

# Media Alert

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AGAHOZO-SHALOM YOUTH VILLAGE IN RWANDA DEDICATED  
15 YEARS AFTER GENOCIDE TO PROVIDE  
HEALING COMMUNITY TO AFRICAN ORPHANS**

*American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Shares Lessons Learned  
Serving Orphans from the Holocaust in Israel*

RWANDA, June 23, 2009...*“I feel like it’s a miracle to come to the Village to live, because I was in a bad life. I don’t have parents. I don’t have a family. I was a street child living on the streets. Now I have hope for my life,”* said Marcel whose mother, father, brothers and sister were all killed. Marcel is **one of the 1.2 million children** orphaned by the Rwandan Genocide. Fifteen years have passed since the mass murder of nearly one million people during the course of 100 days in Rwanda.

Hope for Marcel came with the opening of the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda, a special project of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which was recently opened and will eventually house 500 high school age Rwandan orphans. The Village is modeled after Israeli youth villages which were built to serve children who lost their parents in the Holocaust.

Agahozo is the Kinyarwanda word for “a place where tears are dried,” and Shalom is Hebrew for “live in peace.” The Village is situated on 143 acres of land that overlooks Lake Mugesera in Rwanda’s Eastern Province and includes 32 group homes, a high school, science and computer labs, land for organic farming, a reforestation program, dining hall, counseling and medical facilities, and recreational fields. This comprehensive living and learning community provides security, structure, and unconditional support for young people who desperately need a healing environment.

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The first 125 students, whose ranks will eventually grow to 500, moved into the Village in December 2008, and now call it home.

On June 23, 2009, the opening dedication of the new youth residential and educational complex will be a day-long celebration of joy and peace. Students will perform dances, read their poetry, lead tours of the facility, and serve lunch to their guests who are dignitaries from around the world. Rwandan leaders and the Israeli Ambassador will be joined by: Agahozo-Shalom Founder Anne Heyman, Esq.; Seth Merrin, CEO of Liquidnet, JDC's corporate partner; JDC Board member Nora Barron, and William Recant, JDC Assistant Executive Vice President. The celebration includes the planting of mango and banana trees, unveiling of a mosaic, speeches by students, and the dedication of the Edmond J. Safra Community Center, which was made possible through the generous support of Agahozo-Shalom by the Edmond J. Safra Foundation.

“Within the Jewish world, we have worked with Holocaust survivors to heal some of the psychological wounds of the past,” said JDC’s Dr. William Recant. “Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel, one of the villages which served as homes to orphans of the Holocaust, has become a model for helping to rebuild traumatized lives. Agahozo-Shalom shares the lessons we learned from these experiences. The Village is a place where children can heal, experience renewal, and prepare for the responsibilities of adulthood. Agahozo-Shalom is a special project for us based on a shared bond of survival.”

Agahozo-Shalom reflects the principles established at Yemin Orde Youth Village of healing or repair (*tikkun* in Hebrew). Young people are assisted by “house mothers,” many of whom lost family members in the Genocide, mental health counselors, teachers and volunteers who all work together to heal the self and the heart (*tikkun halev*) and to empower the youth to heal the world by helping others (*tikkun olam*). The Village also serves orphans and traumatized youth who lost parents to AIDS and other causes.

Agahozo-Shalom Founder and JDC supporter Anne Heyman, said, “In November 2005, I learned that Rwanda had a tremendous orphan problem, and no systemic solution to deal with it. I was immediately struck by the fact that after the Second World War in Israel, there was a tremendous influx of orphans. And what did they do with the children? They built youth villages. This idea struck me as a potential solution for Rwanda. I couldn’t let it go, and now here we are, looking at the Village and the smiling faces of these children.”

JDC provides emergency relief and long-term development assistance worldwide with a track record in international development that lends instant credibility to the project and inspires confidence in its overseas partner organizations and governments. The non-profit organization has a 95-year history of responding quickly and effectively to

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crises and remaining for the long-term to guide initiatives like the Village to become self-sustaining.

In 1994, during the course of the Rwandan Genocide, nearly one million people were killed, even more people were displaced, the country was left in ruins, and, today, Rwanda has the world's highest per capita orphan population. These children were not only robbed of their families, of their homes, and of their communities, but also of their hope for a viable future. Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village aims to be a solution to the challenge of healing these traumatized youth. This unique and ambitious special project of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee will serve as a model for caring for the disrupted lives of youth across Rwanda, Africa, and beyond, to wherever there are traumatized youth who need a place to call home. More information can be found at [www.agahozo-shalom.org](http://www.agahozo-shalom.org).

### **About the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)**

Since 1914, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has given global expression to the principle that all Jews are responsible for one another. Working today in over 70 countries, JDC acts on behalf of North America's Jewish communities and others to rescue Jews in danger, provide relief to those in distress, revitalize overseas Jewish communities and help Israel overcome the social challenges of its most vulnerable citizens. JDC also provides non-sectarian emergency relief and long-term development assistance worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.JDC.org](http://www.JDC.org).

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