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President Shelly Concludes Israel Tour in Southern Towns and Farming Communities

SEDE BOQER, Israel— Wrapping up a week long tour of Israel in northern and southern cities and towns Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and First Lady Martha Shelly spent their final day visiting farming communities including small business ventures in the Negev, a rural area of arid desert lands that borders Egypt and Jordan.

President Shelly met with Shai Hazaz, mayor of villages and kibbutz communities near Beersheba where thousands of desert acres have been transformed into economically sustainable farms.



President Shelly toured farms with local Mayor Shai Hazaz and toured an area in which 12,000 acres are farmed in a climate conditions similar to the Navajo Nation's.

“We talk a lot about green houses and technology,” said President Shelly after seeing drip irrigation farmlands and green houses that use computer aided control systems monitored from a cell phone. “This is an area where our communities would be interested. We can teach individual Navajos to use green houses—to be self-sufficient. That could be the second phase I would be interested in.”

Emphasizing Navajo Agricultural Products Industry the president proclaimed with its products speaking about fried bread with Navajo Pride flour. “We need to come to test it,” said Shai Hazaz, who accepted the president’s invitation to visit the Navajo Nation.

Farming communities with organic agricultural produce are packaged on a truck with a loading bay and placed on transports for immediate shipping to Russia and Europe upon harvesting. Left over produce on the field are open to community members at no cost. The Israeli government’s agricultural ministry works with local farming communities in providing water and certifies produce with organic labels.

In neighboring communities where green house are producing crops with the use of drip irrigation in rows of elevated fields, the president visited AMA Agriculture Industries with 12,000 acres of farming. The fields are monitored by sensors for sunlight, temperature, moisture saturation, and fertilization levels. Adjustments are made through a computer with designs for water efficiency and growth acceleration. The watering and fertilization system is centrally located in a control room to enable easier access to the system for maintenance, repairs, adjustments, and to keep the system operating with as little down time as possible.

President and First Lady Shelly also visited a community at the Mashabbim and Nizzana border crossing near Gaza in an arid, rocky desert climate where tourism and animal farms are the main methods of economic sustainability. The community resembling areas of the Navajo Nation serves as a bed and breakfast vacationing spot for Israelis who live in urban Israel and mostly Europeans throughout the year. Sheep and goats are raised in these communities.

“Seeing these communities grow out the desert,” said the president, “assures me that we can continue our own ways while increasing our economic livelihood. They are flourishing in the desert.”

Communities in the Negev are working closely with a research university in Elat, Israel where professors and scientists are continually finding new ways while improving methods of water use to promote life in a dry climate. A large underground aquifer with brackish water is used for year around fish hatcheries producing Australian and aquarium fish for market.

President Shelly met with professors Eilon Adar, Pedro Berliner, and Jhonathan Ephrath of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev as they spoke about the university’s cooperating participation of the local farming and agricultural communities. The university meets with local communities routinely to adjust research protocols to fit local needs.

The university is open to Navajo students for graduate school in sciences at the master and doctorate levels.

President and First Lady Shelly visited Beit Kama in Ramat, the resting place of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister who spent the latter years of his life in the Negev with a vision of turning the desert into agricultural lands. Israel's largest solar research institute in Elat is on the verge of breakthrough in energy storage.

Returning late Friday, President and First Lady Shelly their final evening in Israel at a dinner north of Jerusalem with Shalom Almog, a retired colonel who served in the Israeli Defense Forces, who expressed gratitude to the president for coming to Israel with open invitations for return.

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