The Last Ethiopian Jews

ICEJ to help speed the return of the Falash Mura

The Jewish Agency for Israel has requested special assistance from the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem to help accelerate the return of the last 8,700 Ethiopian Jews to Israel by sponsoring direct aliyah flights over coming months. According to Howard Flower, ICEJ Director of Aliyah Operations, JAFI officials say the need is urgent given the current drought and political turmoil in the region, as well as the growing medical problems of the Jewish community still in camps in the mountainous Gondar area.

Years of intense debate ended last November when the Israeli government and rabbinic authorities finally approved the aliyah requests of thousands of Jews left in Ethiopia who are known as Falash Mura. These are Jews whose ancestors were pressured to convert to Christianity about 150 years ago for economic reasons but still sought to retain in part their Jewish identities and traditions.

The Jewish Agency has been flying them to Israel at the rate of 200 per month in special flight groups of 100 passengers each. At the current rate, however, it will take up to four years to complete this unique aliyah initiative.

“With concerns growing over their deteriorating conditions, the Jewish Agency is eager to speed up the process, and due to budget cuts they are very thankful for the help from the Christian Embassy,” said Flower. “We are a long-time partner with JAFI in the great modern-day aliyah and this provides us with another amazing opportunity to assist in the final Ingathering of the Jews to the land of their forefathers.”

Some of the Falash Mura require urgent medical treatment which they cannot receive in Ethiopia, as a number of clinics have been closed due to funding shortages. Many also have been separated for years from close family members already in Israel.

“Children are growing up away from their grandparents, who are now well advanced in age,” Flower explained.

Additionally, the severe drought that has been plaguing northern Africa has caused food shortages around Gondar, where most of the Falash Mura live.

Finally, there is concern that the chaotic revolutions in the Arab world might spread to Ethiopia, forcing Israel to consider yet another emergency airlift of Ethiopian Jews.

The request for ICEJ assistance came on the 20th anniversary of “Operation Solomon” when nearly 15,000 Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel in a dramatic airlift involving...
Dear Friends,

We have just concluded the biblical festival of Pentecost, which reminds us of the giving of the Law at Sinai and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the early Church. The message is clear: God’s work must be pursued in the power and anointing of His Spirit. He does the work, we are just His voice! Now our gaze is forward to the Fall High Holidays and the glorious celebration of the triumph of the Kingdom of God – the Feast of Tabernacles. These all remind us of our destiny.

God will accomplish His will through us and bring us all into His triumph.

The work and ministry of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is pursued in this hope and reality. Though the challenges against Israel are great, our confidence is in the power and grace of God. I just read an article warning that Israel faces an overwhelming missile threat from radical Muslim regimes and militias in the region, led by Iran. We can look at this and despair or we can gaze heavenward and trust in God. He has never failed Israel and never will. He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and He alone can watch over Israel. We can join Him in prayer, comfort and love, but in the end it is His work!

Many of you are probably aware by now that I have decided to step down from my position and continue the sojourn that Jesus has for my life. My time to go has come, as with all God’s servants, and I am sure of His leading in this regard. My years at the helm of the Christian Embassy have been challenging and blessed, and I thank God for giving me the unique privilege and honour of leading this movement as its Executive Director. I could not have done this without your help, prayers and encouragement. You have stood alongside me and together we have done the work. This “work” is bigger than any one person and it is close to the heart of God. It is His work and will go on in power, anointing and grace.

Our Interim Executive Director, Dr. Juergen Buehler, is a fine, godly man and he will lead the movement well. I have worked very closely with him for many years and am delighted that the Lord has prepared such a choice servant to take over from me. Please pray for him and give him all your love and encouragement.

So, new days are upon us and these are exciting changes as the Lord is positioning the ICEJ for increased effectiveness and blessing. We should all rejoice in this. I wish to bid you farewell and to thank you for your faithfulness and love. I will always pray for the Embassy and I will remain on its International Board. We embrace the call of God to bless Israel remembering that it is His work and not ours!

Yours in Jesus,

Rev. Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director
Among Israel’s diverse population, the Druze are a truly unique minority. They trace their ancestry back to the biblical figure Jethro, but left the Sinai deserts a millennia ago when the Muslim mainstream rejected their distinctive brand of Islam. Instead, they settled in the highland areas of Lebanon and northern Israel, where they have managed to survive centuries of Muslim persecution.

Today, the Druze community in Israel numbers about 120,000 people living on the Carmel range, the Golan Heights and other scattered villages throughout the Galilee. Most have tied their fate to the Jewish state, although relations become strained from time to time for Druze towns along the border with Syria, who have relatives on the other side of the fence.

