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Regavim: Protecting Israel's Resources, Preserving Israeli Sovereignty

Regavim (Hebrew for 'mounds of earth') was conceived in the darkest days of 2005, as Gush Katif was emptied of its Jews and Peace Now was waging a successful legal campaign against a host of Jewish communities. Three young Jewish idealists looked out of their windows – one from his home in Samaria, one from his office window in the Binyamin region, and one from the window of an IDF jeep in the Negev – and realized that the Land of Israel was gradually disappearing before their very eyes. Together, they combined their expert legal and fieldwork skills to confront the forces undermining Jewish sovereignty and delegitimizing the Jewish State.

Ever since, Regavim has been waging the legal battle to preserve Israel's most precious resource: the land itself. Day after day, week after week, year after year, a small but dedicated staff of fieldworkers and attorneys have documented, researched, and prosecuted the abuses of Israel's resources and sovereignty that threaten the very foundations of the Jewish State.

"We use the information we gather to create an overview of the problem," explains Meir Deutsch, Director General of Regavim. "We research the history and the legal issues that impact what we see out in the field, and map out the problem using every resource we can get our hands on: archival material, land deeds and official documents, historic photographs, up-to-date aerial and drone photography, state-of-the-art GIS maps, and more. When we have the facts, the next stage begins. We process and digest all of this information and build our case, file official complaints with the relevant authorities, and closely monitor enforcement activity. When necessary, we take it to the next stage: Our legal department petitions the court for an injunction or work-stop order."

The process doesn't end there, though. The follow-up often takes longer than the case-building or prosecution, and some active cases have been in the courts for a decade. In the interim, Deutsch and his colleagues use the information to piece together a larger picture of the underlying issues, and to formulate solutions. With hard facts and incisive analysis, they take any and every procedural and legal measure necessary to compel those responsible to enforce the law. And when the law is insufficient or unclear, they focus their efforts on lobbying and participation in Knesset hearings, and have become a major contributor to important pieces of legislation that strive to fill the gaps that allowed the problems to arise in the first place.



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It's painstaking, exacting work on a shoestring budget with a small but dedicated staff. The odds against their success seem insurmountable; the magnitude of the challenges is stupendous. Yet they have sued the United Nations for violations of Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem, forced the European Union to halt illegal construction in the Adumim region, been instrumental in rewriting Israel's Planning and Construction Law, spearheaded the fight against the practice of polygamy, and more. Regavim's comprehensive plan for the Negev, presented to the Israeli government in 2017, is both a proposed resolution of existing problems and a vision for the future development of the Negev, and it has become the basis for national strategic planning and land-use policy.