When Israel celebrated its 60th anniversary in May, the observances began with the annual Day of Remembrance for Israel’s fallen soldiers, or Yom HaZicharon. This year the nation honored more than 22,000 soldiers and civilians killed in Israel’s wars since 1948, as well as some 1,600 victims of Arab terrorism dating back to more than a century ago.

The very first victim of Arab terror recognized by the State of Israel was a little known rabbi with an interesting story. In the mid-1800s, Rabbi Avraham Shlomo Zalman Tzoref began drawing local Arab ire after he obtained permission from Egyptian and Ottoman Turk authorities to rebuild the Huvra Synagogue in Jerusalem’s Old City, which had been previously razed by Arabs.

Apparently, the ‘Ishmaelites’ were enraged that Ashkenazi Jews were beginning to establish themselves in the city. Their violent reaction included an assault on Rabbi Tzoref in which he was struck in the head with a sword on his way to morning prayers one day in 1851. He died of his wounds three months later. And while the Huvra synagogue was eventually rebuilt, it was later blown up by Jordanian forces in the aftermath of the 1948 War of Independence, and its teetering arch became a symbol of the destruction of east Jerusalem while in Arab hands.

The account reads much like the book of Nehemiah, when the Israelites had a decree in hand from the land’s foreign rulers to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Many have drawn an analogy between today and the returnees from Babylon who re-built Jerusalem ‘with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other.’
Dear Friends,

These are trying times here in the USA. Families are struggling to pay for the increased cost of food and gas and are cutting back on many other expenses in order to make ends meet. This “cutting back” has a trickle-down effect throughout the economy for businesses and non-profit organizations alike.

This year’s presidential campaign, meanwhile, has many feeling uncertain. With deep political divisions over the war in Iraq and economic turmoil at home, the US is at a crucial juncture this Fall. Our choice of a president is weighing heavily on us all.

And then there is the rising threat of Iran....

If we do not have a leader in the White House next year who is resolute enough to confront this threat in strength, we are at risk of a nuclear war with serious consequences to Israel and the world.

Yet this is not a time to be discouraged! This is the time to participate in the democratic process by voicing our opinions to our leaders and candidates, and voting in line with our convictions.

More importantly, now is the time to pray! We must come together, humble ourselves and pray for our leaders, and for revival in our churches and communities.

That’s why this summer, we’ve redoubled our efforts to reach out to the churches and communities of this nation with a series of teaching events designed to inspire and inform a new generation of Christians to grasp hold of God’s heart for America and His promises for Israel. By the end of this month, ICEJ speakers and teams will have ministered in as many as 16 cities across 8 different States from New Jersey to Alabama, touching the lives of thousands of people.

At this critical moment in history, our hope for this nation is found in that beautiful promise of II Chronicles 7:14:

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

And our hope for Israel rests in the sovereignty of God, knowing that, “He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm 121:4)

God bless you as we stand together for God’s purposes in our generation!

Susan Michael
USA Director
To the Ends of the Earth

Touching the Nations with the Good News of God’s Faithfulness

By Jürgen Bühler

The call and mandate to bless Israel is a global one. The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah declares, “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’” Thus the message of Israel’s restoration in our day is one for the body of Christ worldwide. God commissions us to declare it even to the isles afar off.

To fulfill this biblical mandate, the ICEJ has established branches in more than 60 nations and a global reach into 125 countries around the world, impacting millions of Christians united in their commitment to Jesus and their love for Israel.

But the Church has not only the responsibility to understand God’s eternal purposes regarding Israel. We are also called to act accordingly. The Psalmist tells us to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (122:6). Isaiah commands that we “comfort” God’s people (40:1). The Apostle Paul teaches us to show them “mercy” (Romans 11:31). These all require action on our part.

The worldwide mission of the ICEJ is therefore twofold. The first is instructive – to declare to the nations that God is gathering Israel for His redemptive purpose. The second is pro-active – to mobilize prayer and practical support from the all four corners of the earth to comfort and bless the Jewish State and people.

Whether it is in the midst of the Amazon rainforests of Latin America, the plains and peaks of North America, the halls and cathedrals of Europe and Scandinavia, the heart of deepest Africa, the vast stretches of Asia or even on the remotest islands the South Pacific, the ICEJ is carrying out its calling to tell Israel’s story and to mobilize her true friends all around the world.

