About RHR:  Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) is the only rabbinic organization in Israel explicitly dedicated to human rights in Israel and the West Bank. RHR is supported by thousands of rabbis from around the world and represents over 140 Israeli rabbis and rabbinical students from different streams of Judaism. The work of Rabbis for Human Rights expresses the view of its members that as Jews, we are obligated to protest against every injustice enacted against any other person, a view based on the belief that humans are created in God’s image. With the generous help of our supporters RHR continued our important human rights and social justice work throughout 2018. We were also proud to announce that Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, founder of Jerusalem’s Congregation Kol HaNeshama, became RHR’s new president.

Activities:

Hadera Rights Center: The Rabbis for Human Rights Hadera Center continued in 2018 to assist vulnerable Israelis claim their socio-economic rights and entitlements. Most of our clients come to our center for help with issues relating to debt repayment, public housing, ensuring access to unemployment benefits, and claiming paid leave, sick days and child allowances. For single parents, the elderly and/or disabled, people living in poverty and immigrants/Palestinian citizens of Israel with language barriers, having someone assist them in understanding their state provided socio-economic entitlements is often the difference between poverty and a life of dignity. Our staff shows our clients exactly what they must do in order to advocate for themselves, providing them with the tools needed in order to live a more stable and self-reliant life.

Our center continues to operate at full capacity. In 2018, we facilitated 1440 interactions with clients, averaging 120 a month. This number shows a slight increase from 2017, when we had 1429 interactions. During open hours 3-4 times a week, RHR staff conducted in-take with clients to review their issue, and if it is immediately solvable, made relevant phone calls, filed paperwork or wrote needed letters to the appropriate authorities in the presence of the client. In cases where the issue were not immediately solvable, staff consulted with one another, turned to outside assistance and sought assistance from RHR’s socio-economic lawyer.

Below are two recent stories demonstrating assistance provided by RHR:

Z is a divorced and a single mother to a child with special needs. She and her son were subsisting on the minimum allocation provided by social security. Eligibility for this small monthly allowance depended on her reporting to the employment agency on a regular basis. However, frequent medical appointments as well as meetings with her son’s preschool caused her to miss several of these appointments resulting in his losing her benefit. With the help of RHR, she filed an appeal which she than had to bring to court. RHR helped her acquire a state appointed lawyer who eventually helped her win her case and collect all the back months of benefits she had lost.

T is a disabled man from Ethiopia who owes child support to his ex wife along with other debts. RHR helped him request all his debts be divided into monthly manageable installments, but he did not have the documents originally needed for this request. Together with a lawyer we helped him prepare an affidavit.
relating to his expenses and lack of documents. To our delight his request was accepted, he was given a monthly payment plan and is now able to steadily pay off his debts.

Social Justice Advocacy work: In 2018, we proudly continued to fight to ensure that the Jewish values to “seek justice, alleviate oppression, defend orphans in court, and plead the widow’s case” are enshrined in Israeli law and policy. RHR is recognized in the Knesset, academia, media & on the ground as a leader in social justice and anti-poverty work. Years of activism surrounding issues from public housing to labor law & now food insecurity have made us skilled advocates able to accompany issues from the very beginning, when first identified by clients & activists, all the way to the legislative changes & media campaigns needed in order to rectify them. Some of our related achievements and development in 2018 include:

- Attended Knesset & committee discussions on topics including labeling of unhealthy products, ensuring affordable healthy food, removing unhealthy food from schools & securing food donations by companies.
- After 6 years of RHR pressure, the Knesset passed in February regulations setting conditions allowing single parents to receive income support while studying for academic degree. RHR then launched an awareness raising campaign of this new policy.
- Successfully advocated for the inclusion of amendments to the Tenant Refusal Law protecting the elderly during urban renewal processes
- Drafted changes to bill (passed in December) to ensure debtors access to their bank accounts & stop liens on their paychecks while paying their debt off.
- Successfully altered Insolvency & Economic Rehabilitation Bill (passed Feb) to benefit people living in poverty with debt including clearer paths to debt forgiveness & assurances keeping them in their homes.
- Collaborated with the Housing Ministry to release a Public Housing booklet that will improve transparency & day-to-day procedural knowledge for residents.
- Continued to lead the Forum for the Struggle Against Poverty, a coalition of activists & NGOs bringing the voices of those in poverty to decision makers
- Together with our partners, we arranged a conference attended by over 150 participants bringing those in poverty together with government representatives to discuss policy-driven solutions to poverty issues such as public housing, debt, food insecurity & employment of Arab women.

