

by Leah Colmer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **EXCLUSIVE VISIT DURING IDF'S DIGNITY WEEK**

West Bloomfield, MI -- January 23, 2006 – In a rare and exclusive opportunity Lieutenant Yanir Gatnio and Captain Shira Biton arrive in Michigan on Wednesday, February 8, 2006, for a one day highlighted occasion, punctuating Friends of the IDF **DIGNITY** Week, an event generating critical aid to deserving young soldiers and their families in severe financial distress.

Scheduled to arrive early in the morning, Gatnio and Biton will meet with Jewish community leaders and educators, as well as interested individuals, to detail the plight of Israeli soldiers in dire need who defend our Jewish homeland. An undeniable focus is their poignant testimonies, which serve as a touchstone to the reality of every Jew worldwide.

Today, Lt. Gatnio serves as a platoon commander of an armor battalion. Early in 2006, LT. Gatnio's platoon was responsible for the arrest of a major terrorist whose main activity was transferring weapons and selling them to Hamas.

Abandoned by his father at age five, Gatnio was raised by his grandmother after the untimely and heartbreaking death of his mother a year later. Within time, his grandmother's deteriorating financial situation forced Gatnio to leave his home, and be sent to boarding school, far away from his half-brother and grandmother.

Pursued by life changing circumstances, and no longer an abandoned child of five, Gatnio demonstrated his maturation into adulthood by requesting to become a combat soldier in the IDF. Considered an only child, a classification that automatically excludes young men from combat in the IDF, Gatnio forged ahead and successfully fought for his aspiration to become a combat soldier. It was at this specific turning point in his life that the IDF recognized Gatnio as a 'special' lone soldier. Since then he has benefited from unique aid and grants through the **DIGNITY** Program.

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Today LT. Gatnio commands 25 Israeli soldiers. Four of them are needy soldiers on the threshold of their future, looking for support and survival.

Social workers complete the other half of the equation in this crucial partnership with the **DIGNITY** Program by identifying soldiers in need. Captain Shira Biton is valuable part of this critical link between Friends of the IDF and their soldiers. Since 1999, Captain Biton has amassed invaluable training and experience, serving as a social worker at different bases, brigades and divisions throughout Israel. The **DIGNITY** Program directly impacts the 5000 soldiers under her care, and the 23 social workers committed to human dignity under her command.

For an interview or an opportunity to personally meet with **DIGNITY** ambassadors LT. Yanir Gatnio and Captain Shira Biton for this one-day event, please contact Tamir Oppenheim at Friends of the IDF Michigan Chapter.

**DIGNITY** WEEK'S circuit also includes Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Boston and New York.

The IDF steadfastly protects the identities of these soldiers and their families, allowing for the greatest possible freedom and dignity during their adversity. There are over 14,000 young disadvantage soldiers, like Yanir and our anonymous soldier, fighting courageously for the peace of Israel who need our cherished support.

The FIDF initiates and helps support social, educational, cultural and recreational programs and facilities for the young men and women soldiers of Israel who defend the Jewish homeland. The FIDF also provides support for widows and orphans of fallen soldiers.

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