Dr. Jürgen Bühler serves as International Director of the ICEJ

“For the Lord shall build up Zion” Psalm 102:16

Over the nearly three decades of our ministry, the ICEJ’s worldwide family has been involved in the building up of Israel through a variety of special projects aimed at meeting urgent practical needs.

When the Soviet Jews began returning home to Israel in the 1980s, ICEJ supporters in Finland sponsored the construction of a community center for elderly Russian Jewish immigrants in Ashdod.

When the city of Ma’ale Adumim lacked critical funding to finish construction of a synagogue, our German branch raised the necessary donations in memory of Kristallnacht, the infamous “Night of Broken Glass” when the Nazis destroyed hundreds of synagogues across Germany.

Since then, friends of the ICEJ in the USA, Canada, Europe and beyond have helped donate a bullet-proof bus for children attending school in Efrat, funds to train and deploy bomb-sniffing dogs used by security forces throughout the country and portable bus stop bomb shelters to protect the embattled Israelis of Sderot.

Our branches have planted hundreds of thousands of trees in Israel through the Jewish National Fund. And we have assisted local charities in meeting the needs of the poor.

From building parks and playgrounds to defending its citizens, our record of projects on behalf of Israel stretches from one end of the country to the other.

Help Build Up Zion
www.icejusa.org/build
The Sacrifice of Friends
The High Price of Standing with Israel for the Arab Bedouin of the Galilee

By Michael Hines

This month marks three years since Israel’s painful evacuation from Gaza and two since the bitter end of the 2006 Lebanon War. For more than 2,500 years this season has been a traditional time of mourning for the Jewish people, as they mark the destruction of both the First and Second Temples with a day of fasting and lamentation called Tisha b’Av – the “ninth of Av.” Rabbinical Judaism traces some of the darkest events in Jewish history to this short, hot, cheerless period of summer, which falls this year at sunset on August 9th.

With every year that passes it seems that the observance of Tisha b’Av is more painful than before. This year’s fast comes hard on the heels of July’s gut-wrenching prisoner exchange with Hizballah for the mutilated bodies of captured IDF reservists Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.

At such a time, it is almost impossible to fathom the great gulf between the Israel’s painful, at times even foolhardy, respect for the remains of its loved ones and her enemies’ unrepentant glorification of their death. And yet, to this day, Israel is home to indigenous Arab minorities prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice to stand with the State and defend its borders. Foremost among these are the ancient Arabic-speaking Bedouin and Druze communities of the Negev and Galilee that for years have been considered traitors to the Palestinian cause by many of their Israeli Arab neighbors.

A journey to the Galilee town of Taibe finds a small Bedouin community of 1,300 that was forced to give its traditional Negev grazing lands to the army to enable them to secure the Egyptian border following the 1982 Sinai withdrawal. Because their children still serve in the Israeli army, these Bedouin families have been widely ostracized for “selling out” to Israel, though they were poorly compensated for their loss. Meanwhile their community has been ignored and neglected by Arab local authorities who have not bothered to establish health or educational facilities or provide running water and sewerage. Their drinking water comes from an agricultural well. The community’s trash is collected only once a month.

Unsurprisingly, the Bedouin grapple with many different needs. There is 70% unemployment and those working receive very low wages. Lack of money forces many teens to drop out of school and work to support their families. Since 1990, none have reached matriculation standard. What’s more, 90% of the community is illiterate. Urban living and the breakdown of their traditional family culture has brought its own problems also, leading to a dramatic rise in Bedouin youth crime.

Several years ago a youth worker named Saeed set about changing the reality for the Bedouin teens of Taibe. He opened up the unfurnished basement rooms of his house to provide after-school classes for children from 5th to 10th grade, hoping to help some of them to graduate from school. In 2007, he contacted the Christian Embassy for help, impressing ICEJ AID staff with his compassion and zeal.

A walk across rubble and rough ground on the edge of Taibe reveals difficult living conditions. Undeterred, however, Saeed enthusiastically shares his dream of empowering Bedouin youngsters to overcome their circumstances. It’s a dream that prompted the ICEJ to provide funds to help.

