ICEJ funds water therapy for handicapped children in Ashkelon

By Birte Scholz

The Oranim School in Ashkelon has become a very special place for handicapped children across the Negev ever since the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem helped to fund the installment of a state-of-the-art therapeutic swimming pool. The unique pool opened four years ago and an ICEJ delegation paid a visit to the school recently to see how the facility is being put to good use.

We watched as young students Tali and Dascha were carefully pushed in their wheelchairs close to the edge of the pool. A special lifting device was used to slowly lower Tali into the water, where her hydrotherapist was waiting for her. Tali, who is 12 years old and from an Ethiopian immigrant family, has a severe spastic paralysis that has confined her to a wheelchair. But once in the water, she was splashing and smiling. The buoyancy gives her a wholly new freedom of motion.

“Tali is unable to walk, but when she is in the water she feels like she can,” said Jardena Zachlach, director of the school. “In the water, Tali can move so much better than is possible in her wheelchair or in bed.”

Meanwhile, Dascha had been calmly awaiting her turn. When it came, the hydrotherapist moved her slowly through the water. The sensation brought a smile to her face, as her body felt lighter and her cramped muscles could relax. Coming from a Russian immigrant family, Dascha is also unable to walk. Yet she is set free to move about in the unique environment of the swimming pool, which is providing not only therapy but also lots of old-fashioned fun for dozens of special boys and girls who would otherwise miss out on some of the joys of childhood.

The city of Ashkelon is proud of its one-of-a-kind school with the therapeutic swimming pool for disabled youngsters and they get a lot of visitors. Parents of handicapped children are especially keen to bring them to Oranim. Some 130 hydrotherapy sessions take place in the pool each week. Two days a week are set aside for the 61 disabled children attending the Oranim school. On the other days, handicapped children from kindergartens and schools all over Ashkelon and surrounding areas are able to come and use the pool.

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The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded in 1980 as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem.

Today, the Christian Embassy stands at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.

From our headquarters in Jerusalem and through our branches and representatives in over 80 nations, we seek to challenge the Church to take up its scriptural responsibilities towards the Jewish people, to remind Israel of the wonderful promises made to her in the Bible, and to be a source of practical assistance to all the people of the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ’s United States Branch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with offices in Washington, D.C. and in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. We are a non-denominational faith ministry supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends.

We invite you to join with us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by using the enclosed response card to make your donation to the ongoing work and witness of the ICEJ.

Please mail all donations to:
PO Box 440276
Nashville, TN 37244

Or make your tax-deductible gift online:
www.icejusa.org

Upcoming Seminars & Speaking Events

Murfreesboro, TN
Israel, Church & the Nations
May 20th - May 22nd
World Outreach Church
1921 New Salem Hwy.
Murfreesboro, TN 37128
Malcolm Hedding; Allen Jackson; David Parsons; Susan Michael et al.

Spring, TX
North Central Church
Sun. June 12th: 9am; 11am; 6pm
25130 Aldine Westfield Road
Spring, TX 77373
Michael Hines

Destin, FL
Living Word Ministries
Saturday June 18th: 6pm
446 D Racetrack Road
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549
Michael Hines

Charlotte, NC
Israel Teaching Conference
May 27th - May 29th:
Fri: 7pm; Sat: 7pm; Sun: 10.30am
St Giles Presbyterian Church
2027 Emerywood Drive
Charlotte, NC 28210
David Parsons

Albuquerque, NM
For Such a Time as This
Sat. June 18th: 9am-12.30pm
Faith Lutheran Church
Albuquerque, NM 87111
Carrie Burns & Susie Sandager

Alva, FL
First Baptist Church of Alva
Sunday June 26th: 10am
2790 Joel Boulevard
Alva, FL 33920
Michael Hines

Schedule an ICEJ Speaker or Seminar today!
For more details call Teresa at: (615) 895-9830.
www.icejusa.org
I am truly excited as we gather again this month to pray for Israel. By now thousands of Christians, prayer groups and even entire churches are joining us in our prayers for Israel and the Nations. Every month new groups join us in our corporate intercession, representing many different countries.

When we pray we also should remember that prayer, for the Christian, is not just going to a private or communal ‘wailing wall’ where we somehow can unburden our souls and move on. Prayer is more. When we pray we always should remember that His answers might be different than we expect. Often God’s response to our prayers will surprise us in the manner and scope of the answer. As we pray we always should bear in mind that our understanding of our situation is always limited but that God sees the ‘full picture’. Therefore when we pray we always need to listen to the One to whom we are talking!

