PM NETANYAHU VISITS CHRISTIAN EMBASSY

HISTORIC ETHIOPIAN ALIYAH
The Rescue Mission of Ethiopian Jewry Continues!
Dear Friends,

This past year was very eventful. As a family we literally went through the valley of the shadow of death when I faced a health challenge that, according to the doctors, gave me little hope for survival. But, thanks be to God, the doctor’s word was not the final word with our Lord. Jesus restored me, for which we are deeply grateful as a family. But, we are also grateful for the prayers of countless people around the world who stood with us in this challenging time. God answered our prayers!

In 2016 God allowed us to be at the forefront of the latest wave of renewed Aliyah from Ethiopia. Many of you were standing with us in prayer and financially. Thank you so much! We also had another blessed Feast of Tabernacles this past year. I will never forget the Holocaust survivors dancing and singing in the Pais Arena on Israeli Guest Night. And, the year ended with a surprise visit to the ICEJ by Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to record his annual Christmas greeting to the Christian world from our headquarters.

There is much more for which we are thankful to God, as He has proved to be faithful beyond our expectations! At the same time, the year ended with another major assault on Israel via a very biased and one-sided resolution from the United Nations Security Council. While the election of Donald Trump as US president gives much hope for many Israelis, they also recognize that the pressure against them from Europe is becoming more intense. Israel needs our support in 2017, and our prayers, more than ever before.

Thank you for standing with us over the past year, and please continue to do so in this new year! I pray that the Lord will bless you mightily in 2017 and that it will be a year of blessing and new things from the Lord!

Yours in Christ,

Dr. Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ Executive Director

COVER PHOTO:
PM Netanyahu’s visit to the ICEJ.

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In the new year of 2017, we will pass several important milestones for Christians who support Israel. For instance, it has been 500 years since the start of the Protestant Reformation in October 1517, when Christians could read the Bible in their common languages once again and rediscovered that God still had plans for the Jewish people back in their ancient homeland. Meanwhile, it has been 100 years since the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 committed Great Britain to establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. Finally, we will mark fifty years since the city of Jerusalem was reunified under Israeli rule during the Six-Day War of June 1967.

The anniversary of Balfour is especially significant for the state of Israel and her Christian friends. The Balfour Declaration, issued on the 2nd of November 1917, is a key document in modern Israel’s legal chain of title to the land. From this decree by the British cabinet flowed a series of international decisions to restore the Jewish nation, including the San Remo Conference of 1920, the League of Nation’s mandate over Palestine in 1922, the UN Partition Plan of 1947, Israel’s own Declaration of Independence in May 1948, and Israel’s admittance into the United Nations one year later.

The Balfour Declaration was the crowning achievement of the “Restorationist” movement in Great Britain. As early as the 1700s, leading Christian figures in England had advocated for a return of the Jews to the Land of Israel according to the divine promises of Scripture. This movement featured such noted clergymen as Charles and John Wesley, Charles H. Spurgeon, and Bishop Ryle of Liverpool, as well as prominent government leaders like William Wilberforce, Lord Palmerston and Lord Shaftesbury. As a result of their preaching and activism, Restorationism had already become the prevailing view even within the Anglican Church by the time the Jewish Zionist movement was launched by Theodor Herzl in 1897.

When it became clear during World War I that Britain and its allies would be able to free the Middle East from
Ottoman rule, the government of David Lloyd George recognized it as an historic moment to assist the Jewish Zionists in regaining their homeland. Six of the nine members of his war cabinet, including Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, were openly professing Christian Zionists and they seized the opportunity to issue the modern equivalent of the ancient decree by King Cyrus for Jews to return and rebuild their nation. Because of this solemn commitment, which came to be known as the Balfour Declaration, Britain was granted a mandate to help create a Jewish nation in the liberated province of Palestine.

The Balfour Declaration was the crowning achievement of the “Restorationist” movement in Great Britain

So, we have much reason to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration this year. This coming November the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem will be sponsoring events and joining with Jewish and Christian friends to commemorate Balfour, including observances in London and Jerusalem.

Yet, not everyone will be hailing the centenary of the Balfour Declaration this year. In fact, Palestinian leaders will be using their internationally-funded PR machinery to assail this “criminal injustice” against their people. They are demanding that Britain apologize for Balfour and are even threatening to bring a lawsuit against the United Kingdom for all the damages caused to the Palestinians ever since. Yet, such moves would be untenable and even counterproductive. The reason is that these actions against Israel would actually undermine the claims to statehood of numerous Arab nations in the region.