In April of this year ICEJ AID Deputy Director Yudit Setz was once again in Saeed’s Taibe basement listening to his vibrant vision for the future, only this time she found herself surrounded by the new furnishings and brightly painted walls paid for by a generous ICEJ AID renovation grant. Today the after-school program lasts 2 hours each day and trained teachers help some 65 children advance educationally, gain self-esteem and confidence, aware that there are millions of Christians around the world have not forgotten them and their costly stand with Israel.

For the Bedouin of the Galilee, that stand has come at a price. But reflecting on the events of Tisha b’Av, it is a stand that echoes beyond the borders of Israel across the Middle East and the wider world.

As bitter as it is to hear the unceasing taunts of Israel’s enemies, the sound cannot drown out the sacrifice of her friends: from the villages of the Galilee, to the far corners of the earth.

Michael Hines serves as the ICEJ’s USA Media Director. Maxine Carlill and Petra Van der Zande contributed to this article from Jerusalem.
For many decades, the majority of Israel's Christian supporters were devout saints from the older generations, many of whom had actually witnessed the miracle of the re-birth of the Jewish State and its early struggles for survival. While valuing this vital constituency, the leadership of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem also became increasingly aware of the need to train up the next generation of Christian Zionists for the challenging days ahead. At the annual meeting of our national directors in 2001, there was a general sense that it was time to reach out to younger Christians with our biblical message of God's promises for Israel.

Liesl Hedding of the Christian Embassy staff also received a specific vision from God to be involved in this very mission. Her heart was to mobilize young adults worldwide who desire a deeper understanding of God's plans for their lives as well as their roles in supporting the nation of Israel, and she became the catalyst for founding “Grafted”.

“The scripture God gave to me for this ministry was from 1 Kings 20:17, to be a generation who will run with zeal and passion for God's purposes in these days; to respond to God's Word and be forerunners for His Kingdom,” Hedding says.

Since Grafted was started, over 1000 young adults representing over 100 countries around the world have come to Israel on Grafted tours held during the ICEJ’s annual Feast of Tabernacles celebrations and on our ‘hands-on’ service tours during the summer months.

Each tour gives participants the opportunity not only to travel through the incredible land of the Bible, fellowship together and hear from His word, but also to meet and bless the Jewish people through service projects across the country.

Kasey, a 27-year old believer from West Virginia, will never forget her time serving with the Grafted team in Jerusalem: “While in Israel, God clarified many questions, reaffirmed my faith, and revealed some new truths. It was incredible to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, the Bible truly came alive. We serve a living God, and our God – the God of Israel who does not change like shifting sand – reigns forever more!”

The Grafted ministry has an interactive and informational website for young people, as well as a quarterly newsletter with prayer points, devotionals and current information relating to Israel.

If you are a Christian young adult who is excited about learning more about the heart of God and His love for you, His land, and the Jewish people, then check out our website and sign up for our next tour!

For more information, go to www.grafted.org or contact the Grafted team at: grafted@icej.org.
A Christian Face at Yad Vashem

Susanna Kokkonen appointed as Director of the Holocaust Center's Christian Desk

BY DAVID PARSONS

Yad Vashem, Israel’s official museum and memorial to the heroes and martyrs of the Holocaust, has appointed Susanna Kokkonen, a former cultural attaché with the Finnish Embassy in Tel Aviv, as the new director of its special desk for Christian Friends of Yad Vashem. She replaces Episcopal minister Rev. Sam Clarke, who spent the past year setting up the office’s operations.

Kokkonen is a political scientist and historian who studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where she earned her doctorate in Holocaust studies. Her focus was on the plight of Jewish survivors detained for years in post-war displacement camps in Italy due to the British blockade in Mandatory Palestine.

Most recently, she represented the European Coalition for Israel and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem as their lobbyist at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Kokkonen hopes to expand the Christian Desk’s educational outreach. “I think you can only understand what happens today if you bear in mind the history behind it. I find it outrageous that some people are comparing the Palestinian situation with the Holocaust,” said Kokkonen.

Learn More

www.icejusa.org/yadvashem

Tour Israel
during the Feast of Tabernacles
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Call Toll Free for Details: 1-866-393-5890
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The Forgotten Refugees

The Neglected Plight of Jewish Exiles from Arab Lands

By Kasey Bar

When referring to the Arab-Israeli conflict the word refugee is nearly synonymous with Palestinian. The reality is that when Israel became a modern nation in 1948 there were more Jewish refugees than Palestinian. As five Arab nations launched a regional war against the state of Israel, an estimated 670,000 Arabs fled the war and an estimated 860,000 Jewish refugees were expelled from Arab lands.

