

Save All Ethiopian Jews photograph collection, 1983-2009

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Save All Ethiopian Jews (Organization)
Title	Save All Ethiopian Jews photograph collection
Dates	1983-2009 (inclusive) 1983 2009
Quantity	55 photographic prints and 38 35mm negatives (1 folder and 1 oversize folder)
Collection Number	PH2016-037
Summary	Photographs of Ethiopian Jews in Israel meeting with members of Save All Ethiopian Jews, a human rights organization in Western Washington that worked covertly to expedite the immigration of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel
Repository	University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Special Collections University of Washington Libraries Box 352900 Seattle, WA 98195-2900 Telephone: 206-543-1929 Fax: 206-543-1931 speccoll@uw.edu
Access Restrictions	No restrictions on access.
Languages	English

Biographical Note

Save All Ethiopian Jews (SAEJ) was established in Mercer Island, Washington, in 1983 to assist in the immigration and resettlement of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. The organization was the brainchild of Sidney Weiner, a former Boeing engineer, and his nephew-in-law Eli Halpern, an attorney in Olympia, Washington. Eli Halpern's brother, Bill Halpern, had died in Kenya under mysterious circumstances in 1982 while working to help Ethiopian Jews. Sidney Weiner and Eli Halpern decided to memorialize Bill Halpern's efforts by forming a local organization dedicated to the rescue and resettlement of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle and several other Jewish service organizations, SAEJ was run completely by volunteers. Along with Sidney Weiner, his wife Margaret, and Eli Halpern, the founding members of SAEJ included Sol Goldberg and Samantha Ripley, who were working independently to raise awareness of and funding for Ethiopian Jews in local Jewish congregations.

At the time that SAEJ was founded, there were an estimated 30,000 Jews in Ethiopia, most of them living in the rural province of Gondar. Scorned as "falashas" (a pejorative term that means "strangers" in Amharic), Ethiopian Jews faced discrimination, poverty, religious oppression, and starvation. These conditions were exacerbated by widespread famine in Ethiopia throughout the 1980s, the repressive

policies of the Mengistu regime, and the ongoing war with Eritrea. To escape such conditions, many Ethiopian Jews traveled by foot to refugee camps on the Sudanese border. In late 1985, the Israeli government, which had no official diplomatic relations with Ethiopia at the time, airlifted 9,500 Ethiopian Jews from Sudan in a rescue dubbed Operation Moses. The rescue was suspended after news of the secret evacuation effort broke in the international media, and Israel did not actively pursue further large-scale evacuations of Ethiopian Jews until the Operation Solomon airlift of 1991.

Along with several other North American organizations, such as the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ), the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ), and the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ), SAEJ worked to fill the void left by Israel's official non-participation in repatriating Ethiopian Jews. The group first attempted to secure passports for Ethiopian Jews by "adopting" Jewish children in Ethiopia. When this strategy became unfeasible, Halpern and Weiner devised a covert program in which Ethiopian adults received "work contracts" from Washington employers, and children and teenagers received "scholarships" to Washington grade schools and colleges. Most of the schools were fictitious, and the supposed employers participating in the "contract" arrangements had only the vaguest notion of their role in assisting SAEJ's efforts. The falsified documents enabled Ethiopians to receive passports and leave the country. Once they reached the United States, they were immediately flown to Israel and entered absorption centers before resettling in their new country. Until late 1988, most of the documents were prepared by Eli Halpern and the employees of his law firm in Olympia. From 1985 to 1990, SAEJ worked in quiet cooperation with Israeli officials through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which reimbursed SAEJ members for travel and operating expenses.

SAEJ's model for rescuing Ethiopian Jews proved so successful that it was later adopted by the other North American organizations working on behalf of Ethiopian Jews. In 1989, SAEJ moved into an office in the Jewish Federation building in downtown Seattle, where its members continued to prepare, process, and track immigration documents not only for SAEJ but also for AAEJ, NACOEJ, and CAEJ for the next two and a half years. Because of the covert nature of their programs, SAEJ did not publicize its efforts, nor did it actively solicit donations outside local Jewish congregations.

In May 1991, the Israeli government airlifted approximately 14,325 Ethiopian Jews from Ethiopia to Israel in Operation Solomon, bringing the vast majority of the remaining Ethiopian Jews to Israel. After this monumental event, SAEJ members felt that their assistance with immigration efforts was no longer necessary and officially dissolved the organization on March 23, 1992. The remaining SAEJ funds were used to establish the SAEJ/Bill Halpern Ethiopian Scholarship Endowment Fund, which awards college grants to Ethiopian youths now resettled in Israel. The fund is jointly managed at present by the Jewish Federation of Seattle and the Ethiopian Scholarship Fund Committee, which includes Sidney Weiner, Eli Halpern, and other original SAEJ members.

Content Description

Photographs of Doctor Charles Kaplan of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle presenting Save All Ethiopian Jews (SAEJ) scholarships in Israel, circa 1993-2008. Photographs from a 1983 trip to Israel to meet with Ethiopian Jews and Israeli officials working on the immigration and resettlement of Ethiopian Jews. Also contains oversize photograph of an Ethiopian Jewish family.

Other Descriptive Information

Forms part of the Washington State Jewish Archives.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

Creator's copyrights transferred to the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Sidney Weiner, 1995-08-29 and 2015-05-28

Separated Materials

Material Described Separately:

[Save All Ethiopian Jews records \(MSS Coll 4532\)](#)

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Jews, Ethiopian

Personal Names :

Kaplan, Charles, 1913-2008--Photographs

Other Creators :

Corporate Names :

Washington State Jewish Archives (University of Washington)
(creator)

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Visual Materials Collections (University of Washington)

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