2018 Olive Harvest: 2018 was marked by a small yield of olives throughout the West Bank. A cyclical and normal occurrence, this was due to a pest infestation of the olives added to a dry winter. The United Nations body OCHA, which monitors human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, wrote:

“The 2018 olive harvest season will last approximately from mid-September to mid-November. However, a pest that infects olive trees, particularly in the northern West Bank, is expected to significantly reduce this year’s yield compared with 2017. In recent years, the olive harvest has also been affected negatively by Israeli settlers stealing or damaging olive trees, and by restrictions on access by Palestinian farmers to olive groves behind the Barrier and near Israeli settlements.”
As a result of this reduction of olives our assistance was needed less. This meant that Rabbis for Human Rights worked less days and with less volunteers than anticipated. The following chart shows the dates we went out harvesting, the number of volunteers who came, and the location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Harvest location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 7 2018</td>
<td>Awarta</td>
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<td>October 8 2018</td>
<td>Burin</td>
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<td>October 10 2018</td>
<td>Huwara</td>
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<td>October 12 2018</td>
<td>Yanoun</td>
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<td>October 17 2018</td>
<td>Tofer Khalil</td>
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<td>October 23 2018</td>
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Total number of work days: 9
Total volunteers: 53
Total number of locations: 9

**Significant incidents from 2018 harvest:**

**Unjust Expulsion from Land:** As has been the case in previous years, Rabbis for Human Rights noticed a huge gap in amount of land access between Palestinians and the Israelis living in settlements and outposts neighbouring the Palestinians. While the Palestinians often must coordinate with the Israeli army in order to access their own private property, Israelis are given, for the most part, free reign of the area – including on land that is not considered their own even according to Israeli law. Furthermore, it is not unusual for Palestinians to be completely blocked from accessing their own land by the Israeli army, or, when permitted to enter it, to be given inadequate amount of time to work it. In instances such as these, RHR acts as a liaison for the Palestinians and requests that the army allow the farmers more time to access their lands as well as more extensive access when needed. This year, RHR noted three incidents were Palestinians farmers were unjustly expelled from their lands. Twice the Palestinians were expelled by the army, and once by a local settlement security officer. In all three instances, with the intervention of RHR, the farmers were able to return to their land and harvest.

**Olive Tree Destruction:** Unfortunately, Rabbis for Human Rights came across multiple instances in 2018 of tree and agricultural destruction while we were in the field or through our contacts with farmers. In these instances, the crimes were reported to the Israeli authorities. Depending on the severity, documentation was also placed on RHR’s website.

Although RHR and other local NGOs continue to report these crimes by radical settlers to the authorities, it is rare that action is taken. The reality is that in this area of the West Bank there is a strong feeling of impunity among the radical settler elements. The Israeli authorities are slow to take action and pursue crimes, and when they do, just consequences are almost never meted out.
Despite these challenges, RHR successfully sent a powerful message on the power of solidarity, human compassion, and commitment to justice to overcome even the strongest and deepest conflicts. Our work helped Palestinian farmers complete their agricultural work in dignity, unburdened by unjust demands put in place by the army, and with less fear of attack or intimidation by radical settler elements. This important project serves as a reminder that peace-making begins with the people. By working together under a shared commitment to human dignity, we can make a very real and practical difference in the lives of many.

Dialogue of the Olive Groves: Rabbis for Human Rights once again held an annual Tu B’Shevat event on February 9th 2018 where American and Israeli volunteers planted trees side-by-side with Palestinians. This year, we were joined by a number of American rabbinical students in the village of Awarta in the West Bank. Over the years, Palestinians in this area have faced violence and intimidation from local extremist settlers, and on-going attempts to take-over their lands.