Historically this process is considered a “population exchange.” Arabs fled to neighboring Arab states and Israel became the beacon of hope for hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees who were expelled from Arab lands losing substantial assets and the historical heritage of their families. Israel also became the haven for 600,000 European Jews who survived the holocaust.

Thus, in 1948 over a million Jewish refugees found security in the state of Israel. The infant state welcomed the refugees and sacrificed as a corporate community to provide housing, food, and even education to quickly transform their feeble refugees into functioning, prosperous members of society.

The Arab nations did exactly the opposite. Believing their armies would soon destroy Israel, they made a calculated decision not to absorb the Palestinian refugees as citizens or to re-establish their lives in any way. Untouched by the suffering of their fellow brothers, they chose to exploit the misery of the Palestinians as a political weapon against Israel continuing the war they began in 1948.

Sixty years and four generations later, the Palestinian refugees have grown to a number of over 4.4 million. Still all Arab nations continue to refuse citizenship to Palestinians. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the definition of a refugee pertains to an individual who has lost both their home and livelihood. The status of refugee is not transferred to his/her descendants. The UNHCR is responsible for all refugees worldwide, except for the Palestinians.

Under the pressure of several Arab nations, on December 8, 1948, the UN formed the agency of UNWRA, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency. The only agency in the UN dedicated to just one group of people, the Palestinians. Under UNWRA the definition of a Palestinian refugee is different from all other refugees worldwide in that the status of refugee is transferred indefinitely from generation to generation. Because of this the Palestinians are the only group of refugees whose numbers are growing rather than shrinking.

The US taxpayer supports 40% of UNWRA’s annual $300 million budget while the oil rich Saudi Arabia contributes a token 2% to the care of its Arab brothers in refugee camps the Arab League refuses to dismantle. The best solution is simply to shut down UNWRA and to transfer its responsibilities to UNHCR in order to break the refugee cycle and to provide Palestinians with the ability to build a brighter future.

UNWRA’s mandate, however, keeps being extended year by year and will continue to be so until enough people cry out against the injustice of the Arab nations toward Israel and the disenfranchised Palestinians in their midst. According to that same mandate the descendants of those Arabs displaced in 1948 will remain refugees until they are able to build communities inside all of Israel.

Under these terms there will be no end to the Palestinian “refugee” issue until there is an end to the State of Israel, a nation built by over a million forgotten Jewish refugees.
Indeed, many Israeli towns today first went up as stockades built overnight by Zionist pioneers. And there have been plenty of local detractors like Sanballat and Tobias seeking to hinder the modern Jewish return and the rebuilding of Zion.

But there is another aspect of the biblical ‘pattern of return’ highlighted in Nehemiah that is often overlooked, yet it is just as critical to finding her rest back in the land. That is, the nation gathered as one and collectively repented for all the sins and rebellion that had led to their exile in the first place.

The ninth chapter of Nehemiah records the solemn assembly of all the Israelites who had returned from captivity, to repent and renew their covenant with God. They came together with “fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads... and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers” (verses 1-2).

They recalled how, even though “our fathers acted proudly [and] hardened their necks (verse 16)...“Yet in Your manifold mercies, You did not forsake them in the wilderness” (verse 19). They also lamented “the trouble...that has come upon us...from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day” (verse 32), but acknowledged that “You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly” (verse 33).

This national repentance and reaffirmation of their covenant relationship with God mirrored the ‘return’ under Joshua. Once the Israelites had re-entered the land from exile in Egypt, one of the first things they did was to build an altar to God on Mt. Ebal and collectively repent and renew their vow at Sinai to serve Him alone (Joshua 8:30-35).

In Israel’s modern-day return, she has yet to find that place on national repentance and recovery once back in the Land. Yet the prophets speak of it everywhere, for example in such passages as Joel 2:12-32.

Hosea also foretells of this promised moment in glowing language: “Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (6:1-2). The Hebrew word for “return” here connotes not only physical return but also teshuva meaning repentance and return to God.

We can expect great things whenever Israel reaches that divinely appointed moment, for the sure promise of Scripture is that her troubles will soon be over.

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director in Jerusalem and Contributing Christian Editor of ‘The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition’