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**IALC Joins JNF in Commemorating Columbia Tragedy**

**February 10, 2003 - New York, NY and Tucson, AZ** – Scientists and researchers from the International Arid Lands Consortium join its long time partner, Jewish National Fund, in commemorating the victims of the shuttle Columbia, including the first Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon.

“The International Arid Land Consortium's scientists, teachers and researchers join with our long-time partners at the Jewish National Fund in commemorating the brave crew of the shuttle Columbia,” said Kenneth E. Foster, president of the International Arid Lands Consortium. “We offer our thoughts and prayers to the families and colleagues of the Columbia astronauts and rededicate ourselves to our shared cause of scientific advancement.”

In a televised conversation from space during the Columbia mission, Ramon told Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

*“I call upon every Jew in the world to plant a tree in the land of Israel during the coming year. I would like to see at least 13 or 14 million new trees planted in Israel exactly one year from now, on the anniversary of the launching.”*

Ironically, Ilan means “tree” in Hebrew. Jewish National Fund immediately responded by planting the first 13 trees on January 23, 2003 in American Independence Park on the outskirts of Jerusalem in honor of Ilan Ramon and the Columbia team.

In the immediate aftermath of the Columbia tragedy, JNF received an overwhelming number of requests for tree plantings in Israel, as people wanted to help realize Mr. Ramon’s dream of 13 million more trees in Israel.

As a JNF partner for more than a decade, the IALC supports JNF’s global effort to coordinate the planting of trees throughout Israel. Planting trees helps the environment of arid lands by preventing land erosion, providing shade and helping the environmental balance. While in space, the shuttle astronauts were performing a variety of scientific experiments including many on desertification.

“The Columbia mission of exploration and scientific advancement is one that the IALC and JNF partnership has embraced, and the pursuit of that mission is essential to creating a better and more peaceful Earth,” said Dr. Foster.

To plant trees in Israel in memory of the seven astronauts who lost their lives aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia or to make a donation to the memorial, call 1-800-542-TREE (8733) or visit [www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org).

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The International Arid Lands Consortium (IALC) is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to exploring the problems and solutions unique to arid and semiarid regions. IALC promotes cooperative research and practical application of new knowledge to develop sustainable ecological practices. The member institutions share a mission to enable people of arid lands to improve the quality of life for future generations. IALC members include the University of Arizona, Desert Research Institute – Nevada, Higher Council for Science & Technology – Jordan, The University of Illinois, Jewish National Fund, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation – Egypt, New Mexico State University, South Dakota State University, and Texas A&M University-Kingsville.