After a short prayer and the planting of the trees, we all sat down together in a lovely ancient olive grove for lunch and conversation with local Palestinians including the mayor of the village. He graciously explained to us the struggle his village has faced over the years, and their wish to live in safety and quiet. Participants engaged with the Palestinians and asked them a number of questions about their culture, community, and village. The mayor concluded by reminding us that “we are all children of Adam and Eve.”

Abrahamic Teams: Our successful interfaith Abrahamic Teams program continued throughout 2018. This program brings “teams” of 3 religious leaders, each representing one of the Abrahamic faiths, to take part in discussion panels in different educational and communal frameworks. These panels highlight the
many similarities that exist between the different Abrahamic traditions. During 2018, we had eleven such encounters. The topics we dealt with were:
1. Jerusalem as a multi faith, multi-culture, and multi nation city
2. Sanctity of Human Life – the value of human life
3. The concept of peace in the three monotheistic religions
4. Abraham – our common Father

762 people from across Israel and from all denominations attended the various encounters. One encounter was between Palestinian students from Bethlehem who are studying to become priests and rabbinic students from Hebrew Union College. The encounter was so successful that we are organizing another one in April 2019. Seven of the encounters were for young Israelis in pre-military academies, where RHR teaches a year-long human rights and Judaism course. The other encounters were held around the periphery of Israel in community centers.

Many of the encounters were led by female religious leaders. This included Laila Abed Rabbo, an independent Muslim advisor on women’s rights in Israel and first female advocate in the Sharia court and Rabbi Dr. Dalia Marx, a published author and Associate professor of liturgy and midrash at the Jerusalem campus of Hebrew Union College-JIR. Encounters were geared towards the needs of the specific groups, but generally opened with a various textual quotes and poems from the different faiths and a joint prayers for peace. Some also included ice-breakers, textual study sessions, the distributions of sources, and break-out work in pairs.

Participant’s responses tend to be very positive, although some wonder how representative the religious leaders are of their faith as a whole. Below are quotations from participants:

- "I realized that interfaith dialogue is the hope for peace and understanding"
- "I understood that in each religion there are people who are willing to compromise and lead us to coexistence"
- "There is hope! There are sane people in this world and we shouldn’t remain with stereotypes and stigmas"
- "I learned the 3 religions are based on common ground & common values"
Human Rights Education & Interreligious Tours: During the 2017-2018 academic year, RHR brought 550 young Israeli women and men, than enrolled in year-long “gap” programs prior to their military service, on at least two Judaism and human rights tours throughout our region. These experiential tours are a vital addition to the coursework RHR provides the students during the year. Trips include a visit to the Negev to learn about the struggle of Israel’s Bedouin; South Tel Aviv to learn about African asylum seekers in Israel, migrant workers and victims of sex trafficking; South Hebron Hills to learn about land expropriation & settler violence; East Jerusalem to learn about separation between East and West Jerusalem; Jerusalem to learn about civics, governance and the significance of Jerusalem to multiple faiths, and the H2 section of Hebron to learn about the specific struggle of Palestinians living in this extremely contentious area. Tours are punctuated by meetings and visits with guests speakers, including Palestinian Muslims and Christians, African asylum seekers, Knesset members, High Court judges, social activists and entrepreneurs from across the religious and ethnic spectrum in Israel. Students report these tours as an extremely significant part of their learning because they allow them to see situations firsthand and meet diverse populations in person.

Below are quotes from students regarding the trips they joined us for:

- "The conversation with Omar [Palestinian speaker in East Jerusalem] pointed out and made it clear that we can live side by side. I learned to differentiate between radicalism and moderation, to look at the distress and suffering of others and not ignore them. I hope to be active on this issue after my military service"
"I learned the complications of trying to have a Jewish and democratic state"

"This tour is relevant because as human beings we are obliged to respect minorities among us and to respect each other"

Campaign on South Hebron Hills – Tuwani and Legal Advocacy in the OPT

In the course of 2018 RHR dealt with a number of important legal and advocacy issues in the West Bank.