Britain’s motivations behind the Balfour Declaration have always been a subject of debate. Some say it was meant to win Jewish favour during the war, or to repay Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann for his valuable contributions to the war effort. Others say it was a gesture of remorse for centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, or simply an act of British expansionism.

The truth is that Balfour was a valid and noble expression of Christian sympathy for a just cause. It also was part of a series of decisions made by the victorious powers during and after the war to create trusteeships in the Middle East and elsewhere as a way of nation-building and granting self-determination to the native peoples of liberated lands. So, Balfour actually is a pivotal marker for the closing of the age of colonialism, a self-imposed end by the Western nations themselves.

One of the architects of this mandate strategy was Jan Smuts, an avowed Christian Zionist. Until that time, the European powers would have just claimed the vacated Ottoman territories of the Middle East as part of their own empires. But Smuts and others felt it was time to let native peoples rule over their own lands and that the role of Western nations was just to assist them on the way to independence. This new approach was inspired in part by American president Woodrow Wilson and his fourteen points for spreading democracy and securing the peace in the post-war era. But, Smuts also described the mandate system as a “sacred trust” meant to free various lands and peoples from foreign rule.

Thus, Britain was granted a temporary mandate in Palestine and Iraq, while France was to oversee nation-building in Lebanon and Syria. In fact every Arab nation in the Middle East today can trace its legal claim to independence back to some of the same documents and decisions which created modern Israel. This was not a case of creating a Jewish state out of nothing. The Jews, like the Arabs, were viewed as indigenous to the region and thus entitled to reconstitute their ancient nation. So, to undermine Israel’s legal chain of title by assailing the Balfour Declaration would also call into question the claims to sovereignty of all its surrounding Arab neighbors. That is not something the Palestinians should really be pursuing.

The Balfour Declaration of 2nd of November 1917 was a letter signed by Lord Balfour which conveyed to British Jewish community leader Baron Walter Rothschild the cabinet’s decision to support the Zionist cause. It stated: “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and

will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu receives a gift of a silver dreidel from Dr. Jürgen Bühler of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem during a visit just ahead of the Christmas and Hanukkah holidays. (Photo: ICEJ/Emill Salman)

PM Netanyahu Visits Christian Embassy

Delivers Christmas & New Year’s Greeting from ICEJ Headquarters

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, paid a visit to the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem on December 21st to deliver his annual Christmas and New Year’s Greeting to the Christian world.
The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu contacted the ICEJ in regard to recording the traditional Christmas greeting on the grounds of our ministry. Before the filming the Prime Minister personally greeted a small gathering of Christian leaders at the ICEJ headquarters. Within ten days the video had received more than seven million views on Facebook alone and was also posted on Fox News and numerous other major news sites. In his greeting Netanyahu stated:

“To all of our Christian friends around the world, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! I send you these greetings from Jerusalem. I’m standing in the courtyard of this magnificent International Christian Embassy. I’m so proud of our relations with our Christian brothers and sisters. I wonder for many of you if you remember the experience you had when you first visited Israel, when you saw the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Via Dolorosa or the Sea of Galilee or Nazareth. I’m sure it moved you deeply. And it moves us deeply to have this bond with you because we all know that this land of Israel is the land of our common heritage. It changed the story of humanity, it changed civilization. What a magnificent heritage it is. Yet, we also know that it is under attack these days, that the forces of intolerance, of barbarism, that attack all religions attack Christians with particular vehemence. We stand with you and I’m proud of the fact that in Israel, this is the one place in the Middle East that the Christian community not only survives but thrives and it’s no accident. It’s because of our commitment to religious freedom; it’s because of our embrace of our heritage; it’s because of our embrace of our common future. So please come to Israel. Come and visit me, I’m waiting for you. It will be a great experience for you. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year.”

With Christmas falling on the same day as the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, ICEJ Executive Director Dr. Jürgen Bühler responded by wishing the Prime Minister a “Happy Hanukkah,” and giving him a silver Hanukkah dreidel as a gift.

“It was a great honor to host the Prime Minister at our Embassy headquarters and to receive his good holiday wishes for Christmas,” said Bühler. “We know his warm, sincere remarks were greatly appreciated by Christians in lands far and wide. It also was a thrill to respond with our own ‘Happy Hanukkah’ wishes for him, his family and all the Jewish people. This indeed was a season when both communities could celebrate the triumph of light over darkness. And this timely display of solidarity shows once more that Israel is a country where religious freedoms are not only safeguarded but even encouraged.”
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has been receiving wide coverage in the Israeli press over the past year, with the major media outlets reporting on the work and impact of the ICEJ every week in 2016.

This has included the main Hebrew daily newspapers Israel Ha’Yom, Yediot Aharonot, and Ma’ariv, the news sites Ynet, Walla News, NRG, Globes, and Arutz Sheva, as well as the popular national radio channels Reshet Bet and Galgalatz. Taken all together, this means hundreds of thousands of Israelis are reading and hearing stories every month about how Christian love for Israel is touching lives and caring for families throughout the country, while also defending their nation and its just cause worldwide. In response we are regularly contacted by ordinary Israelis who thank Christians like you for your constant support and friendship.

Last summer Israeli media reported on the ICEJ’s gathering of national directors in South Africa and the release of the “Cape Town Declaration” denouncing the BDS movement and the “Israel = Apartheid” analogy. The ICEJ also received extensive coverage for sponsoring the renewed Aliyah flights for Ethiopian Jews still waiting to reunite with families in Israel. The reports stressed the Embassy’s long history of cooperation with the Jewish Agency and the humanitarian nature of the revived Ethiopian Aliyah.

Next came a wave of reporting on the ICEJ’s criticism of UNESCO over its resolution erasing any Jewish or Christian historic links to the Temple Mount and other biblical sites in Israel. As a result, for many Israelis and Jews living abroad, the ICEJ has become one of the most important Christian voices in the current battle to defend our shared bonds to the holy places in the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ’s Feast of Tabernacles celebration in October also was featured in many Israeli news outlets. The participation of over 5,000 Christians from nearly 100 nations in the annual Jerusalem March received special attention from the Hebrew press in light of the recent UNESCO votes and was presented as proof that Israel has friends all over the world who stand with the ancient Jewish connection to Jerusalem.

In addition the ICEJ and the Feast were well covered in the Anglo-Jewish and Christian press over recent months, with a number of positive feature stories in The Jerusalem Post, Times of Israel, CBN News, and other outlets. This included broad coverage of the ICEJ’s sponsorship of the renewed Ethiopian Aliyah, the ICEJ response to UNESCO, and the Feast events. The Jerusalem Post even published a main editorial welcoming the Feast pilgrims and citing them as a sign Israel is not alone in its struggle for acceptance in the world. There also were several reports about Israel’s new inroads in restoring diplomatic ties and trade with Africa and the ICEJ’s unique role in encouraging this rapprochement.

By David Parsons
Over recent months Christians from around the world have responded to an ICEJ initiative by sending thousands of Bibles to UNESCO to protest its recent passage of a resolution which seemingly erased any Jewish or Christian connection to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

In what has become an annual ritual, the United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Committee (UNESCO) passed a resolution in October on “Occupied Palestine” which, among other things, charged Israel with endangering and hindering access to religious sites in the Holy Land. For the second year in a row, any references to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem used only the Muslim names for the site, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram al-Sharif, while intentionally omitting the Jewish and Christian names for the same place – Har Habayit and Temple Mount. This was seen by many as a deliberate move by the Arab and Islamic states to erase the historic Jewish and Christian links to the Jewish temples which once stood there, while also raising concerns that other revered biblical sites in the Land of Israel could become “Islamicized” as well.

The UNESCO resolution was adopted right when the ICEJ was hosting thousands of Christians at its annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem in mid-October. As the Feast was concluding, ICEJ Executive Director Dr. Jürgen Bühler issued a challenge to Christians worldwide to send Bibles to UNESCO representatives in Paris in order to impress upon them the deep historical and spiritual connections which Christians and Jews have to these holy places in Jerusalem and throughout the Land of Israel.

Since then thousands of Christians have responded to this challenge by mailing Bibles to UNESCO, many of them with references to Jerusalem and other holy places highlighted. Sources at UNESCO have confirmed to the ICEJ that various officials at the international body have been inundated with Bibles and do not know what to do with them all. UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, alone, has received close to 500 Bibles along with over 50,000 emails protesting the seriously flawed anti-Israel resolution.

Though not a voting member, Bokova had expressed her own opposition to the resolution at the time of the vote, a position which drew angry reactions and even death threats from Islamist elements. She recently acknowledged that the Bibles and protest letters coming from Christians and Jews will help strengthen those within UNESCO who support a more balanced stand that affirms the irrefutable Judeo-Christian heritage in Jerusalem and throughout the Land.
Our heart for Israel manifests not only through faithful works of service and generous giving, but also through persistent prayers. The Lord invites us to partner with Him in bringing His Kingdom to earth, as we pray for His will to be done. When we remind God of His great promises for the people and land of Israel delivered through the Hebrew prophets, He assures us that He is watching over His word to perform it (Jeremiah 1:11-12 NASB).

For the past six years the ICEJ has been connecting intercessors around the world, through the Isaiah 62 Prayer Initiative, to pray that God's purposes for Israel will come to pass. We are receiving encouraging reports of God's power touching lives through this great prayer movement in the nations.

Edith, an ICEJ supporter from Nairobi, Kenya, was excited to learn of the Isaiah 62 prayer campaign because she wanted to support Israel but did not know where to begin. “I realized it was something I could easily do,” she recently told us. “Sometimes you have money, sometimes you don’t have money. And prayer? You can do that every day!”

She urged everyone to read chapter 62 of Isaiah and pray in line with its message. “I think it’s very much on the heart of God to pray for His city. The Bible says over and over again that in Jerusalem, God has put His name forever. So we can’t just forget about it and go on with our lives as if that didn’t matter. If God says it is His city, we need to be interested in what is happening to her.”

Meanwhile in Europe, Isaiah 62 prayer meetings have drawn an unexpected group of people. An Israel prayer group in Stuttgart, Germany was joined by dozens of Iranian refugees who recently converted to Christianity. Repenting for the sins of their government and nation, they intercede passionately for Israel. As German and Iranian believers worship in both the Farsi and German languages, their prayers for Israel have created a real sense of unity.

“When it comes to prayer, you can never go wrong with praying for people,” Edith reminds us. “It is God’s will that all men will be saved. And as Isaiah says, do not give Him rest until He makes Jerusalem a praise!”

Join the Isaiah 62 global prayer movement and pray with us on the first Wednesday of every month! Sign up at www.icejusa.org/isaiah62
A popular mountain peak frequented by tourists in Israel is Mount Bental in the Golan Heights. From the top of this mountain, one can see into Lebanon to the northwest and into Syria to the east bringing home just how small Israel is and how close are her enemies: Hezbollah in South Lebanon, ISIS and other jihadist groups in Syria, not to mention the Syrian Assad regime.

Looking down into Syria, one can see a modern highway built in the general vicinity of one of the ancient roads leading into Damascus. The conversion of Saul in Acts 9 took place on just such a road, so this is a great place to review that story and act upon its lesson. Saul was an enemy of the believers in Jesus and had the authority of the High Priest in Jerusalem to capture and bring them bound to Jerusalem.

The believers in Damascus were terrified and must have prayed much for Saul, because the next part of the story is nothing short of a miracle. Jesus appears to Saul before he even reaches the city and causes him to lose his sight. Ananias is then told to find Saul, lay hands on him, and pray for him to receive the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Saul spends the rest of his life as: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1).

Praying for Our Enemy
The lesson from this story is to pray for everyone – even one’s enemies who are bent on doing harm. Today, there is a great spiritual battle brewing over the region, and the same forces that want to destroy Israel and Christian communities are killing each other in the quest for control. Mount Bental is the perfect place from which to intercede for all the people caught up in this turmoil.

The Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, was predominantly Christian before the Islamic forces invaded in the 7th century. A thousand years ago, there were more Christians in the Middle East than in Europe. Even a century ago, more than 20% of the region’s population was Christian.

Today, estimates put the Christian population in the region at less than 5% and likely to become extinct. The second largest Christian community in the Middle East, after the Copts of Egypt, is the Syriac/Assyrian Christians from Iraq, Syria and surrounding areas. They are now displaced, many are refugees, and will never regain their community’s size and strength.

Hearts should break over the human toll and suffering this conflict has and could still potentially cause. All the peoples of the Middle East—Jew, Christian, and Muslim—are, in one way or another, victims of the spiritual stronghold over the region that causes hatred, violence, and death.

