

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MARCH 3, 2003

MAYORS' MISSION TO ISRAEL

Recommendation

In consultation with Mayor Michael Di Biase, the Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications recommends that the Mayor, Councillor Susan Kadis and the Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications participate in the Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region's first ever Mayors' Mission to Israel on May 10-16, 2003.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to review and advise Council on the first Mayors' Mission to Israel.

Background - Analysis and Options

Mayor Michael Di Biase's office received correspondence from the Canadian Jewish Congress inviting the Mayor to participate in the Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region's first ever Mayor's Mission to Israel.

Staff was asked to review the objectives related to the Mission and report to the Committee of the Whole Meeting of March 3, 2003. The following is a list of objectives that the Ontario delegation will achieve during the Mayors' Mission to Israel:

- Meet with top level Israeli Government Officials, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister;
- Participate in briefings on the current situation in Israel;
- Meetings with Mayors of Israeli Cities including the Mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert and Ramla;
- Workshop on changing demographics and developing municipal infrastructures;
- Briefings by Israeli experts on terrorism and how municipalities are dealing with these threats, and;
- Meetings with officials from the Ministry of Industry and Tourism and Chamber of Commerce.

As part of our City of Vaughan's International Twinning Policy, Vaughan twinned with the City of Ramla in 1993 when former Mayor Lorna Jackson, Councillor Bernie Green and Scott Somerville visited Israel to sign the twinning document. It has been ten years since any City of Vaughan officials visited our sister city Ramla. The Mayors' Mission to Israel presents an opportunity to achieve several objectives including renewing ties with Ramla and with key officials from the State of Israel.

Ramla has an extensive English website highlighting the city's progress over thousands of years. Most of Ramla's residents are Jewish people from many different countries who settled in at the time the State was founded. The new residents blend in the Hebrew Israeli culture together with other minorities such as Muslims and Christians of different sects who have lived in the city for many generations. Ramla is the capital of the central region, one of the six regions in the state of Israel supervised by the interior ministry.

Ramla houses the office of the manager in charge of the country, the vice manager, county officer, officer in charge of minority groups, regional office for planning and the regional office for immigration and registration.

The central region includes the Tel-Aviv region to the west, the Haifa region to the north, the Jerusalem region to the east and the region of BEER-SHEVA to the south. Strategically located as a major transportation hub, Ramla has a population of over 70,000 people. The primary industries include furniture, small commerce, agriculture and a sizeable manufacturing sector. Other fields of employment include Lods train station, which is Israel's most important railroad junction and Lods BEN-GURION airport. In addition to Ramla's geographical location, Mayor Yoel Lavi and his Council is in the process of creating a stronger infrastructure for the City including additional roads and railroads which will lead in the establishment of the second largest employment area in Israel.

Conclusion

Participating with Professor Ed Morgan, Chair of the Canadian Jewish Congress Ontario Region will be The Honourable Tina Molinari, Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mayor Mel Lastman and many other Ontario municipalities. The trip is being subsidized by the Canadian Jewish Congress resulting in a \$1000 cost for each participant, which includes return airfare, all accommodations, meals, and transfers.

This Mayors' Mission to Israel is a good opportunity to renew our sister city relations with Ramla and create closer ties and understanding with our Vaughan residents.

Report prepared by:

Frank Miele, Commissioner of Economic/Technology Development and Communications

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Miele
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Economic/Technology Development and Communications