Druze loyalty to Israel includes a communal decision to accept mandatory induction into the IDF. This stems from the pre-states years, when the Druze were caught up in the Jewish-Arab struggle over the land and the Jewish underground, the Haganah, assisted the Druze in creating self-defence networks against recurring attacks by Arab marauders.

Their consent to compulsory draft into the IDF is a great source of pride for the Druze, and these young adults are currently integrated into all IDF units. Yet the full equality that exists for every Druze soldier within the IDF does not extend back to civilian life, where the Druze do not always receive the same rights and benefits as other sectors.

So despite their patriotism, the Druze have not had easy lives in Israel and are in need of outside assistance to help level the playing field and pave the way to a better future. Thus, the ICEJ has decided to help the community financially, so that young Druze can have better chances of success in the areas of education and work.

To accomplish this goal, ICEJ AID has partnered with the Lt.-Col. Saleh Falah Association to provide support for Druze schools. This association was founded by retired Druze IDF officers in 2008 with the goal of investing in Druze youth before their enlistment in the IDF. It also helps demobilized Druze soldiers to become integrated back into civilian life, through academic scholarships and job and housing placement. It also assists poor families, along with the elderly and disabled in the Druze community.

The association has several dozen activists, mostly volunteers, and is financed solely by private donations.

ICEJ AID joined the association in its efforts to improve education in Druze public schools by raising an initial amount of NIS 100,000 (US $30,000). Half of this donation was invested in the main elementary school of the mixed Druze/Christian town of Maghar.

The project’s main aim is to raise the number of Druze teenagers acquiring a marketable diploma and continuing on to higher education. Key elements of the program include capital investments in computers and science labs and regular informal activities during the school year. Ten special study spaces were also built in Maghar, each equipped with a computer and book stand.

Meanwhile, some NIS 30,000 was donated towards university scholarships and the remaining NIS 20,000 was dedicated to social assistance.

Please join with us in continuing this very worthwhile outreach to the loyal Druze community of Israel. Support ICEJ AID today.

Learn more and give: www.icejusa.org/aid
The ICEJ’s Long History of Assisting Ethiopian Jewry
Two Decades of Practical ICEJ Support
by David Parsons

The ICEJ has been reaching out to help the ancient Ethiopian Jewish community ever since the 1991 emergency airlift Operation Solomon rescued nearly 15,000 refugees and the nation of Israel faced the daunting challenge of absorbing them into a modern culture.

One initial problem was that many of the Ethiopian immigrants had urgent medical problems but Israel had no doctors able to speak their native Amharic language.

The Foreign Ministry asked if the Christian Embassy could help and we were able to quickly identify and employ Dr. Campbell Millar and his wife Ferne, who had just completed an extended medical mission in Ethiopia treating leprosy and other diseases and could speak the language fluently.

The Finnish parliament then provided the ICEJ with two mobile medical clinics – the first such mobile hospitals of their kind in Israel – which Dr. Millar used to treat thousands of Ethiopian immigrants as well as other needy communities in Israel. The project was done in coordination with the Hansen Hospital in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, additional assistance was given to help with the Ethiopian absorption process, including household items, medical aid and job searches. The ICEJ also sponsored the building of two tukuls (Ethiopian meeting places) in the town of Beit Shean.

34 round-trip flights in 36 hours. Rebels opposed to the Marxist regime in Addis Ababa were closing in on the capital, forcing the country’s military ruler to flee. With diplomatic intervention from the United States, Israeli leaders convinced the rebels to allow them to bring the throngs of Jews home in a swift, massive operation over one weekend in late May 1991.

A half decade earlier, “Operation Moses” had rescued an initial wave of thousands of Ethiopian Jews who had fled the nation’s bitter civil war and were trying to journey to Israel by foot via Sudan.

This current group of almost 9,000 Falash Mura represents the last contingent of Ethiopian
In more recent years, the ICEJ has helped to fund a special project at the Israel Center for Psycho-trauma which seeks to lift many disadvantaged Ethiopian immigrants out of a cycle of poverty and failure, largely caused by the trauma of their difficult journey to Israel. With our help, the center is providing individual psycho-traumatic treatments for these Ethiopian olim.

Another ICEJ AID project provides special educational opportunities and after-school programs for Ethiopian youths at-risk.

Some 70% of Ethiopian Jews in Israel still live below the poverty line, and many teenagers are at risk of dropping out of high school and ending up in detention centers. The programs also provide their parents with counseling and Hebrew lessons.

The ICEJ also is sponsoring scholarships for promising Ethiopian students to earn university degrees and receive special vocational training at the Ruppin Academic Center near Netanya, thereby equipping the future leaders of this distinctive community.