There needs to be much prayer for the protection of Israel and the Christians, but also for the gospel to go forth throughout the region in even greater ways than it is already. Indications are that the region is more open to the gospel than ever before. Throughout the Muslim world, Jesus is appearing to people in dreams and visions, and they are turning to Him. What began as a small trickle in the early 1980s has mushroomed to now millions of Muslims who have turned to Christ.

God Chose Israel for Blessing
God loves all the peoples of the Middle East as they are part of the world He loves and for whom He sent His son to die (John 3:16). This is just as true for the Arabs, or Muslims, as it is for anyone else.

God’s choice of Israel was not to bless the Jewish people to the exclusion of others, but that through them He would “bless all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). In fact, it is because of God’s love for the world that He brought into existence the nation of Israel through whom He would bring about His redemptive plan.

Millions of people are caught in the crossfire of the forces of evil that hate God, His plan, and His people. Let’s pray for them. A “Damascus Road” revelation of the Prince of Peace is their only hope.

Susan M. Michael is US Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem www.icejusa.org and her articles can be found at www.icejusa.org/susans-blog. For information on the ICEJ’s tours to Israel go to www.icejusa.org/tours
The rescue mission of Ethiopian Jewry continues!

By Estera Wieja

The first group of 63 ICEJ-sponsored Ethiopian immigrants came to Israel last October on the same day the Ethiopian Government ordered a “State of Emergency,” which restricted diplomatic travel and reduced mobile internet access. We are calling on your help to join the ICEJ in rescuing the last of the Ethiopian Jewry waiting to come to Israel!

On November 9th the Government of Ethiopia lifted some of the travel restrictions after months of violent protests. This allowed Aliyah workers to once again travel to the Gondar region of Ethiopia to resume preparation for members of the Jewish community there who have already been approved for Aliyah.

The office remained closed at the time, but the workers were helping the people to start on their journey. First they have to take a van or bus to Addis Ababa over 350 miles away, and from there they need a flight to Israel to be arranged.

In November more ICEJ-sponsored Ethiopian families arrived in Israel, increasing the number of Ethiopian ‘olim’ to 84 arriving this past year.

Today, despite all the many difficulties posed by the security situation, the Jewish Agency has reopened their offices in Gondar. There are still many challenges to the whole process of Aliyah, but the Government of Israel is committed to its decision to bring 1,300 olim by the end of 2017. The ICEJ is also dedicated to sponsor and care for the Ethiopian Jews after they arrive in Israel.

As Christians we are devoted, first and foremost, to the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah said foreigners will bring Jewish sons and daughters
back to their land. We want to be a part of this prophecy’s fulfillment! The Christian Embassy in Jerusalem wants to walk with Ethiopian Jewry as they come back to Israel and make this land their home. Their absorption process into the land of Israel lasts up to two years or more.

Currently an administrative bottleneck is blocking the progress of Aliyah from Ethiopia. Please pray that God’s angels would open all the right doors and quicken the arrival of these Jews in Israel.

U.N. REPORT ON THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

“Drought exacerbated by El Niño, combined with extensive flooding, disease outbreaks and the disruption of basic public services, continue to have a negative impact on the lives and livelihoods of 9.7 million Ethiopians. Urgent funding gaps for the response remain across multiple sectors to the end of 2016, notably for response to Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD), and for interventions in animal health and food assistance. Major funding requirements are already anticipated for early 2017, as there are concerning indications that the La Niña phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean, and more significantly the current negative Indian Ocean Dipole, may affect water availability, livestock body condition and Meher harvest performance in parts of southern and eastern Ethiopia.”

Donate Online

You can play a major part in this historic and urgent wave of Ethiopian Aliyah! Support the work of the ICEJ today by giving your best gift to ICEJ Aliyah: www.icejusa.org/ethiopia
ICEJ has been working in Ukraine since the civil war broke out in April of 2014 and has helped bring more than 1,000 Ukrainian Jews home to Israel. One of the programs through which we do this is the Sela program which helps single young adults who move to Israel without their parents. Often these young people are sent ahead by their parents to get them out of harm’s way in Eastern Ukraine. This program enables them to study Hebrew, receive housing and support, and prepares them to attend an Israeli university.

