

## Address at IDC Media Conference in Herzliya

**By Noam Bedein**

We are all aware of the reality in the southern part of Israel. Ben Gurion's vision in the Negev has been under lethal attack of more than 5,500 missile attacks over the past six years, with more than 1,200 in the past fifteen months. That is an average of three missile attacks a day. 28 missile attacks have occurred since the 'cease-fire.'

Yet with such staggering statistics, no public office is relating to the human side of this tragedy. Children grow up with sirens as a part of their life: When you hear the siren *Tseva Adom*, you understand that you've got fifteen seconds to take cover. Yet we have revealed that there are over 8,000 citizens of the Western Negev who have no sheltered room to run to.

When you go into the office of the head of security in Sderot, you see a map of Sderot on the wall. You see dots on the map. The head of security says that he stopped putting dots two years ago because you wouldn't notice the map...The conclusion: There is no street, neighborhood, community or family, which has not experienced the trauma of a missile exploding near by. I've experienced it myself during a Friday night service in the synagogue. I shall never forget the sight of the fathers not knowing which child to grab first to protect. Only six psychologists work in Sderot. Half of the kindergartens aren't protected. Can any one imagine what's it like to send a child to an unprotected classroom?

Basically, it's like playing Russian roulette.

Unfortunately, people in Israel, especially in the Israeli media, show an interest only when there is blood, under the principle of "only when it Bleeds it Leads"... The human tragedy, the anxiety, the trauma- that is not being shown, that is not being reported, that remains a secret to the media – especially during what is described by the government as a "cease-fire"

This is where our new information center comes in. Its purpose is to show the human face behind the cold media statistics and the "weather report" style of telling about a few missiles falling from the sky and nobody really being injured.

Our goal is to create awareness in Israel and in the world opinion of what people are going through.

During my first six weeks in Sderot, I met with community workers such as: social workers, the head psychiatrist, the heads of the parents association. the security officers, the teachers, the families of victims, and the different projects that work with the community. The task at hand was to put all this together, to liaison between reporters and groups that come to Sderot and to show them the human side of it in an informal way and on a personal level, as a Sderot resident.

We've managed to host several groups, including The American Jewish Congress and AFSI, and most recently escorted American talk show host Gordon Liddy, who broadcast his radio show with 6 million listeners as the guest of our center in Sderot.

And we have been publishing timely investigative pieces in the Jerusalem Post, Israel National News and Israel Insider while providing news reports for English Radio of Kol Yisrael and Shalom USA in Baltimore.

Our articles about the lack of protection for of the schools in Sderot reached important Jews in London, who confronted the Israeli ambassador in London with the letter that our agency had received from the Prime Minister's advisor that the government was simply not going to add more protection for the schools. That process produced a change in policy and a government decision to indeed allocate the necessary funds to protect all of the schools. in Sderot

Presently, our information center is working on an investigative piece about the Israel Tax Authority and their local representatives known as *MAS RECUSH*, in which we are investigating how and why people don't get their homes and stores repaired for long periods of time, and how the government tries to wait until people take money out of their pockets that they do not have to cover the costs themselves until the Israel Tax Authority finally comes through with help.

Our center looks forward to take part in building a trauma center. We were pleased to receive an offer from an architect from Tennessee who wants to volunteer his time in the design of the Trauma center, after reading our article about what the children in the Kindergartens go through these days. Our center looks forward to bringing more volunteers from outside of Sderot- My sister, who acts as a clown therapist, bringing a bus full of clowns to Sderot...Our Center looks forward to recruiting help from the 'Ayaliem project' - Students at the Sapir College who are now building Yeshuvim in the Negev. And, most importantly, our center looks forward to being the only physical representative for the foreign press in the Negev with the ability to function in seven languages. At this moment, our center is getting ready for the next round of death and destruction.

We are ready to film with our video as the missiles fall, to interview the people who are affected, to place our material on our new web site, only three weeks old and with more than 2,000 people who have scrolled through the web-site. Our information center runs as a private company with a small borrowed computer. Our center needs help to acquire state of the art computer equipment, to get a van to show reporters around, to cover expenses for volunteers and to hire staff. We will do this by forming a membership support organization, by raising funds through a non profit organization in the US, and by selling shares in our small corporation.

On a personal note, after returning after a 13 months of travel bymy self in the Far East, and coming home, it seemed like people had given up, that people had convinced themselves that they do not have the powers to do any thing about their situation. Yes, it's so easy to just care only about ourselves, our own careers, and our families.

We have to wake up, and to understand that even we, the simple people can make a difference in this reality. I may be a little "pisher", as my Grandmother called me once. I know, however, that it is possible to make even the smallest change. It's not even a question of believing or not. It's a fact.