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New York, Los Angeles bid their own farewells to Shaer, Fraenkel and Yifrah

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Akunis: Their bodies were found 'in Judea,' not in the 'occupied territories.'



CONSUL-GENERAL Ido Aharoni speaks at the Jewish Center on Manhattan's West Side. Photo: MAYA SHWAYDER

NEW YORK — The Jewish Center on West 86th Street was flooded with people and with emotions on Tuesday night as dignitaries and politicians of all stripes, from Israel and the US, gathered to memorialize the three teenagers who were killed near Hebron on June 12.

Deputy Minister for Liaison with the Knesset Ofir Akunis made some of the boldest statements of the night, declaring that the bodies of Eyal Yifrah, 19, Gil-ad Shaer, 16, and Naftali Fraenkel, 16, were

found in Judea. “Not the occupied territories.

In Judea,” he said, to applause from the audience.

This tragedy was “a direct result of the unity government in the Palestinian Authority, a government that now hosts the terror organization of Hamas. It is a government of terror. This is the only truth,” he said.

Consul-General Ido Aharoni, US Sen. Chuck Schumer, US Rep. Charlie Rangel and New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver similarly condemned Hamas and the unity government in their addresses, and many speakers praised the victims’ families for their strength during this time.

Schumer and Silver called on the US Congress to cut off all funding to the Palestinian Authority should it fail to break ties with Hamas.

“The Palestinian Authority made a terrible mistake,” Schumer said. “When you associate with terrorists, they become emboldened.”

The American-Israeli Fraenkel’s second cousin Manny Halberstam, who attended the service with his grandmother Mina Halberstam (Fraenkel’s great-aunt), gave the most emotional speech of the evening, imploring the audience to look at the photos of the three teenagers on the bima, and know that each face held “an entire personality, an entire inner world, that is no longer with us.”

Halberstam recalled meeting Fraenkel for the first time three years ago when he was studying in yeshiva in Israel, and recognizing how special he was, and what a good brother he was to his younger siblings. “Now when we speak of Naftali, we must use the word was, instead of is,” Halberstam said.

He thanked everyone for their support for the families, and praised the “amazing wave of unity” now being felt by Jews all over the world.

“Each of the three boys is a brother by faith and by culture to all of us,” Halberstam said.

“If there is any silver lining to any of this, it is our observation that the global Jewish community today stands more united than it has been in decades... We must not let this tragic incident take away our fervor for becoming a more unified Jewish people and a more unified humanity.

“It is up to us, whether this tragedy has a higher purpose,” he said.

In a statement to The Jerusalem Post before the service, Halberstam said the most appropriate way to respond would be to “devote our lives to creating a better world where these types of inhumane acts occur less frequently.

“I know that if Naftali was given the privilege of living past the age of 16, he would have been such a force for good in this world,” he wrote. “But he was denied this privilege and, in his memory, we should each strive to be the force of good in this world that Naftali was never allowed to be.”

Memorials were held across the US, including in Los Angeles, Detroit, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Hartford and Portland.

The Beth Jacob synagogue in Beverly Hills was packed to the gills on Tuesday night as over a thousand people turned out for a memorial service.

Beth Jacob is an Orthodox synagogue but religious and secular alike filled the pews, the aisles, an overflow room and the streets outside in a show of solidarity for the families of the murdered teens.

Consul-General David Siegel promised that Israel would do everything in its power to bring the perpetrators to justice.

“Israel will take the steps that this country and any country would take to defend its people and will leave no stone unturned, literally, until justice is done,” he said. “Terrorism is a global threat and no one is immune. It is our duty... to ensure that we and our leaders around the world loudly and clearly condemn this savagery.”

The guest of honor was Leahy Shaer – Gil-ad’s aunt. Shaer remained composed as memorial candles were lit in honor of the three boys. However, she came close to fainting as the community stood for the recitation of the El Male Rachamim mourning prayer and had to be helped back down in her seat.

Regaining her composure to address the attendees, she said, “It wasn’t supposed to end like this. For the last 18 days never for a moment did I think Gil-ad – my dear nephew – was anything but alive.”

She spoke of Gil-ad’s love of life, his love of his five sisters and how he was a beloved counselor in Bnei Akiva. She marveled at how the whole of Israel and the Jewish community around the world came together. She thanked the IDF and the government for doing everything in their power to find and bring the boys home.

“The terrorists may have murdered three wonderful and precious boys who were being groomed to contribute goodness to the world, but in no way will the terrorists ever succeed in hurting or destroying us – Am Yisrael,” she said.

While the work to bring the boys home is over, the work to end terrorism is not, Shaer said.

“I pray that the leaders of the world will join together to stop terrorism and stop the teaching of hate,” she said. “In the name of Gilad, Naftali, Eyal and their families, we pray that... these are the last three boys who will ever be the victims of terror. It must end now.”