

El Al Israel Airlines: Pilots Refuse to Fly Deported African Refugees to Dangerous Country

'The refugees should remain and be treated as human beings - just as the Jews used to be refugees and wanted to be treated like human beings and not thrown out.'

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Ten days after a campaign was launched demanding that Israeli pilots refuse to fly deported Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers to Rwanda, or any other dangerous African country, a group of El Al pilots stated they would not participate in the pending deportations.

The campaign, initiated by the NGO Zazim Community Action, comes amid growing reports that the government is planning to indefinitely imprison or deport tens of thousands of the 38,000 refugees in April.

According to the NGO's CEO, **Raluca Gena**, the online campaign is the first step toward a series of activities against what they, and many other human rights organizations and Jewish communities around the world, are deeming an immoral deportation.

One of the El Al pilots, **Ido Elad**, wrote on Facebook:

"I have joined many of my best friends by declaring that I will not fly refugees to their deaths. I will not be a partner to this barbarism."

Noting the similar dangers Jews faced throughout history, pilot **Yoel Piterbarg** posted a lengthy missive on Facebook detailing why he refuses to fly the refugees back to Africa.

"The State of Israel is populated mainly by Jews who were in their distant and recent past refugees in countries [around] the world," wrote Piterbarg. "Most of them went through the Holocaust, many were forcibly expelled from their countries, and many emigrated voluntarily to better their situation to better countries that agreed to accept and care for them."

Piterbarg continued:

"It is precisely us, the Jews, who must be attentive, empathic, moral and public opinion leaders in the world to deal with the immigration of refugees who suffered and suffer in their countries of origin."

While the pilot conceded the necessity of controlling migration, which the country has

succeeded at as of last year, he insisted the asylum-seekers who are now in Israel be treated with compassion.

“The refugees should remain and be treated as human beings – just as the Jews used to be refugees and wanted to be treated like human beings and not thrown out,” he wrote. “**Martin Luther King** said that the terrible things in history happened not because of the bad people who committed them, but because of the ‘good people’ who were silent when it happened.”

A third El Al pilot, **Shaul Betzer**, also declared on Facebook that he would not assist the government in the pending deportations.

“There is no way that I, as part of a flight crew, will participate in taking refugees/asylum seekers to a destination where their chances of surviving are minuscule,” he wrote.

Gena said that since the campaign began 10 days ago, over 7,500 concerned Israeli citizens have sent personal appeals to the Israel Aircraft Association, the Israeli Pilots Association and the companies that provide the ground services at Ben-Gurion Airport for international flights.

“I am encouraged to see that the pilots have begun to respond to our call,” she said on Monday, noting she based the campaign on German pilots who recently refused to fly over 200 deported refugees to dangerous countries.

“We believe that they have the power and the ability to refuse to take part in the brutal expulsion.”

Meanwhile, **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** and the Interior Ministry continue to claim the vast majority of refugees are “infiltrators” and “economic migrants,” not victims of genocide.

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