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Tourist-activist seeks ban on T.A. carts

By [Cnaan Liphshiz](#)

A movement to ban horse-drawn carts in Tel Aviv started with one horrified Jewish-American tourist, who witnessed equestrian abuse on the city's streets nearly 25 years ago. That tourist, 60-year-old Nina Natelson from Washington, D.C., has recently hitched some of Tel Aviv's most sought-after performers - including Assaf Amdursky, Billie Levy and Ram Orion - to do a concert this coming Sunday to help raise awareness to her cause.

"In Israel, more than any other country, there's no place for horses and donkeys in city traffic," Natelson says, citing Judaism's references to animal welfare.

After witnessing "dead horses walking" in 1984 on one of her frequent visits to Israel, Natelson founded two dedicated nonprofits: Chai, which she registered in the States, and Hakol Chai, an Israeli sister-group. The two groups have a staff of less than a dozen Americans and Israelis.

"The municipality isn't doing anything about the abuse of donkeys and horses. People walk right past these tortured animals on the street, and city inspectors do, too," Natelson complains.

Zvi Galin, Tel Aviv's chief veterinarian, declined to be interviewed for this article. Rona Besser Harpaz, a spokesperson for the city, commented, "Equestrian abuse is an important issue which requires all legal action to stop it."

Harpaz went on to say that since 2005, the city has impounded 90 horses and donkeys from their owners and put them into rehabilitation shelters. In addition, according to the municipality, the city has handed 800 citations to people who kept horses without a permit. The city does not have an estimate as to the number of horses which are kept without permit in Tel Aviv.

In describing her Israeli base of support, Natelson says: "We mostly get help from young Israelis and from Anglos and Europeans in Israel, who are more conditioned to care about these issues."

Last year, Chai lobbyists and their supporters prompted Tel Aviv's city council to hold a special and first session on the problem of horse and donkey abuse.

Outside the meeting, Hakol Chai activists demonstrated in favor of a ban, but the council decided instead to make efforts to enforce an existing regulation that requires horse owners to obtain a permit, conditional upon their providing proper food, maintenance and veterinary care.

"Experience has shown that it is impossible to properly regulate how these animals are treated," said the organization's 26-year-old spokeswoman in Israel, Ikey Green, who recently moved to Israel from Germany. "Owners who know they won't pass simply don't bother with getting a license."

Professor Karen Alkalay-Gut, a U.K.-born member of Tel Aviv's animal-rights party, Latet Lihiyot, disagrees with the demand for a ban.

Stressing her views on the subject may not be the party's official line, she said: "Imposing a ban is not the way to go. Education and registration are. People's lifestyles shouldn't be interrupted. Only as a last resort."

Alkalay-Gut nonetheless praised Hakol Chai's efforts to "get people to look these horses' in the eyes."

In explaining why she has come to demand a full ban, Natelson recalls an incident when owners of a starving mare and her colt, rummaging for garbage in the heat with no water, chased away activists in Jaffa who tried to persuade them to take better care of the animals.

But Natelson believes things are changing for the better. Besides the fact that Latet Lihiyot, the animal rights party, won a seat on the city council, she says, "other recent advances in animal rights in Israel give me hope. Maybe we can make horse-pulled carts a thing of the past within a few years."

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