But finally, our prayers need to be prayers of faith - faith in an omnipotent God and faith that He answers our prayers.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Prayer Points for Israel
• Pray for a spiritual revival in Israel ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).
• Pray for wisdom for the Israeli government in the wake of a new surge in terrorism, and for protection for the people of the Land. The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1).

For the Middle East & Africa
• Please continue to pray for the Arab Nations around Israel - in particular for Syria and Egypt.
• Also pray for Libya, that peace will come to this war torn country.
• Pray for all the churches in the Middle East that God will grant them more freedom to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.
• Please pray for protection for the Church in the Ivory Coast and in particular our National Director and his family amidst the widespread violence being carried out against Christians by the UN-backed forces of the Islamic North.

For the Ministry of the ICEJ
• For our branches around the world; for anointing, vision and open doors to spread the message of Israel to the churches.
• Please pray also for the ongoing support of our various projects in Israel. God has been faithful but we trust that He wants to increase and expand our borders of influence (Isaiah 54:2-3).

Dr. Jürgen Bühler serves as ICEJ International Director and lives with his family in Jerusalem.
Sign up for latest project news and Isaiah 62 Prayer Alerts from Israel at: www.icej.org

It is the prayer of faith that will move the mountains. So let us together expect great things from God! 🙂

Prayer Campaign Word from Jerusalem
Over the last two years, the government has also financed training courses for the returning refugees in agriculture, primary health care, entrepreneurship and commercial driving. Courses are held at Eilat’s Josephthal Hospital, kibbutzim and other sites in Eilat, Arad and Tel Aviv.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor would not confirm or deny the existence of the repatriation program, but seemed to tip his hand by adding wryly, “We’re in the business of doing, not commenting.”

Until now, this story has been kept almost entirely under wraps by government censorship. Hedding said she was revealing it in detail to *The Jerusalem Post* “so the truth would come out.”

Many media accounts in the past indicated that the government, which is exploring various ways to drastically reduce the refugee population, was pressuring and even informally bribing Southern Sudanese to go home.

This notion was refuted by both Tall and Hedding.

“We interview all these people to ascertain that they’re going back voluntarily, that they’re making an informed decision, and we haven’t found any cases where they’re being pressured into leaving. The government isn’t always cooperative with the UNHCR, but this time it’s been very cooperative,” said Tall.

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**‘No Unhappy Endings’**

*ICEJ teams with Israeli Government to take Sudanese refugees home*

It is a story that can now be told. For the past several years, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has quietly served as liaison between Israel and the South Sudanese Authority, mainly for the purpose of repatriating hundreds of Sudanese refugees in Israel. The following is an exclusive account which finally broke the story in *The Jerusalem Post* on 23 February 2011 and is reprinted with permission.

Larry Derfner - *The Jerusalem Post*

“W e’ve interviewed all these people. They’re happy to go home. The Israeli government isn’t forcing them,” said William Tall, representative in Israel for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as another planeload of Southern Sudanese refugees flew home in late February at government expense.

Speaking by telephone through a translator at Ben-Gurion Airport before takeoff, Regina, 26, travelling with her one-month-old baby, May, said she was going home after 14 months in Israel “because Southern Sudan is going to be independent, and also because I miss my parents.”

Ninety-seven refugees were aboard the charter flight headed for Juba, capital of Southern Sudan. All told, some 400 have been flown home in the last 2½ years, said Charmaine Hedding, a leading activist on behalf of the refugees, who initiated the program by securing the cooperation of Israel’s Foreign Ministry.

“I have a waiting list of 400 more people. I can’t keep up with the demand,” said Hedding, who has close ties with the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, which is also involved in the program.

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“We interview all these people to ascertain that they’re going back voluntarily, that they’re making an informed decision, and we haven’t found any cases where they’re being pressured into leaving. The government isn’t always cooperative with the UNHCR, but this time it’s been very cooperative,” said Tall.