Oksana and Vycheslav Zolodyv had long been dreaming of moving to Israel, where they could live more openly as Jews than they could in Luhansk, Ukraine. When their daughter Aleksandrina turned 18, they sent her ahead to Israel thanks to the Sela program.

Howard Flower, ICEJ Aliyah Director based in St. Petersburg, had known Irina for 23 years. When her mother was diagnosed with cancer, they decided that the family should make Aliyah so she could get treatment in Israel because of the worsening conditions in Russia with food and medicine scarcity. They all made Aliyah together this year with the help of ICEJ.

Thank you for writing, we are fine! Mom was examined now we are waiting for her to be assigned treatment with the oncologist, and it also turned out that my papa has an urgent need to do surgery on the eye, so our departure was very timely. Initially, we are living in the city of Ramla. The city is not expensive and there is enough money to rent an apartment and for food. I have already grown accustomed to the local rhythm and life. We are all learning at the ulpan studying the language. They accepted me for an intensive course at Ulpan Etzion. Time is going so quickly, we are here for almost 3 months, but it seems like it’s been more than a year. As a whole, we have already settled in and feel at home and even drive to other places and my parents go to doctors themselves, we can say a little in Hebrew. Susanochka, I am very grateful to you and Howard and Maya for help in departure.... At first it was not easy ... everything was foreign ... Now the opposite is true, it’s as if we have lived here a long time and everything is native....

A few months later, Lugansk was heavily bombed and riddled with ground battles. Electricity, water, and phone services were often non-existent, most people stopped receiving their salaries, and the schools and police stopped functioning. Oksana, Vycheslav, and their son Artur, 15, spent two months hiding in their basement. They slept in potato crates and subsisted on potatoes, onions, and barley. Vycheslav

NEW OLM (immigrants to Israel)

Sela Program for Single Young Ukrainian Jews

Irina in our office filling out the application.

Zolodyv family reunion with Aleksandrina.
periodically emerged to search for food, or for batteries so Artur could read and continue his studies.

The Jewish Agency reached out to the Zolodyvs and urged them to escape to Kharkov, where The Agency would be waiting for them with aid. With this assurance of help, the Zolodyvs ran for their lives. They took a few possessions and made the difficult drive to Kharkov, stopped along the way at 10 checkpoints – sometimes by Ukrainian forces, sometimes by insurgents.

Once in Israel they were reunited with their daughter.

Today Artur is in the Na’aleh program, studying at a technological high school. “What he gets today is beyond his expectations. Aleksandrina has completed Selah and moved on to a Jewish Agency program: Garin Tzabar, which helps prepare young immigrants to become soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces. “We’re so proud that our daughter is soon going to serve in the IDF,” Oksana said. “After everything we received, we are thrilled to be able to give something back.”

ICEJ Aliyah through Finland

Elena Konshkova, a 39-year-old mother, and her twin daughters—Olga and Alina—10 years old, made Aliyah through Finland this winter with the support of ICEJ. Since the economic crisis began in Russia 2 years ago, the number of people making Aliyah through Finland has more than doubled. The Konshkova family left St. Petersburg, in January, on a bus that took them to the home of a host Finnish family where they stayed for the weekend and then flew on to Israel. After they arrived in Israel they wrote us this very thoughtful thank you letter.

I am writing to say that we had a good trip, have successfully and happily settled in, for the day and a half that we have been in the country we have already arranged business with the bank, clinic, school and so on. I want to thank you once again for the days spent in Finland, we were greeted magnificently, and enjoyed such comfortable conditions, about which we could not even dream. Many thanks to the hosts; they are very good-natured, friendly, bright and hospitable people. They carry out a good mission, which makes the process of emigration pleasurable. Pass on to them a big hello from us, a great big thank you, may the Lord keep them.

My apologies if we've created some discomfort. I am sending you some pictures.

With respect and once again thank you very much.

Elena, Olga and Alina

In June ICEJ International Director Juha Ketola participated in a graduation ceremony where Sela students received their Israel ID cards. Soon they would be ready to enter universities or pursue other careers.
ICEJ unites Ivory Coast churches for Israel

Dr. Maiga Abdou, the ICEJ’s special representative for West Africa, paid a visit to the Ivory Coast in December to meet with the main leaders of the Protestant and Evangelical churches and unify them for more effective activities in support of Israel.