- Success in protecting Palestinian farmers land rights. The case of the appropriation of Palestinian land by a member of the Shani Livne settlement was a matter that RHR has worked on for many years. In 2018 RHR attorney, Yair Nehorai successfully demonstrated that the land in question belongs to the Palestinian farmer and that his rights had been usurped by the Israeli settler. The land will now become accessible to the Palestinian farmer. This not only is an affirmation of legal rights but also of the right to work one’s land and earn an income.

- Advocating for cultural rights of Palestinians in Hebron, a complicated and volatile city. The divided West Bank city of Hebron is holy to both Jews and Moslems. The Cave of the Patriarchs, a holy site to all three Abrahamic faiths is located in the Israeli controlled section of the city, which also is home to about 500 Israeli settlers and about 40,000 Palestinians. Because the city is holy to Jews and Moslems RHR’s approach is to recognize this and to try to work within the sensitivities of this significance. Over the course of the past years the Israeli settlers have, among other things, instituted a number of changes to street signs, public notices, and street names which serve to erase the Palestinian connection to the city. RHR saw this as irresponsible, immoral and illegal. Our protest to the army was not satisfactorily answered so we demanded that the authorities and the settlers of Hebron explain the process of naming streets and establishing signs. The High Court of Justice agreed with RHR attorney Yair Nehorai’s demands and has called on the State and the Settlers in Hebron to demonstrate exactly what the process is. This is the first and important step in the restoration of the Palestinian rights to live with dignity in this area of Hebron.

- The Ofer Military court and prison houses Palestinians arrested by the Israeli security forces and is the site where they are put on trial. Among them is hundreds of minors who are arrested over the course of the year. The core problem, as explained by RHR’s attorney is that Palestinian children on trial in the military courts receive differential treatment than their counterparts, Israeli children who face criminal proceedings in Israeli civilian courts. This is unacceptable and led RHR to join in a successful petition demanding that Palestinian children be afforded pre-trial treatment similar to Israeli children on trial in Israel. At the same time RHR decided it was important to map and monitor the situation in the Ofer Court. Employing a Palestinian attorney, a woman from East Jerusalem, who is a member of the Israeli Bar, we were able to gain the trust of attorneys representing children and to enter the trials, monitor the situation and to collect an extensive data base of cases and situations in which Palestinian children were treated differentially. This data has proven itself to be reliable and compelling and has been requested and used by other civil society actors active in the field of the rights of children.

- Tuwani – South Hebron Hills, is an area under constant threat from the violence of Israeli settlers and the danger of land usurpations. RHR has accompanied the children of the Tuwani village who have faced consistent harassment and violence by settlers in close proximity to the village as they
made their way to school on a foot path to the neighboring village. RHR had in the past successfully established the Army is obligated to protect these children. However the Army has been constantly derelict in enforcing this. RHR therefore submitted a petition to demand that the army protect these children and that the children’s right to go to school and to make sure that the Palestinian villagers be afforded the right, with little restriction to access the neighboring village by established roads which have been blocked to them. Accompanying this effort, RHR released a compelling public campaign to gain attention to the issue and to encourage people to take action on the matter. The **next hearing on this matter is imminent, and will be held on 27 March.**

**Jahalin Summer Camps:** This year’s summer camp for the children of al-Jabal took place in the last week of June. The camp ran each morning from 8:30 am until noon. The camp took place in the Al Bustan community center in the Jabal.

Eighty children from the Jabal aged 5-13 attended the camp. Approximately 55 were girls and 25 were boys. No prior registration was needed and so the children could attend when they were able. Almost all the children attended every day. On the last day there was trip to an amusement park and a water park. The camp was staffed by Ibtisam, three female and two male volunteers from the community. Two American volunteers from Achvat Amim (“Solidarity with the Nations”) an organization which brings young people, many of them university students and graduates, to work in the OPT assisted on two of the days.

