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A new Uganda Plan: Emissaries open Chabad House in Kampala

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NEW YORK – When Moshe and Yochaved Raskin met a few years ago for the first time, it was clear to them that were they to get married they would want to be *shluchim* (Chabad emissaries) one day.

That day arrived three months ago when the couple, along with their two-year-old son, packed a container of personal belongings, a Torah scroll, a big stock of frozen kosher meat and joined the Chabad international project that includes almost 100 countries worldwide. Their destination was Kampala, Uganda.

“We have done something insane, and we are happy about it,” Moshe says, summing up the first two months in the new Chabad house.

Although Theodor Herzl agreed to examine Chamberlain’s proposal, the Zionist flag never flew on Ugandan soil, or what was then called British East Africa. But 114 years later, in the African country that has long since received its independence from the Brits, the Chabad flag is now raised in a move that makes Uganda a tiny but rather new point on the map of Diaspora Jewry.

Chabad announced this new outpost at the *Kinus Hashluchim* (International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries) that took place in New York this weekend. Rabbi Raskin was one of more

than 5,000 emissaries gathered from all around the world to participate in the annual event.

In Kampala, there is no organized Jewish community, except for a synagogue and a school affiliated with the African community of Abayudaya, who keep certain Jewish customs and see themselves as Jews.

Raskin says the Chabad house that he and his wife are starting is going to serve Jewish businessmen who come to Kampala, as well as a growing number of tourists and volunteers, many of them from Israel.

“A year after the wedding, my wife and I started searching for a place for *shlichut* [outreach],” he recalls in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post*. “There were options for several countries in Africa, until the chief emissary to Africa, Rabbi Shlomo Ben Tolila, told us about Uganda.

“We traveled there on Purim. It is the pearl of Africa, a beautiful green place that made us fall in love... A relaxed place that conveys relaxation and joy. We arrived there four days before Purim and within a short time organized a megila reading and a Purim party for Jews and Israelis. 30 people arrived and it was so happy and joyful. Later we arrived on Passover, and we organized a public Seder that was successful.”

The young couple, Moshe is 24 years old and Yocheved is 22, decided that Kampala “is our place, a city that still

had no [center for] Judaism and we could build something in it.”

A week and a half before Rosh Hashana they took a container and went to Uganda. “We also took a Sefer Torah and the four species for Sukkot, and we did the holidays there,” he says. “Now the usual system of the year begins, with Shabbos programs and routine. We are completely alone there – my wife, the child, me and God, and we built the house with our own hands.”

After opening Chabad houses in all other continents, Chabad is now heading to Africa, with houses already active in the Congo, Nigeria, Angola, Ghana and Kenya, as well as in places with more active Jewish life and history, such as South Africa, and the north African Morocco and Tunisia. Chabad is examining the option to open centers in a few other capitals in Africa as well.

The annual *Kinus Hashluchim* is traditionally held in New York, and includes panels and Hassidic gatherings called “*hitva’aduyot*.” On Sunday morning, the thousands of emissaries were standing in front of the late Rebbe’s synagogue in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn for the traditional photo.

The climax of the *Kinus* is the dinner in which the new Chabad outposts are announced around the world for the coming year. This year, Chabad had to move the dinner for the first time from Brooklyn to a New Jersey venue because of space constraints.