



# **PRIEST WHO MOBILIZES FELLOW CHRISTIAN ARABS FOR ISRAELI ARMY ADDRESSES FIDF IN HOUSTON**

## **FIDF Texas Region Gala Dinner raises over \$500,000 to support Israeli soldiers**

**HOUSTON, March 31** – More than 650 community leaders gathered at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Houston on Monday for the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces (FIDF) Texas Region Gala Dinner, raising over \$500,000 to support the well-being of the brave men and women of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The gala, one of the Houston Jewish community's largest events, featured a keynote address by **Father Gabriel Naddaf**, an Israeli-Arab Christian leader who works to encourage Israel's Arabic-speaking Christians to enlist in the IDF.

"Israeli society is being strained amid current tensions between Israeli Arabs and Jews," said Naddaf, who is the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Yafia, a town near Nazareth, and founder of the Israeli Christian Recruitment Forum. "Jews and Christians are inextricably linked, through scripture and our shared history. Christians are an inseparable part of the fabric of Israeli society, and it is our duty to protect the Jewish homeland — the only place in the Middle East where Christians are safe. Now it is more crucial than ever for Israeli Christians to join the IDF — to build a sense of belonging and to foster their aspirations to contribute to the State of Israel."

One of the evening's highlights included a surprise appearance by Houston native Cpl. **Benjamin**, 20, a Lone Soldier – or who enlists in the IDF without any immediate family in Israel – currently serving as a light machine gunner in the IDF's elite Paratroopers Brigade. Benjamin was reunited with his unsuspecting parents in an emotional onstage reunion.

"Tonight's dinner was extraordinarily uplifting and inspirational," said FIDF Texas Region Executive Director **Scott Kammerman**. "To have the honor of hearing from Father Naddaf, who is doing all he can to safeguard Israel at great personal risk to himself and his family, followed by a surprise reunion between Benjamin and his parents invoked overwhelmingly positive feelings and helped connect even more people to the amazing soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces."

The funds raised at the event will go toward FIDF well-being and educational programs for IDF soldiers, including the Lone Soldiers Program, which provides guidance and support to all IDF Lone Soldiers through flights to visit family and friends in their countries of origin, fun days, a 24-hour call center for soldiers and parents, grants and financial assistance, holiday gift packages and vouchers, Shabbat and holiday celebrations, social network, and post-service scholarships.

Co-chairing the gala were **Robin** and **Bennett Greenspan** and **Susan** and **Max Reichenthal**.

"Israel's brave men and women in uniform – whether they are Jews, Druze, or Israeli Arabs – put everything on the line to protect the Jewish homeland and make the world safer for Jews across the globe," said Bennett Greenspan. "While their job is to look after Israel, ours is to look after them."