Finally, the ICEJ has agreed to sponsor 10 children to attend an exceptional Ethiopian summer camp this summer, by special request of the Jewish Agency.

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth — everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made.”

Isaiah 43:5-7

The Christian Embassy has committed to helping with this urgent humanitarian mission as we work to hasten their rate of return to Israel. The first ICEJ-sponsored flight in this accelerated aliyah initiative will make the journey to Ben-Gurion Airport in August with 100 Ethiopian Jews on board.

“We plan to be waiting with a festive reception,” said Flower. ☺

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director and lives with his family in Jerusalem.
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is undergoing a change in leadership that will mean sad and grateful farewells to proven and trusted ministry figures as well as excitement and confidence in a new generation of leaders raised up to keep the organization on course.

Rev. Malcolm Hedding informed a gathering of the ICEJ National Directors in Jerusalem in May that he has decided to step down as Executive Director of the ministry after 10 years of service, effective as of the 31st of July 2011. He testified to the clear leading of God in the timing of this decision and his confidence in the continued success of the ministry under a new generation of leadership.

“I feel I have accomplished the tasks which God gave me to do when I assumed the helm of the Christian Embassy a decade ago,” said Hedding. “It is now time to make way for a new set of leaders to guide the ministry going forward.”

The decision was accepted, with regrets, by the International Board of Trustees, but it also paved the way for the unanimous appointment of Dr. Juergen Buehler to the position of Interim Executive Director.

In addition, Rev. Juha Ketola, the National Director of ICEJ-Finland, was welcomed on as the newly-elected Chairman of the International Board, taking over from longstanding ICEJ Chairman and Norwegian Branch Director, Mr. Leif Wellerop.

Over several decades, Wellerop has built ICEJ-Norway into one of the ministry’s most active and effective national branches, while his great passion for Israel has impacted all levels of our global constituency.

“Leif Wellerop held the position of Board Chairman for ten years and blessed the movement by his leadership and experience. We owe him a great debt of gratitude,” said Hedding.

Meantime, Ketola has been expanding the work of the Finnish branch since taking over from founder Dr. Ulla Jarvihleto and brings years of pastoral experience and fresh vision to the Board.

The national directors’ conference noted that Rev. Hedding had served the organization with wisdom and integrity, and leaves behind a remarkable theological, relational and financial legacy.
“There is obviously considerable sadness at Malcolm’s decision to move on from Jerusalem,” said Dr. Buehler. “But we are excited to sense the leading of the Lord in his life, and are grateful that he leaves the ministry positioned so well for the future. We wish him and Cheryl every blessing.”

Malcolm will remain closely connected with the work of the ICEJ as a member of the International Board of Trustees and as part of the ministry’s international speaking team. He will also be ministering at the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles Celebration in October.

Profile: Dr. Juergen Buehler
ICEJ Interim Executive Director

After graduating from Ulm University with a degree in physics, Dr. Juergen Buehler moved to Israel with his wife in 1994. Following a five-year research project at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, he obtained his doctorate in chemistry.

Juergen joined the staff of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem in 1999 and presently serves on its International Board of Trustees and as the ministry’s International Director. Since 2001 he has also been National Director for ICEJ-Germany, a position that he will still hold.

Juergen was also a founding member of the “Christliches Forum für Israel” (Christian Forum for Israel), a German umbrella group of Christian Zionist organizations.

He is an ordained minister of the German Pentecostal Federation (BFP). His grasp of biblical theology and his unique insights into issues relating to Israel, the Church and the nations have placed him in great demand as a speaker all over the world.

In addition to his other responsibilities, Juergen has remained an active member of the King of Kings Assembly in Jerusalem, and served on the congregation’s board from 1994 to 2010.

He and his wife Vesna live in Jerusalem and have three young sons and a daughter.

Dear Friends,

It was with great shock and sadness that we learned of the untimely passing of Johan Greeff on the 22nd of May 2011, at age 68. He will be greatly missed by everyone that knew him because he had a zeal and enthusiasm for the things of God that was infectious. He was always abounding in the work of the Lord and most certainly was a faithful defender of Zion and of the Jewish people.

Johan worked with the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem for many years, serving as an inspiration to all of us. He generously volunteered his time as National Director of ICEJ-South Africa while also pursuing his profession as a geologist and teaching at Stellenbosch University.

Although we know that he has now gone to be with His Lord, our hearts are saddened and our thoughts and prayers go out to Gayle, his wife of 45 years, and his five children and many grandchildren.

Johan’s life was guided by his personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and this gave meaning and a clear example to others of what it means to bless Israel. Among the tributes which poured in from around his native country and abroad was one was from the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria.

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have now entered into the joy of your Lord.

Malcolm Hedding
ICEJ Executive Director
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