**French Jewry in Crisis:**

*What the State of Israel Can Do to Help*

CONFIDENTIAL

**Executive Summary**

The socio-political turmoil in France has emboldened anti-Semitic elements in the country, and caused a worsening of the already-tenuous situation for French Jewry. As the most committed members of the Jewish Community make Aliya, those who are left face an increasing vacuum of leadership. In short order, this will adversely affect the State of Israel in two major ways: decreasing Aliya, as the less-committed Jews disappear into the general society; and decreasing support for Israel by the French government, as the voices of the Jewish community fade, either due to apathy or fear.

Ozar HaTora has been addressing the issues of Jewish Identity and Continuity long before they were buzz words. For over 70 years, Ozar HaTora has worked with the JDC and the Jewish Agency both behind the scenes as well as in the forefront to assure Jewish survival in numerous countries throughout the world. Through a strategic partnership with the State of Israel, Ozar HaTora is uniquely positioned to address the critical issues in the French Jewish community, helping rescue it before it is too late.

**Background**

In 1946, Isaac Shalom founded Ozar HaTorah to address the Jewish educational needs of Sephardic Jewry around the world. He personally visited the many devastated communities throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Seeing masses of hungry, illiterate children he vowed never to abandon what he termed “the forgotten million”. Partnering with the JDC and the Jewish Agency Ozar Hatorah built 70 schools throughout the Mid-East.

**The 70’s**

Population shifts in the 1970s led to mass immigration to France, mainly from French North Africa, creating the fourth largest Jewish Community in the world. As a result, Ozar Hatorah refocused its main efforts on France, building the largest network of schools in France.

**Present**

In March 2012, the horrific terrorist atrocity at the Ozar HaTorah-founded school in Toulouse claimed the life of Miriam Monsenago, the daughter of the principal, and three others. It exposed the lack of security in France, and particularly for its Jewish citizens. In January 2015, the attack on Charlie Hebdo and the Port de Vincennes kosher supermarket further fueled the worst fears of French Jewry.

This caused a mass migration of French Jews – estimated to be between 30,000-40,000 Jews – primarily to Israel, but also to England and North America. It is vital to note that those Jews who made Aliyah were, by and large, the most affiliated Jews, and thus were the most active in Jewish communal life in France. As a result many Jewish day schools lost 10% of their student population each year, placing the very substantial Jewish day school system in serious danger of implosion.

**OH International Mission to France**

An Ozar Hatorah International mission was dispatched to France in January 2017 to investigate and assess the options first hand. They visited a majority of the schools that were affected. These included the Ozar HaTorah schools at Sarcelles, Creteil, Paris 11, Paris 13, the Sinai schools, Paris 17, 18, 19 and Levallois, the Beth Hannah schools in Paris 19 and 20, the Ohr Yosef School in Paris 19, and Les Benjamin school in Pantin among others. This visit represented a pool of 10,000 students.

**The Findings: A Looming Crisis in Jewish Education**

The mission yielded important data, concluding that the impressive infrastructure which had been developed over the decades – representing tens of millions of dollars of investment – is now under-utilized relative to the amount of students currently being served.

**A System on the Brink: The Current Implications of the Crisis**

For a clearer understanding of how serious this deficit of students is, we must explain the how the French Government subsidizes its private schools.

In France there are two types of private schools: those that have a contract with the French government and those that don’t. A private school that has a contract with the government (sans conrtat d’association) must follow the same educational program as the state schools. In return, these schools receive a “Post” i.e., complete funding of the general studies teaching staff for each class approved. In order to apply to receive a “Post”, your class must initially have 24 pupils. In order to maintain a “Post”, you may not fall below a class level of 20 pupils.

These “Post” funds represent fully 70% of a Jewish day school’s budget. Once lost, it creates a death spiral for the school, since there is no way to institute a fundraising mechanism which could replace this massive amount of funds privately in a relatively limited period of time.

The fact-finding mission found many schools in a precarious state. Some classes had already been lost last year, and many more classes are in danger of collapse in the near term, precariously holding on with the minimum 20 students per grade.

**Outside of the Box: New Avenues Toward a Solution**

While the mission was in Paris, they discovered that there are over 60,000 Jewish students in Public and Catholic schools. It was also determined that due to the increasingly insecure climate of Jewish students in these schools caused by anti-Semitic incidents, there may be a historic opportunity to persuade many parents to switch their children to Jewish schools. It is impossible to overstate what a sea change this transfer of less-affiliated Jews could cause for the future of French Jewry, in terms of increasing Jewish Identity. At the same time, this would directly and indirectly bolster long-term support for Israel and Aliya.

**Challenges**

One of the primary obstacles in recruiting Public and Catholic School students into the Ozar HaTora schools is the tuition fees. Most parents belong to the lower and middle class population and cannot afford tuition fees. Secondarily, the schools that take in pupils from Public schools will require remedial classes for those students with either limited or non-existent backgrounds in Jewish studies. After meeting with the principals), all schools (with only two exceptions) are willing to except children from the public and Catholic school systems at every grade level at reduced tuition levels.

**Our Goal: To Save French Jewry**

We have set as our goal to register 1000 children per year over the next five years. While ambitious, we believe that with the proper budget and important partners, this target is achievable.

**The Need for Immediate Action**

The Ozar HaTora board in New York has undertaken the bold challenge of reaching out to the 60,000 Jewish children in the French Public Schools and Catholic School systems. We are building outreach and infrastructure in France to accommodate these families and provide scholarships for them on an as-needed basis to the participating schools.

In this mission, we will establish and maintainreligious education in France for the families that are disadvantaged and cannot make Aliyah while at the same remain faithful to our raison d’etre: strengthening Jewish identity and battling against assimilation. **By doing so, we provide for a future for both French Jewry and the State of Israel, as a strong French community can continue to advocate for Israel in the halls of French government, while continuing its strong record of Aliya.**

**Campaign Components and Budget**

Our campaign includes an intensive and broad-ranging marketing effort throughout all Jewish media, including radio spots, social networking, print, etc.

The following is the anticipated budget:

A. Launch, administer and oversee “choose Jewish” marketing campaign. **$300,000**

B. Pay tuition scholarships of $1,000 dollars a year, on an as-needed basis. **$1,000,000**

C1. To finance limited capital improvements and renovations necessary to   
 increase appeal to Jewish Public school parents. **$400,000**

C2.90 Smartboards for 18 schools **$585,000**

D. Provide funding for school transportation for students living in areas where   
 no Jewish day schools exist – 8 bus routes. **$480,000**

**Total Annual Cost of Campaign: $2,765,000**