

Russell F. Robinson

## Despite gales, JNF stays the course

**P**ablo Picasso was spot on when he noted that, "The older you get the stronger the wind gets - and it's always in your face."

Mother Nature aside, as chief executive officer of a major nonprofit, I'm used to a lot of wind sent in my direction. But lately a different sort of gale has blown in. The government in Israel has reclassified our partner in Israel, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael, to that of a public benefit corporation in consideration of the fact that it is "concerned with the welfare of the public."

The attorney general, Yehuda Weinstein, has stated that "...nothing in the decision is meant to cast aspersions on the JNF's public activity."

I'm very pleased that the attorney general has high regard for KKL's operating standards and its commitment to the public good. For 113 years, JNF and KKL have been doing great work in Israel.

Sadly, however, some have taken this occasion to kick the JNF around and use the decision to question the continued need for KKL. I won't let that happen. I owe it to our heritage, ancestors, Zionists, to the people of Israel, Jews everywhere, and our work today, to speak up.

I challenge the critics who have taken this opportunity to type away hurtful and disparaging comments to explore any corner of the

country without seeing the footprints of KKL and JNF-USA. Then ask yourself: What would Israel look like, and what would life be like without our achievements?

And to those who would argue that time has blurred our purpose, witness what our long history has created, and our mighty plans for the future: Since our founding, KKL and JNF-USA have greened Israel with millions of trees, built thousands of parks, new communities and cities for generations of Israelis to call home. We've bolstered Israel's precious water supply, helped develop innovative arid-agriculture techniques, and educated both young and old about the founding and importance of Israel on the world stage.

And this is only the beginning. Over the next 10 years, we hope to move 500,000 people to the Negev and 300,000 to the north and, in the process, generate new homes, businesses, medical centers, good jobs, and tourism.

While KKL and JNF-USA are in fact separate organizations, we maintain a proud history of working together along with other dedicated partners to better the land and people of Israel. The numerous joint projects and program areas that JNF-USA supports in Israel are well managed by project managers who lead, develop and monitor them from start to finish, and report to an active board of directors.

In the United States our donors give generously to Israel to ensure its future, and during the last two years we have raised a record-breaking \$225 million toward our "\$1 Billion Dollar Roadmap for the Next Decade" campaign.

JNF-USA is registered as a 501(c) 3 charity, and under U.S. law is regulated by the Internal Revenue Service and the individual state attorney's general for tax purposes, transparency and oversight. We take great pride in our auditing and internal governance structure and the proper management of our donor contributions - and it shows.

We have earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, meet all of the 20 non-profit requirements of the Better Business Bureau, and have achieved a top rating by the American Institute of Philanthropy.

Yes, we've been at it for a long time. It took many decades to amass the donors, partners and revenue needed to help nurture a start-up nation. It didn't happen by itself and while U.S. aid has helped to build a mighty Israeli military, billions from JNF donors and partners around the world have been required to grow a country of 8.1 million and expand its frontiers in the Negev and the Galilee to provide for the next generation.

JNF succeeds because we skillfully accomplish on-time and on-budget proj-

ects without red tape. We succeed because we had the foresight to combat a hostile climate and envisioned a future that was unparalleled if we could master the elements. As a result, we created hundreds of new reservoirs, increased water recycling to nearly 90 percent, invested in drip irrigation and desalination.

We succeeded because we recognized that the government of Israel could not by itself provide the capital for this scope of work, nor the ability to maintain the accompanying infrastructure, housing development, parks, water projects and so much more that we manage and finance. Simply put, the work that we and our partners perform in Israel saves Israelis millions a year.

Further, if Israel were merely a nation of its collective citizens, JNF would not involve itself in the work that we do. But Israel is a Jewish Nation. Thus, we have a moral obligation, opportunity and legacy to uphold for her people, our people, as partners.

As JNF moves forward, we will tack and navigate through the gusts ahead with patience, experience and sound judgment. I only ask those who would speak out against us to apply the same qualities. The future prosperity of Israel and the Jewish people depends on it.

*Russell F. Robinson is JNF's chief executive officer.*