

To: Irit Zmora- Chairwoman of the Conservative Movement in Israel

Derech Hevron 98, Jerusalem

P.O.box 7559, Jerusalem 91074

Dear Irit,

**Subject: The Conservative Movement Activities in Kibbutz Hanaton**

Almost 7 years ago (February 2003) my friends and I responded to the Kibbutz Movement's request to move to Kibbutz Hanaton in order to rehabilitate and help revive it as a flourishing kibbutz in the Galilee. Though Kibbutz Hanaton was established in 1983, at the time of our arrival, the kibbutz consisted of only 11 senior members and the kibbutz suffered from severe demographic and economic crises. We, educated in our youth in "Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed" Youth Movement, made the decision to devote our adult lives to the fulfillment of the values we were brought up on. Consequently, today, 26 of us, members of the alumni movement of "Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed," (ages 27-28) live in Kibbutz Hanaton and work and volunteer in an extensive variety of educational activities throughout the area. We help to guide working teenagers in vocational schools and defend their rights in their work places; educate children with learning disabilities in different schools in the area as well as at-risk teenagers in the boarding school that we established for youngsters from broken homes in Kibbutz Eshbal. We coordinate the youth movement's activities in the north; run seminars within schools on different subjects, such as: Judaism, Zionism, the connection between economy and society, peace and equality. In addition, we initiate and guide co-existence projects such as educational activities within local Arab villages and bring Arabs and Jews - children, teenagers and adults - together for shared activities.

In October 2006, lawyer Sagi Merom was appointed to Kibbutz Hanaton as a "mefarek mafil" ("disassemble-activator") in order to rehabilitate it, to repay its debts and to bring in new members. The "mefarek mafil" did not accept our cooperative and educational way of life and decided to sue us and to begin legal procedures in order to evict us from our homes and from the kibbutz. Sadly, the shameful behavior of Mr. Merom, previously a son of the kibbutz movement himself, did not surprise us at all; we have been witnesses, for the past few years, of a long and destructive change of values in Israeli society.

However, we were disturbed and disappointed to find out that, in fact, our potential partners, members of the Conservative Movement who recently moved to Kibbutz Hanaton and were accepted as members here, are collaborating side by side with the "Mefarek Mafil" in order to remove us from our home, into which we have invested a great deal since moving here after completing our army service.

In a meeting with the representatives of the new families that took place a few months ago and included the community's Rabbi, Mr. Yoav Endy, we repeated and emphasized that we are interested in maintaining our unique way of life and more than willing to live together with the Conservative community, living as a "renewed kibbutz" in Hanaton. The representatives stated that, "There is no place for two communities in Hanaton" and refused our offers to turn to experts in order to find solutions to this matter. Today, we know from the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel that it is possible to maintain two communities in Hanaton, but the members of the Conservative Movement still prefer us removed rather than finding a plausible and reasonable solution. Their negation was so strong that only a few days after their arrival to Hanaton they refused to freeze the legal proceedings for even two months (!) against the members of "Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed" that would allow time to find a proper solution for both communities in Hanaton. A few days ago, Mr. Sagi Merom mentioned to us that even if he agrees to a resolution in Hanaton, the conservative members will object!

How can a respected democratic and humanistic movement as the Masorati movement (some of us were educated in Tali, the conservative schools), that holds a high standard of pluralism and tolerance, that sees each human being as born equal and entitled to the freedoms of thought and belief, behave in Kibbutz Hanaton in such a non-ethical way, in order to expel a community, which is just as valuable, despite the fact that it maintains a different lifestyle?

The members of the Conservative Movement, whom arrived in Hanaton only a short while ago and already feel that they own the place, have decided to give up on finding a possible solution for the members of the alumni movement of "Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed." It is critical to mention that this solution would not harm or limit the conservative community's growth or unique way of life. Kibbutz Hanaton, which includes a unique conservative community and a cooperative, educational community, living side by side and nourishing one another, could have become a symbol and exemplar of justice, tolerance and humanity, in Israel and throughout the world.

Expecting your response and intervention,

Gil Plotkin – Director of the Educational Kibbutz of  
"Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed" in Hanaton