Activities at the camp included arts and crafts, sports, circle games and games with hoops, sacks and ropes. For some of the activities the girls and the boys were separate in order that their needs could be met more effectively. On one of the days a Tel Aviv based art therapist volunteered at the camp running activities with the boys. On the final day of the camp the children went on a trip to a water park and an amusement park. The trip was open to teenagers from the community as well and altogether 100 young people took part, the 80 participants in the camp and 20 teenagers aged 14 – 18. A number of mothers also attended.

**Jahalin Advocacy Work:** In September, the High Court of Justice ruled to allow the demolition of the Jahalin Bedouin village Khan al Achmar to proceed. This includes the village’s beloved school. Known as the “school of mud and tires,” it was built by a number of volunteers and NGOs and serves as the only viable schooling option for nearly 200 local children from a number of communities. RHR staff, board members and volunteers, already advocating to save the community, immediately mobilized along with the rest of the human rights community. In a press release, RHR referred to the ruling as a “serious moral and Jewish failure…. [that] allows Israel to plunder the land of a poor, ethnic minority with no political power.” Below please find a listing of various actions RHR took to protect the right of the Jahalin to remain in their homes & send their children to school:

- During Sukkot, RHR organized an open meeting to express our solidarity with residents and discuss the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, the Succah, Judaism and our hopes for the New Year. Rabbi Levi Weiman- Kelman and Dr. Yehuda Schwartz, Project Manager, led the gathering. Many members of the Israeli public attended as well as many Khan al Achmar residents and community leaders.

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Provided solidarity presence of staff and volunteers regularly to the community. RHR staff was present at the site when the army began to prepare the land for demolition & provided information, photos, and video to diplomats and journalists

Distributed a number of awareness raising posts in our social media as well as supported others in writing opinion pieces for traditional media platforms

Helped organize & promote “Sukkot Against Demolitions” event in Jerusalem with other activists and organizations

Wrote, organized and distributed a letter signed by twelve prominent Jewish leaders to the Prime Minister requesting the village be spared. Signatories included Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of Reform Judaism in the USA, Jeremy Ben-Ami, founder and president of American Jewish lobby J Street; Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Senior Rabbi of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in Manhattan and others.

**Jahalin Sewing Initiative:** In 2018 RHR launched a new womens’ sewing collective for Jahalin women at Jabal al Jahalin outside Jerusalem. Ten woman successfully participated in the 10 month program. Each received technical and design training for six hours a week from a local women with years of professional sewing experience. The goal of this project is to allows the women to generate income supplementation through the sale of hand-made products.

The women learned to build on the basic sewing skills they already possessed, learning more complex and sophisticated sewing methods. Although the women were not quite ready to work professionally by the end of the course, they had learned to make clothes for themselves, their families and friends. RHR hopes to continue this work developing their skills, and teaching them some basic marketing and selling skills in order to increase their ability to earn to income.

**Below are testimonies gathered from two participants:**

Sarah, mother of six who left school at 14.
“I decided to attend the sewing course because I like designing clothes. I wanted to design dresses for my daughter.... I benefit from the course. I have learned how to draw a model, how to cut it and how to use the machine.”

Nayfeh, mother of 5 who married at 15
“I really benefit from the course. I didn’t have confidence in my ability to take measurements but now I feel that I’ve gotten better at it.... I like to learn and I wish I could have done it before. I expect to learn more useful things on the course and get more experience. The teacher is helpful and supportive.”