The top denominational leaders in Ivory Coast have formed a Consistory to promote unity and dialogue in the Body of Christ. Some of its members who met with Dr. Abdou in the capital of Abidjan included Rev. Gboagnon Appolinaire, Apostle Bouabre Janvier, Apostle Kpangui Bernard, and Rev. Zeze Raphael. They discussed ways to increase the ICEJ’s reach in their country and to grow the delegation of pilgrims from the Ivory Coast attending the Feast of Tabernacles each year.

As new leaders take on the ICEJ’s work in the Ivory Coast, they expect to see a wider embrace of the ICEJ’s vision of supporting Israel while also spreading the Gospel in the nations. The hope is that the churches of Ivory Coast will realize how important it is to invest in acts of compassion and support for the Jewish people, and in prayer for Israel. The recent meetings will undoubtedly give the ICEJ a broader platform to mobilize greater spiritual and political support for Israel in the Ivory Coast.

ICEJ-Liberia hosts Envision pastors conference

The new ICEJ national branch in Liberia recently held its own version of the ‘Envision Pastors’ Conference’ hosted annually by our Embassy headquarters in Jerusalem. The event was considered an absolute breakthrough in connecting the main Evangelical churches of Liberia with Israel.

Organized by ICEJ-Liberia National Director, Rev. J. Aaron Wright, Sr., the Envision Conference took place in December at the Holy Deliverance Church of God in Monrovia, and drew pastors from 50 different churches all across Liberia. Held under the theme “Bless, Comfort, and Support Israel to be Blessed and Prosperous,” the event was a unique opportunity for Liberian church leaders to interact and gain a fuller understanding of the importance of the restoration of Israel in our day. Participants also discussed the relationship between Israel and Liberia today, compared to what it was before the 14-year Liberian civil war.

The conference agenda also included meetings with Liberian government officials, including Vice President, Joseph N. Boakai, who pledged his full support for the ICEJ’s vision, mission, and mandate for Israel. Another meeting was held with MP Julius F. Berrian, who declared himself the “ICEJ Man” within the Liberian parliament. ICEJ-Liberia is now seeking to approach every Christian member of Parliament to become an ambassador for the ICEJ.

Rev. J. Aaron Wright, ICEJ-Liberia National Director (left) with Rev. Williams at the Envision Conference in Liberia.
ICEJ reaches Kazakhstan with message of hope and reconciliation

By Serguei Popov

The Republic of Kazakhstan, a transcontinental country bridging Central Asia and Eastern Europe, is the world’s largest “landlocked country” and is the ninth largest country in the world.

Sharing borders with Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, the country is dominated by Islam, with more than 70% of the population identifying as Muslims. However, it is still a home to several thousand Jews and traditional Christians (predominantly Russian Orthodox) who make up 25% of the population.

The ICEJ decided to reach out to the local Evangelical churches in Kazakhstan to bring a better understanding of Scripture and God’s plans for Israel. At the same time, we made contact with the remaining Jewish communities in the country to show our support to the Jewish people.

After very fruitful meetings with ten of the most influential pastors in Kazakhstan, Pastor Pavel Kuptsov was appointed as a representative of the ICEJ in northern Kazakhstan.

“It is a great privilege to be an ICEJ representative in our country and our region,” said Pastor Kuptsov after the meetings. “Our church is one of the biggest in our region. We have approximately over 500 members, including our branch churches in different cities in Kazakhstan. Our church loves and supports Israel, so we are hoping to have a group from Kazakhstan at the Feast 2017.”

We need your prayerful support for the work of the ICEJ in Kazakhstan during this unstable time in Middle Asia. Also, consider partnering with us and support the international work of the ICEJ by visiting: www.icejusa.org/international

Christians attend Leadership Seminar on the Holocaust at Yad Vashem

Christina Elisabeth Leinum,
ICEJ-Denmark National Director

The 10-day Christian Leadership Seminar at Yad Vashem at the end of November 2016, generously supported by the ICEJ and the Museum of the Bible, was attended by 26 Christian leaders from 9 different countries. One of the countries, Spain, was represented at the seminar for the first time since the program was launched.

It was an honor for us, as Christians, to partake in this high-level program, where different perspectives concerning the horrific events of World War II were presented. Scholars, expert in the fields of history, politics, music, and literature, introduced us to the different parts of Jewish life in the ghettos as well as in the death camps. A very precious moment for us was meeting Holocaust survivors, Mr. Nachum and Mrs. Genya Manor. They met and fell in love in the Schindler Factory, where their lives were saved. Their long relationship with Oscar Schindler continued even when they moved to Israel, where he visited them frequently until his passing.

