

HOMECOMING! Israel cheers arrival of U.S. immigrants

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Byline: BY OREN YANIV DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Body

TEL AVIV - More than 200 Americans who moved to **Israel** amid the ongoing hostilities received a hero's welcome yesterday upon landing here.

"What is the best answer for Hezbollah?" bellowed former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who addressed the group after they touched down. "You are the best answer!"

Tired yet thrilled after their long trip from New York, the olim (Hebrew for new **immigrants**) were mobbed by photographers and reporters as they walked down the steps from the jetliner.

In a nearby hangar, hundreds of relatives and well-wishers welcomed them with hugs and tears.

"It's finally here," said Ariel Blacher, who moved from Riverdale with her husband and four kids. "We've been waiting for this moment for a really long time."

At a time when most Israelis are uneasy and many thousands who reside in the northern parts are heading south to seek refuge from Hezbollah missile attacks launched from Lebanon, the new **immigrants** served as a morale boost for many.

"They are not running away from anything," said Tony Gelbart, founder of Nefesh B'Nefesh, the organization that arranged the charter flight. "They are running to something."

A lineup of officials greeted the new **arrivals** during a welcoming ceremony, and the influx received wall-to-wall coverage in the Israeli media.

A story in Ynet, a popular news Web site, quickly spurred over 300 readers to offer encouragement.

Comments directed at the newest residents of **Israel** included "Way to go," "We love you" and "Best of luck."

Still, some newcomers appeared lost amid the hoopla.

"I'm really nervous and anxious, but excited," said Alana Sobelman, 25, whose only other visit to **Israel** came at her bat mitzvah 13 years ago. "All these emotions come from this future I have no conception of," she said.
oyaniv@nydailynews.com

Graphic

MICHAEL APPLETON DAILY NEWS Jennifer Airley of Cedarhurst, L.I., **cheers** with family - grandmother Frida Nuszen (l.) and aunt Sheila Hanser (2nd l.) - at Tel Aviv airport.

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