[The ICEJ has acted as a liaison between the Israeli government and the South Sudan semi-autonomous authority because the Islamist regime in Khartoum is still in a state of war with Israel.]
Said Hedding: “I’ve been critical of Israel’s asylum policy, or lack thereof, but these Southern Sudanese are desperate for education, to have something to take back with them to their country, and the government is giving it to them. The Foreign Ministry has been amazing in getting the training programs off the ground.”

Southern Sudan’s emerging independence is what made the program of voluntary repatriation possible, Hedding explained. Following last month’s referendum, in which nearly 99% of southerners voted for independence, the “Republic of South Sudan” is scheduled to be born on July 10.

“In late 2007, a lot of Southern Sudanese in Israel began telling me they wanted to go back home and help rebuild their country,” she said.

The half-century of fighting with the north, which cost 2.5 million southerners’ lives, is what drove the refugees to flee their homeland and migrate to Israel in the first place. The mainly Christian, oil-rich south’s struggle to break away from tyrannical, Muslim Sudan ended with the 2005 peace treaty that paved the way for independence.

At about that time, Southern Sudanese who had migrated to Egypt began heading clandestinely across the border into Israel. Some 8,000 are now in the country (along with some 25,000 other African refugees, largely from Eritrea, who have also crossed over from Egypt).

Hedding, who accompanies refugees on flights back to Southern Sudan every month except during the rainy season, May through September, said that when the homecoming planes approach Juba airport, “there’s so much excitement on board, it’s hard to describe. People always cheer when the plane lands. When they get off, sometimes they kiss the ground.”

“They always have family members waiting for them, and I remember once a woman got off the plane, she was met by her sister, and the two of them began hugging each other, rolling around in the dust, crying and laughing.”

Arrangements are made for the refugees’ smooth return home, Hedding added, noting that she monitors their progress and that “so far, there have been no unhappy endings.”

One man who took the course here in entrepreneurship is now running a taxi service in Southern Sudan with a rickshaw he outfitted with a motorcycle engine. Another returnee opened a sports bar that made a name for itself with satellite TV broadcasts of the World Cup, she said.

Emanuel Logooro, who returned to Southern Sudan nearly a year ago after four years at Kibbutz Eilot, said he was in the process of starting up a kibbutz back home.

“I want to contribute to my country, and a kibbutz would be a great contribution,” he said while visiting Israel. “My family said I could have some of their land – Sudan is a very, very big country, and they gave me enough land to start seven kibbutzim.”

“I got a bank loan to start building the facilities, and now I’m hoping to find about 40 families to join,” said Logooro, who came to Israel with his wife and is now back home with her and their three children.

Hedding noted that the repatriation from Israel is a drop in the ocean of some two million Southern Sudanese who’ve returned home in recent years, mainly from refugee camps in neighbouring African countries.

Some in Israel are still hesitant to return for fear that the fighting with the north will resume.

But for the most part, she said, the community here is gaining encouragement from the stories of Southern Sudanese who have made the trip back from Israel to their soon-to-be-independent homeland.

“Potentially”, Hedding said, “there are thousands more in Israel who will be joining them.”

Larry Derfner is a senior writer and columnist for The Jerusalem Post.

GETTING THE TRUTH OUT

Charmaine Hedding, (pictured), began spearheading efforts to train and repatriate Sudanese Refugees while on staff with the ICEJ. She now serves as Israel Director of ‘Operation Blessing’
This coming July 9th, South Sudan is slated to declare its independence and be welcomed into the family of nations. This new country is being born out of decades of conflict and suffering, as the Christians and animists of the south have been brutalized by the Islamist regime in Khartoum. Roughly two million south Sudanese have died as a result of war, famine and disease, while another four million were displaced.

Many of these refugees are now streaming back home, some with newly acquired skills and a keen desire to help build their new nation. There are still hurdles to overcome, as the South Sudanese Authority must negotiate with its former masters over their common border and a sharing of the land’s rich oil resources.

But South Sudan’s recent referendum on independence was an inspiring exercise in democracy and a ringing endorsement of freedom, as nearly 100% of the populace voted for seceding from the north. Its impact on nearby countries has been widely overlooked, as just a few months later peoples throughout the Middle East erupted in an unprecedented wave of longing for liberty from tyrants and for political reforms.

Yet what a disappointing moment it will undoubtedly be for Palestinians to witness the poor and battered people of South Sudan celebrating their independence and especially their release from the cruel hand of dictator Omar al-Bashir, now a fugitive war criminal. To hear the Palestinians tell it, they too have suffered from a ruthless oppressor called the “Israeli occupation” and are no less deserving of nationhood.

