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New York City stands with kidnapped teenagers, says councilman

By MAYA SHWAYDER
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At a rally near the former World Trade Center, protestors from varied faiths and backgrounds urge leaders to support search efforts.



Photo by: MAYA SHWAYDER

NEW YORK – Israeli Consul-General Ido Aharoni was joined in a massive rally of support Wednesday by New York City council members, officials, survivors of terrorist attacks, and community leaders from all ethnic groups, religions, and walks of life, six days after Naftali Fraenkel, Gil-Ad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah went missing in the West Bank.

“Today, as the representative of the State of Israel here in New York, I stand in front of you to express our appreciation for your prayers for their safe return home,” Aharoni said, flanked by students from Ramaz schools, who, many of the speakers noted, had taken time out of a school day during their final exams period to participate in the rally.

Aharoni and Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, had strong words for the Palestinians and Hamas.

“What the Palestinian Authority is trying to do is unprecedented in history,” Aharoni said. “They are trying to become the first government in history that shows zero desire to face its own opposition. Hamas, which is responsible for this, is offering nothing to the Palestinian people, and we all have to recognize that.”

“Take the words of the leaders of Hamas seriously,” said Hoenlein. “They say America is the target. New York is the target... There can be no more appropriate place than the shadow of the World Trade Center for us to gather here to be reminded of the price of terrorism that we all pay. If never again is to have a meaning, it means standing up for our sisters in the hands of Boko Haram and our brothers in the hands of Hamas.”

Hoenlein later told The Jerusalem Post that he thought it was very strange that no one had claimed responsibility, nor made demands, but that Hamas officials would not have praised the kidnapping “if there was no substantiation.”

Hoenlein also called on US President Barack Obama and members of Congress to speak out “forcefully.”

“This puts at risk everyone who believes in democratic values and a democratic society,” Hoenlein said.

New York Congressman Charles Rangel (D) also told Abbas that he should not say he cannot control his people.

“Any politician worth his salt knows that if you can’t control the boys in the back room, you’re not worthy of leading,” Rangel said.

City councilman Mark Levine said in Hebrew that New York will stand with the families of the abductees for as long as the crisis lasts. He later told the Post that he intends to put together a coalition of city council members to support the search for the boys, one that he hopes will represent the diversity of New York. “We are just revolted by this,” Levine said.

Two survivors of terrorist attacks addressed the crowd, including Sarri Singer, who survived the June 2012 Jerusalem bus bombing perpetrated by Hamas. Singer said watching these events brought back many memories.

City comptroller Scott Stringer and council members Mark Treyger, head of the Jewish delegation, and Vincent Gentile also spoke. Rabbi Joseph Potasnik and Father Brian McWeeney of the archdiocese of New York stood side by side to denounce the kidnapping.

Mohammed Razvi, the executive director of the Community of People's Organization, an NGO that serves New York's Pakistani community, spoke on behalf of the Muslim community. Many other New York city officials who could not be present sent in strong statements.

This rally is the latest of many that have happened in New York in solidarity with the kidnapped teens, including prayer vigils in Manhattan and Crown Heights, close to where the American branch of Fraenkel's family lives. Two more rallies are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday next week: one at the Israeli consulate and a fundraiser at Hudson Terrace.