



# *The Truth About Israel:*

## **Israeli Eye Clinics Restore Sight to Africans**

**I**n many areas of Africa, health facilities are inadequate and the people suffer from severe shortages of supplies, equipment and trained personnel. In particular, many people suffer from various degrees of blindness due to cataracts, malnutrition, trauma and infections that aren't properly treated. Since 1960, Israeli ophthalmology specialists, in cooperation and in consultation with local authorities, have been visiting Africa to set up "eye camps" to help those who suffer from eye disease. Over the years, Israeli eye clinics have cured and restored sight for thousands of people.

These eye clinics were sponsored by the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Center of International Cooperation, known by its Hebrew acronym, MASHAV. Launched in 1958, MASHAV's mission is to share with the rest of the developing world the know-how and technologies which provided the basis for Israel's own development. It aims to promote sustainable development and social equity.

Starting in 1960, six Israeli physicians established and staffed a thirty-bed eye hospital in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, in West Africa. While they were there, seven Liberian doctors and nurses were brought to Israel for training so they could ultimately replace the Israeli personnel.

**S**ince then, these initiatives were extended to nearly all other African countries and other continents as well. In April 1990, Israeli doctors and nurses found themselves at their eye clinic in Nakuru, Kenya, training the local professionals in the use of laser and other high-tech procedures. In Malawi, in Southeast Africa, teams of Israelis came for longer training periods ranging from four

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months to three years. These longer visits usually involved traveling beyond the cities to treat those who live in remote rural areas. There were four visits to Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique, to work with local doctors and help treat patients.

In Zimbabwe, an Israeli doctor volunteered for ten days to serve on the "Eye Train", a project designed to bring modern eye services to as many people as possible, no matter where they lived. The train operated from November 1997 until the end of February, 1998. Israel donated intraocular lenses,

medication and disposable materials. 10 to 15 operations were performed daily and another 10 to 20 patients benefited as well by consultations with the doctor.

In Namibia, by running an eye camp for three weeks in August 1996, three doctors operated on 300 patients, implanting more than 200 intraocular lenses.

On July 11, 1999, the first Israeli eye clinic opened at the central hospital in the capital to enhance and preserve the gift of sight for thousands of Mauritians. On the first day, 520 patients were waiting and were served. Large quantities of disposable equipment were flown in from Israel. For the next two weeks, with dedication and skill, Israeli ophthalmologists performed eye operations for people who suffered from various degrees of blindness and for many, their vision was restored.

At the request of the local authorities, plans were made for another eye clinic to operate in a similar format so that as many individuals as possible could be treated. The introduction of Israeli eye clinics was the first step of a project by the Israeli government to extend medical assistance to Mauritania.

Similar eye clinics have visited Micronesia, South America, the Caribbean and Papua New Guinea.