**Media work:** RHR continues to have a strong presence on both traditional and social media platforms. Media is an excellent way to raise awareness of pertinent human rights issues and allows for very fast organizing and response. We regularly update our website, post numerous times a week on Facebook and Instagram in both Hebrew and English, and tweet in both languages almost daily. We have over 22,000
followers on Facebook in Hebrew & English & over 15,000 on Twitter. Influencers including well-known journalists like Karen Neubach, Akiva Bigman & Lisa Goldman follow us on twitter as well as other influential Jewish progressive figures like Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg & political leaders like Michal Rozin. Often, they retweet us, solicit a comment, or request radio/TV interviews based on twitter content. In the last few months, popular posts included the release of a new report by us detailing the discriminatory nature of Israel’s regime in the West Bank globally, anecdotes tweeted by us demonstrating bureaucratic barriers facing people in poverty & a tweet calling out CEO of Bank Leumi for falsely claiming her bank has no control over the actions of collections agencies. We also often “live-tweet” Knesset discussions, resulting in the widening of transparency and holding MKs responsible for what they say. We have also released a number of short clips of Rabbi Weiman-Kelman giving a human rights related dvar Torah to the weekly parasha or relevant holiday.

RHR sends regular updates to supporters via email, often connected to holidays. During the High Holidays, we drew connections between the holiday of Sukkot – where Jews dwell in temporary dwellings – to the immediate threats facing the Jahalin Bedouin of Khan al Achmar often “succah-like” homes outside of Jerusalem. In addition to all the Jewish holidays, this year we also sent a Thanksgiving greeting highlighting food insecurity in Israel. On the convergence of Hanukkah and human rights day, we encouraged rabbis to conduct a “socio-economic human rights” Shabbat for their communities. As part of that, 1420 rabbis were sent prepared materials featuring relevant teachings on poverty & hunger.

Below please find a non-comprehensive list of media clips (w/hyperlinks) featuring our work in 2018:

**Rank and File listing**
Haaretz, Steven Klein, February 25 2018

 Israeli soldiers filmed doing nothing as settlers attack Palestinians
Haaretz, Yotam Berger, March 7 2018

West Bank mosque hit with attempted arson in possible hate crime
Haaretz, Yotam Berger, April 13 2018

Israel admits to top court: We paved road on private Palestinian Land
Haaretz, Yotam Berger, September 5 2018

The call for collective accountability and the sin of losing hope
The Times of Israel, Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, September 17 2018

The Israeli activists helping protect the Palestinian olive harvest
972 Magazine, Orly Noy, October 7 2018
Of further note:

**Support for Young Rabbis and Rabbinical Students:**

In the course of 2018 the work of RHR was enabled in a significant manner through the work of four associate rabbis or rabbinical students who are supported by this grant. They included Rabbi Sigal Asher, Rabbi Tamara Shagas, Rabbi Kobi Weiss and Rabbinical Student Yehuda Schwartz. As detailed below each of these individuals played key parts in making sure the particular projects in which they were involved moved forward and achieved results.

**Rabbi Sigal Asher** managed the Hadera social justice rights center. Through this work and her application of humanistic Jewish values into action, the center was able to work with a wide variety of populations, directly assist people living in poverty and collect data and case studies in order to facilitate a strong policy advocacy program run by Adv. Becky Keshet, which dealt with and continues to deal with the variety of issues connected to poverty, including food insecurity.

**Rabbi Tamara Shagas** is the associate director of RHR’s human rights education project. Her work involved coordination of the educational process, curriculum development, classroom teaching and leading field trips.

**Rabbinical Student Yehuda Schwartz** engaged significantly in our work concerning the Jahalin Bedouin of Area C, in the OPT. The community, long threatened with expulsion from their land and with the challenges of living under circumstances of poverty, and being invisible, both to Israeli society and to Palestinian society invested energy in overcoming these problems. Schwartz spent time during the summer and fall of 2018 working with the Jahalin in the village of Khan al-Ahmar which was under imminent threat of demolition. Thanks to activists and human rights defenders like Schwartz the expulsion was apparently halted. In the course of this work Schwartz interacted with other activists, assessed the needs of the community and worked directly with a community member who has established a community center in what is known as Jabal Jahalin.

**Rabbi Kobi Weiss** remained integral to RHR’s social justice activities, in particular working in the field of housing rights, public housing, and urban renewal. As an activist and advocate Rabbi Weiss also wrote texts related to this area, was associated with developing curriculum for courses RHR is developing in the area of social justice, engaging in media outreach, working with academic settings and reaching out to and engaging with progressive Jewish communities in Israel.