Actually, there have been many peoples celebrating their newfound sovereignty ever since the PLO was formed and laid claim to statehood in 1964. No less than 73 nations have been admitted as new members of the United Nations since the 1967 Six Day War. Some were freed from Soviet dominance, others emerged from colonial rule by Western powers, while still others arose out of bitter ethnic conflicts and civil wars. Yet all are now full-fledged members of the fraternity of nations.

“A Problem Pregnancy
Despite the world’s best efforts, Palestinian statehood remains stillborn

By David Parsons

“With so many new nations on earth, why are the Palestinians still on the outside looking in? Is history simply passing them by?”
So why, it must be asked, are the Palestinians still on the outside looking in? Is history simply passing them by?

The answer is that the effort to birth a Palestinian state has always been a problem pregnancy for the entire world. The state of Palestine was still-born in the wake of the 1947 Partition Plan, and again with the PLO’s Algiers declaration of 1988. Even with broad international backing and Israel’s most accommodating offers, it failed to gestate again at Camp David in 2000 and at the end of the Annapolis process in late 2008.

And the reason for this is that the Palestinian nationalist movement has always been motivated more by a need to destroy the Zionist enterprise, rather than focusing on building a state of its own. The international community has been trying to hand the Palestinians a state for decades, but they have refused if it means the conflict is over and Israel remains intact.

Palestinian Authority leaders Mahmoud Abbas and Salaam Fayyad contend they have now corrected course and concentrated on developing the institutions of modern statehood in time for a September coming-out party at the UN. Yet at the same time, they have promoted a global campaign to delegitimize Israel, encouraging boycotts and sanctions against her abroad while feeding anti-Israel incitement at home.

Both PA leaders also have refused to consider any compromise on the right of return, which continues to be a thinly-veiled formula for Israel’s destruction. Finally, Abbas has also decided to re-engage with Hamas for the sake of national unity, a path that inevitably leads away from statehood.

Nevertheless, much of the international community is prepared to ignore these self-defeating actions and press ahead towards Palestinian statehood, despite the heightened risks for Israel of a region in rudder-less turmoil. There is even increased talk among European officials of an imposed solution.

So we can only expect more wrenching labour pains ahead in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which are looking ever more like the Bible’s depictions of the birth pangs of the Messiah.
“From the beginning, it was the plan that the pool would be available for handicapped children from all over Israel,” said Zvi Givati, a former ICEJ liaison who initiated the project. In the afternoons, adults also are allowed to use the swimming pool in case they need hydrotherapy for back ailments and other mobility problems, he noted.

“This pool is unique in Israel and maybe unique also worldwide,” said Osnat Tov, director of the swimming pool. What is so special is that the pool is equipped with ropes and bars stretched over its basin and on the sides extending down into the water. This makes it possible for handicapped people to move freely, she explained, adding that the Israeli army is also now interested in using this special design for its work in the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers.

“It is wonderful and very touching to see the children able to move and enjoy themselves in this way,” said ICEJ International Director Jürgen Bühler during the visit to the pool facility. “We want to continue supporting this important project also in the future.”

“Thank you! Your help is very, very important to our children,” responded Tzachlach on behalf of the school.

Asked how the ICEJ can continue to help the school, she noted that they are in need of special stainless steel wheelchairs for handicapped children and adults that would allow them to take showers by themselves, as well as non-slip carpets for the swimming pool area.

Meantime, Ashkelon is located only ten kilometers north of the Gaza Strip and thus faces the added harsh reality of repeated rocket attacks launched by Palestinian terror militias.

Recently, a Kassam rocket hit the town not far from the Oranim School. The school’s ‘sensory room’, where the special-needs children normally go to have their senses stimulated in a relaxed atmosphere, has been turned into a temporary bomb shelter and thus cannot be used to its fullest. So the school also needs separate secured rooms to protect the children during the persistent rocket barrages from Gaza.

‘Feels like walking’

Staff at the Oranim School in Ashkelon help Tali (Cover) & Dascha (above) find a new kind of freedom from disability in the ICEJ-funded therapeutic swimming pool (ICEJ AID).

Support our efforts to fund this and other projects to assist the handicapped in Israel. Make an online donation today!

www.icejusa.org/aid