

Former IAF pilot on peace mission to Libya

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Gil Fogiel sat on the beach here Monday morning, gazing across the bay at this Egyptian city on the Mediterranean when he heard a familiar sound prompting him to gaze upward. Flying overhead were two MIG-21 fighter jets.

"They were at the right distance and position that all my life as a fighter pilot I have dreamed to see," the former IAF F-4 Phantom pilot said.

But as the planes vanished over the desert to the south, Fogiel thought of the mission he is on now, and the difference was striking.

On Tuesday, Fogiel and Galit Oren will attempt to cross the border into Libya 200 kilometers west of here, thus becoming the first people ever allowed into the Arab country on Israeli passports.

They are traveling as part of the Breaking the Ice mission, which has brought together 10 participants from around the globe on a mission of peace, a journey that has taken them through Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Egypt.

The group of two Israelis, a Palestinian, an Iranian, an Iraqi, an Afghani, two Americans, a Ukrainian, and a Tibetan is crossing the

Sahara Desert together to send a message of peace and coexistence. The final goal is Tripoli where they hope to plant an olive tree which they have brought with them, perhaps with Libyan ruler Muamar Gadaffi.

"All my years I've risked my life for the short-term defense of Israel. Now, I'm taking a risk for long-term peace," Fogiel said. "I think that is a far more fertile prospect to take risks for."

What happens when the group gets to the border with its 16-member support crew and media contingent is anyone's guess. No one has travel visas into Libya and contacts through a third party with the Libyan government have not produced any acceptance or rejection of the peace mission.

"It's a guessing game, we'll see what happens when we get to the border," said Director of Operations Adam Rice, who spent hours Monday on the phone with friendly contacts in Tripoli.

By entering Libya Fogiel hopes to turn a new corner in Arab-Israeli relations. "We're welcome into Libya. It's a chance to change the course of thinking and from now on, we've produced a new way," he said.

Fogiel added that he feels like he's representing ordinary Israeli people, who are mostly "skeptical" after the events of the last few years.

"But if you stay all the time skeptical, nothing will ever change, so with this set, we're trying to break conventional thought," he said.

Oren said of herself that she "feels very honored." "I still don't see myself as so powerful in that we are making a difference. But if we do it, we can be the pioneers of change," Oren said. "I want to

represent the Israelis' best side, to come with open hands and an open heart."

"We are giving the Libyans and Gadaffi the chance to change the course of relations, to send the world a message that it's time to change attitudes, forget the past and look for a better future," Fogiel concluded.



The advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left, a smiling couple is shown. In the center is the JDate.com logo, which consists of a blue star-like shape with a red heart inside and the text 'JDate.com'. To the right of the logo, the text 'Everyone knows who fell in love' is written in white on a blue background. Below this, a red banner contains the text 'Get your exact digital copy of The Jerusalem Post!' in white. On the right side of the red banner, there is a small image of a tablet displaying the front page of The Jerusalem Post newspaper, with the headline 'Setbacks accept deal' visible.

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