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## Libya turns away peace delegation

**Israeli members of Breaking the Ice group turned away at Libyan border because Tripoli doesn't recognize Israel's existence; 10 delegation members, from PA, Afghanistan, US, Ukraine, Iran and Iraq decide to stick together and take alternate route through Egypt**

Ynet

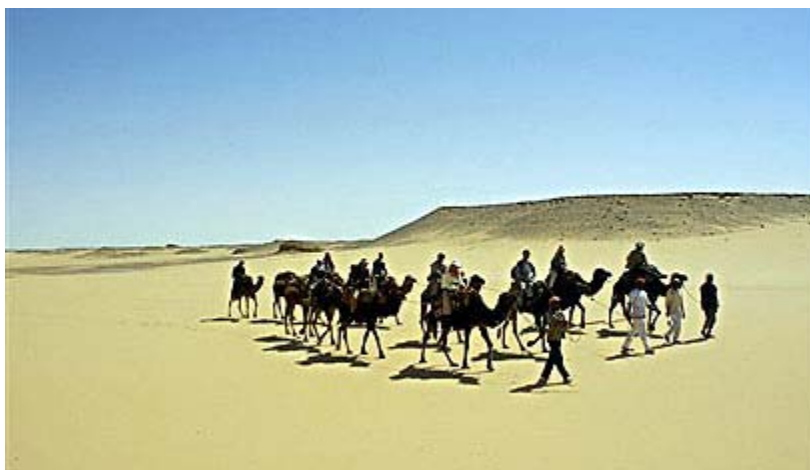
**Libya shuns peace delegation:** After a month of grueling travel through the Sahara desert, the Breaking the Ice delegation to promote peace was stopped at the Egypt-Libyan border Wednesday, just miles from its final destination, because Libyan security wouldn't let two Israeli delegation members cross the border.

The group, comprising 10 men and women from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the United States, embarked on the journey from Jerusalem in late February, and hoped to arrive in Tripoli 5,500 km later after passing through Ramallah, Jericho, Beit Shean, Amman, and the Suez Canal.



Two Israelis turned away Photo: Michael Greenspan

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**Journey through the desert (Photo: AP)**

On Tuesday evening the delegation reached the Libyan border, hopeful to complete the journey, but was stopped short by Libyan guards who refused to let the two Israeli members of the group – Gil Fogiel, 49, and Galit Oren, 40 - into their country. The rest of the group decided to stay with the Israelis and take an alternate route into Egypt.

Fogiel, who comes from Reut, is a reserve Israeli Air Force pilot, who was captured and tortured during the Lebanon war. Oren, from Tel Aviv, lost her mother in a suicide bomb attack on the city's number 20 bus in 1995.

### 'There was an unpleasant atmosphere'

The two Israelis were sorry to see the group give up its goal for them.

"We waited almost a full night at the border until they decided finally not to let us in," said Hezi Natanel, an Israeli businessman living in Germany who helped organize the delegation. "They told us they don't recognize Israel's existence and wouldn't let Israelis in their country."

Members of the group spent long hours trying to negotiate their entry with Libyan security officers at the border.

"All in all they were friendly, but there was an unpleasant atmosphere," Natanel said. "The major disappointment was because during 15 hours of discussions with the Libyan secret

### Breaking the Ice

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Breaking the Ice organization set to send

police, they told us twice that things looked good and our morale was raised. At one point we even started making accommodation plans for the night in Libya. But then suddenly the direction changed – there were a lot of ups and downs throughout the night until they made their final decision.”

delegation of men, women from Israel, PA, Iran on journey to Sahara desert, Libya. Objective: To prove cooperation, dialogue possible in face of challenges. Ynet will be there with them

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### 'All of us or none of us'

The negative decision brought down the group's morale. “We were already exhausted after the night, and our morale plunged lower,” Natanel said.

The group knew from the onset that there was a chance they would not be allowed into Libya, and they chose unanimously to take an alternate route.

“We made the decision together – all of us or none of us, and we turned around.”

Wednesday night the delegation made its way through Egypt's eastern desert, and expected to arrive in Cairo by the end of the month. From there, they will fly to Tel Aviv.

“We are racing against time to cover a lot of ground. We want to take advantage of the time we have together to continue the dialogue and get to know each other better,” Natanel said.

On March 31, the day after they are slated to land in Tel Aviv, a beach party is planned for the delegation members, but the party will not be a wholly happy celebration.

“Everyone here understands that as things are now, these people won't ever be able to be together in the same situation again,” Natanel explained.



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