

## **The Gush Etzion Regional Council financed hundreds of thousands of shekels in illegal activity in 2017**

Settlement Watch, August 2018

Information gathered by the Movement for the Freedom of Information indicates that the Gush Etzion Regional Council financed illegal construction and other illegal activity to the tune of hundreds of thousands of shekels in 2017. In addition, despite the fact that the Council is responsible for enforcing the law in the area of construction, the Council spent more than NIS 150,000 on the Nativ Ha'Avot campaign (in 2017 alone) against the implementation of the High Court of Justice ruling and the enforcement of the law on illegal construction.

### **Financing illegal construction**

Following a freedom of information request submitted by the Movement for the Freedom of Information regarding the Council's expenses in 2017, it appears that the Council financed hundreds of thousands of shekels in illegal construction and services to illegal sites.

The data indicate that the Council approved an expenditure of NIS 580,593, or approximately \$157,231 (\$1 = NIS 3.5) on illegal projects in the outposts of Ibei HaNahal, Sde Boaz, Kashuela Farm, Nativ Ha'Avot and more. By the end of 2017, the Council spent NIS 557,192 of the approved amount.

### **Examples of projects funded by the Gush Etzion Regional Council to illegally-built areas:**

| <b>Details</b>  | <b>Sum<br/>(₪)</b> | <b>Not supplied<br/>(₪)</b> | <b>Comments</b>                       |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Ibei HaNahal – Changes and renovations in Zohar Garden                  | 150,886            | 0                           | Illegal outpost                       |
| Kfar Eldad – Installation of LED bulbs in the new neighborhood          | 69,264             | 0                           | Neighborhood that was built illegally |
| Expansion of access road to Ibei HaNahal                                | 46,554             | 0                           | Illegal outpost                       |
| P'nei Kedem Youth Village – Tadiran Air Conditioner with 1.5 horsepower | 30,000             | 0                           | Illegal outpost                       |
| Kashuela Farm – Traffic planning  | 23,400             | 23,400                      | Illegal outpost                       |
| Kfar Eldad - Installation of LED bulbs in the new neighborhood          | 16,848             | 0                           | Neighborhood that was built illegally |
| Ibei HaNahal – Repair of safety hazards from the water tower            | 15,000             | 0                           | Illegal outpost                       |

|   |                |               |  |
|---|----------------|---------------|--|
| Pnei Kedem - Install fire prevention equipment                              | 12,753         | 0             | Illegal outpost                                    |
| Masu'ot Yitzhak – Survey  | 9,945          | 0             | Illegal outpost                                    |
| Sde Boaz – Survey of sewage   | 6,143          | 0             | Illegal outpost                                    |
| Sde Boaz – Completing road safety infrastructure                            | 5,850          | 0             | Illegal outpost                                    |
| Ibei HaNahal – Intercom system at the outpost gate                          | 4,364          | 0             | Illegal outpost                                    |
| Elazar - Nativ Ha'Avot - Development work of Memorial Site, Stage 1         | 113,244        | 0             | Observation tower illegally built in Nativ Ha'Avot |
| Elazar – Shed for the memorial site in the illegal outpost of Nativ Ha'Avot | 72,248         | 0             | Observation tower illegally built in Nativ Ha'Avot |
| Elazar - Nativ Ha'avot - Construction planning for the memorial site        | 4,095          | 0             | Neighborhood that was built illegally              |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>580,593</b> | <b>23,400</b> |  |

**Expenses connected to the illegal outpost Nativ Ha'Avot**

**Transfer of the memorial site in Nativ Ha'Avot**

Following the High Court’s ruling on a Peace Now petition to evacuate 17 illegal buildings in the illegal outpost of Nativ Ha’Avot, in May 2017 a wooden lookout tower was erected illegally on private Palestinian land, in memory of Lieutenant Colonel Emanuel Moreno and First Lieutenant Ezra Asher.

Shortly thereafter, construction began on a new observation tower, with a massive stone structure, on land recently declared state land, but the Palestinian landowner appealed the declaration, which is still pending before the Appeals Committee.

Construction was conducted without permits and without having received validation, and adjacent landowners had complained that the excess dirt during the construction was piled on nearby private land. The data indicate that the council spent NIS 189,587 for the planning and construction of the new observation tower.

