



# Middle East Spotlight

## Tikkun Olam: A Cornerstone of Israeli Identity

On August 19, members of the international community will celebrate World Humanitarian Day. Inaugurated in 2008, this initiative seeks to highlight the tireless efforts of humanitarians who work to improve the daily lives of the poorest and most vulnerable among us. One country, the State of Israel, has long made helping others through *tikkun olam*—“repairing the world”—a cornerstone of its national identity.

Israel’s state-led humanitarian work began in 1958 with the founding of the Agency for International Development Cooperation, or MASHAV, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. MASHAV seeks to mitigate global hunger, poverty and disease by leveraging Israeli innovations in technology and sharing them with countries and groups around the globe. The organization has become so successful that it even operates in countries that do not maintain formal diplomatic ties with Israel, such as Chad, Uzbekistan and Morocco.

One of MASHAV’s earliest successes involved treating eye disease. Israeli eye doctors traveled to various countries, providing both supplies and training to locals to help cope with cases of preventable blindness. Since then, MASHAV has expanded to helping refugees in conflict areas across the globe, providing trauma centers after natural disasters and sharing training in sustainable agricultural development.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also formed to help those in need around the globe. One of such group, IsraAID, provides humanitarian relief to countries affected by natural disasters. In the past decade, IsraAID has responded to natural disasters in over 35 countries, distributing over 1,000 tons of relief to over 1 million people. Beginning in September 2015, IsraAID deployed to Greece to help Greek authorities cope with the influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Somewhat surprisingly, according to Israel21c.org, when told those assisting them are Israeli, the refugees often respond, “Oh, we love Israel!”

Israel not only provides relief and aid overseas, it also works to bring those in need to Israel.

Save a Child’s Heart is an organization that works to bring children from developing countries to Israel for life-saving heart surgeries, to which they would otherwise not have access. Today, over 3,400 children are alive due to treatment received from Israeli doctors.

In its short 68-year history, Israel has left an indelible mark on countless lives through its *tikkun olam*-driven public works. With the support of both the government and NGOs, Israel’s humanitarian contribution to the world is only destined to grow in the coming years.

To learn more about the difference Israel makes in the world, visit [www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org).