



## Falash Mura on Their Way to Israel

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The government has decided to allow the eligible members of the nearly-8,000 strong Falash Mura tribe in Ethiopia to immigrate to Israel over the next four years.

The Falash Mura – which literally means “forced,” referring to the fact that they were forced to accept Christianity – have been living in torturous conditions in a temporary camp in Gondar, Ethiopia for several years, hoping to be allowed to move to Israel. “There are 7,846 people there today,” said Avraham Negusa, a leading advocate for Ethiopian Jewry in Israel, “but hopefully within the coming months many more will be born.”

### Conversion to Judaism to Remove Doubts

Asked if others might join the camp in the coming months from outside, Negusa told *Israel National News* that the camp is closed and no one else is permitted to join its ranks. He added that all of the Falash Mura who are granted the right to move to Israel will have to undergo official conversion to Judaism, overseen by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, to prevent any doubts as to their Jewishness.

Interior Ministry officials will be arriving in Gondar in the coming weeks to investigate the eligibility of the residents to immigrate to Israel. Three criteria will be applied: Are they biologically Jewish, and do they now simply wish to return to Judaism? Have they been listed in the Gondar registry since 2007? And do they have first- or second-degree relatives in Israel who have filed requests for their Falash Mura cousins to immigrate to Israel?

All 7,846 people are to receive a final answer as to their eligibility to immigrate to Israel by Aug. 1, 2011.

### Up to 200 Each Month

The decision of today stipulates that some 600 will arrive in Israel, after receiving approval, in the coming weeks, and from then on up to 200 will undergo the same each month. No further mass Aliyah programs from Ethiopia will take place after the four-year period.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said, “We want to solve this problem, because as it is truly a difficult humanitarian problem. Personally, I view this as the closing of a circle, because as Prime Minister [in the 90’s], I brought 5,000 Falash Mura Jews to Israel, and now we are talking about a solution that will truly bring this painful and complex problem to an end. We have an ethical obligation as the Children of Israel, as members of the nation in Israel, to solve this issue.”

The Chairman of the Public Committee for the Remnants of Ethiopian Jewry, former Supreme Court Chief Justice Meir Shamgar, said, “This is a first-degree Zionist act on behalf of people who have tied their destiny with the State of Israel. They want to be here, many of them have family members here, and they believe they can be an integral part of this State. I hope that we will fulfill the mission of absorbing them here, and that they feel that they have truly returned home.”

### Jewish Agency in Charge

The Jewish Agency for Israel has allocated nearly 30 million shekels for the four-year operation. It will be responsible for running the Gondar camp during this period, and closing it down at its end. The Agency plans to provide even more Jewish activities than currently given, including Jewish tradition, Hebrew language and the like.