**The Council is responsible for enforcing the law, yet funds a campaign against the High Court ruling and its enforcement in Nativ Ha'Avot**

Although one of the functions of a municipal authority is to enforce building laws in its territory, the Gush Etzion Regional Council financed and openly supported the campaign against the impending evacuation Nativ Ha’Avot. The data indicate that the Council approved an expenditure of NIS 170,000 for the campaign. In practice, by end of 2017, expenses totaling NIS 164,688 were spent, on advertising services, campaign management, billboards, public relations and others items. For more on the Nativ Ha’Avot story, see [Nativ Ha’Avot File](#). It should be noted that the data do not include the year 2018, when the campaign became even more intense.

**Plot 91 as an alternative site for the evacuees of Nativ Ha'Avot**

Following a governmental decision, the Gush Etzion Regional Council began working in recent months to build an alternative site for the evacuees of Nativ Ha'Avot, on Plot 91 near the outpost, despite the fact that the evictees engaged in criminal construction activity.

In order to plan the alternative site, in 2017, the Council approved an amount of NIS 855,000. By the end of the year, Gush Etzion had spent NIS 633,932 of the total. Last February, the government approved a budget of NIS 60 million to compensate the outpost settlers and the Gush Etzion Regional Council for the evacuation of their houses, again, despite the fact that both the settlers and the Council had willingly broken the law. For about the government's compensation package [see here](#).

**Despite the decision of the High Court of Justice, the Council still tried to save the illegal houses from demolition**

The Nativ Ha'Avot ruling was absolute and clear, stipulating that the state must evacuate the 17 structures that the state itself found were built illegally on private Palestinian land. Despite this, the Council did everything in its power to get retroactive authorization on at least some of the houses. The petition of the settlers on this matter was rejected and the request for clarification led the court to reiterate that all 17 buildings must be completely destroyed. Nevertheless, the Council continued its efforts and spent more than NIS 35,000 for an engineering opinion for the various houses in the framework of the idea of sawing off some of the houses. As stated, all the attempts were unsuccessful and the court ruled that all the structures must be taken down. [Read here](#) for about attempts to prevent the demolition on some of the houses.

**Additional payments:**

- **Funds for the Regavim association** - Among other things, the Council paid Regavim, which works against Palestinians living in Area C and inside Israel by targeting illegal construction, a total of NIS 45,000 for aerial photography. (This is in addition to the additional NIS 300,000 [transferred by the Council to Regavim in for other expenses](#), which are not included in the expenditure list).
- **The Gush Etzion Regional Council's propaganda activities** - In addition to public funding for the evacuation of homes in Nativ Ha'Avot, the council approved NIS 1,755 for an ATV tour of MK Yehuda Glick, NIS 2,106 for a survey on the application of sovereignty over (i.e. annexation of) Gush Etzion, and NIS 7,020 for an Israel National News (Arutz Sheva English) live broadcast of a Memorial Day ceremony.
- **Funds for a subsidiary of the Council** - The list includes nearly NIS 4.5 million that were approved for payment to "Bnei Etzion," a subsidiary of the Council. For a small portion of the sum, there is a breakdown of the purpose of the payment (e.g. an emergency water tank at the Tekoa school for NIS 200,000, and access to

bus stations - NIS 113,000). Yet NIS 2.6 million is given no explanation (under the heading "Bnei Etzion M. Housing"). It is possible that these are development projects financed by the Ministry of Housing; however, we have no information about it. In addition, the company was given NIS 1.5 million for the planning of the Anifilim neighborhood in Alon Shvut.

- **Events commemorating 50 years since the Six-Day War victory** - the Council approved an amount of NIS 240,000 for the production of events commemorating the 50-year anniversary of Israel's victory in the 1967 War.

**Peace Now calls for an end to the transfer of funds by settlement authorities to illegal activity:** "It is time for official authorities that are obligated to act according to the law to stop funding illegal activities, attacking the High Court and evading enforcement of the law, especially when using public funds. The Interior Ministry must put an end to this sinister exploitation of the public coffers, and must get our taxpayers' money back."