I encourage every Christian leader to take this opportunity to learn and grow in our relationship with Israel. By attending the seminar, we can show the Jewish people that as Christians we acknowledge their suffering and take a stand that many of our predecessors didn’t: the stand against any and every expression of anti-Semitism today.
Settlements are not the Major Obstacle to Peace

While settlements can be a source of conflict, they are not the major obstacle to peace. From 1948-1967 no Israeli settlements existed, yet the Palestinian leadership and the Arab World still sought Israel's annihilation.

As a result of the resounding Israeli victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel gained the “West Bank,” “Gaza,” “Golan Heights,” and “East Jerusalem.” Less than a week after the war ended, the Israeli unity government under PM Levi Eshkol affirmed—and then told the Americans—that Israel would return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and the Golan Heights to Syria in return for signed peace treaties. Separate negotiations would then be conducted regarding the future of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the refugee issue. While Egypt accepted the Sinai offer, Syria rejected the Golan Heights offer. Negotiations over the West Bank and Gaza failed.

Settlements do not Jeopardize Future “Land for Peace” Deals

In the meantime some Israelis took up residence in areas around Jerusalem that were across the 1967 armistice lines. These Israeli developments, known as “Settlements,” only take up around 2% of West Bank land. Over time, US Administrations recognized that Israel would retain some of these towns in any peace agreement.

Israel has uprooted other settlements such as those in the Gaza Strip. In 2005 Israel evacuated all the Jewish families living in Gaza—a total population of 8,000. However, instead of making peace, Hamas—a terrorist organization—took over the Gaza Strip and responded by firing thousands of rockets at Israeli cities in the ensuing years.

The Israeli Government is not Building New Settlements

For years, the only legal construction allowed by the Israeli government has been within existing communities to accommodate the natural growth of resident families. Illegal outposts, which do not conform to Israel's policies, do exist. Some critics fault the Israeli government for not dealing with them more forcefully, but the government works to resolve the issue peacefully or by court order.

Israeli Settlements may not be Illegal at All

Many legal scholars question whether Settlements are illegal at all. Eugene V. Rostow, one of the authors of UN Security Council Resolution 242—written after the 1967 War to create a framework for peace negotiations—stated, "The Jewish right of settlement in Palestine west of the Jordan River, that is, in Israel, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, was made unassailable. That right has never been terminated and cannot be terminated except by a recognized peace between Israel and its neighbors." Moreover, Rostow contended that “The Jewish right of settlement in the area is equivalent in every way to the right of the existing Palestinian population to live there.”

Others contend that the Geneva Convention, passed after WWII, makes the Settlements illegal. The December 2016 UN Security Council Resolution 2334 Vote—passed due to the US government's abstention—declared them illegal and opened the door to future international actions against Israel.

Palestinians are Building Illegally around Jerusalem

All of the governments and international bodies that criticize Israel for building what many claim to be legal communities are silent about the construction of new Palestinian developments surrounding Jerusalem. According to a detailed article by Bassam Tawil of the Gatestone Institute, the questionable construction is primarily in Zone-C, which under the Oslo Peace Accords should be territory controlled by Israel. According to Tawil, Palestinians estimate that in the past few years they have built more than 15,000 illegal housing units in areas surrounding Jerusalem as part of a plan to encircle the city. These are not single family homes, but massive apartment complexes without proper licenses, not built to code, and some without proper sewage. The article claims that many of the “contractors” are land-thieves and thugs who are building without permission on private Palestinian-owned land or on lands whose owners are living abroad.

The Major Obstacle to Peace is Palestinian Leadership

The Palestinian leadership’s refusal to give up the conflict, recognize Israel as a Jewish State, and renounce the “right of return” for most Palestinian refugees, is the real obstacle to peace. The so-called “right of return” would allow millions of descendants of Palestinian refugees to flood Israel. No Israeli leader would ever accept the “right of return,” since it would mean the end of the world’s only Jewish state. Yet, the Palestinian leadership has never told its own people that they must forfeit this claim in order to achieve peace.

Susan M. Michael is US Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem www.icejusa.org and her articles can be found at www.icejusa.org/susans-blog and www.israelanswers.com/blog
THE TRUTH about ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

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