WORD FROM JERUSALEM

NO TIME TO LOSE

SYRIA UPDATE
ICEJ Brings Aid to Syrian Village
Dear Friends,

We are continuing to rejoice in miracles! Just a few days ago, we learned that President Trump announced the US Embassy in Jerusalem will open on May 14, 2018 ahead of schedule to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Israel declaring its independence. Facing global outcry and rejection from this decision to move the Embassy sooner than originally planned, Trump stated, “I had to do it. It’s the right thing to do.”

All this is happening in the midst of serious war drums in the north, but in spite of this, ICEJ continues to show Christian love to the people of Israel and the Middle East. We were thrilled to participate in several significant outreaches beyond the Jewish community in 2017.

Two recent outreaches were to the Syrian people—innocent men, women, and children caught in the crossfire of the Syrian civil war. The ICEJ was honored to partner with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to be able to provide baby formula to help feed infants across the border in war-torn Syrian villages.

And, we were able to help purchase a large amount of medical supplies to keep a medical team that travelled into Syria well supplied. We were proud to be able to help express the love of Jesus to these devastated people—who have lost everything—through medical care. Both of these stories are in this month’s *Word From Jerusalem*.

Also, with your help, we continue to be able to sponsor the establishment of bomb shelters in areas of Israel frequented by air raid sirens announcing rockets from Gaza. For this we are incredibly grateful.

Thank you for recognizing the ICEJ’s vital mission to assist and bless the people of Israel and keeping this cause in your hearts and prayers.

Many blessings from Jerusalem!

Jürgen Bührer
ICEJ President

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**FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**

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**COVER PHOTO:**
Shoshanna Kolmer, 98 years old, a resident of the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors

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Support our ministry online at: www.icejusa.org
4 OPERATION GOOD NEIGHBOR

5 LIGHT CAME INTO DARKNESS

8 NEW BOMB SHELTERS FOR ISRAEL

10 HAIFA HOME BUILDING PROJECT

18 HOW TO HELP PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
THE ICEJ is well-known for our support of Israel and the Jewish people—so much so that we sometimes are described as being anti-Arab. This is unfortunate and incorrect because the ICEJ continues to reach out to all the people of Israel and the Middle East with the love of Jesus. For instance, in 2017 we had several significant outreaches, which for security reasons, we could not speak about until now.

The IDF has now gone public with “Operation Good Neighbor,” the name given to the ongoing assistance Israel provides to the devastated communities in Syria near the border. We were approached with a request to assist this secret IDF-outreach to Syrian villagers near the border of Israel. The IDF specifically asked the ICEJ for baby formula to help feed the infants across the border in these villages.

Another outreach involved my wife, Debbie Denison, who is an intensive care nurse and trauma specialist. Together with a close friend, Dr. Sally Parsons, a trauma surgeon, Deb and Dr. Parsons traveled into Syria with a team of Christian medical workers. Thanks to a designated donation from ICEJ Taiwan, we participated directly in this outreach by helping purchase the vast amount of medical supplies needed to keep this team well-supplied and able to minister by providing medical care.

For seven weeks, the team showed the love of Jesus in a Syrian village, treating more than 1,000 individuals—including over 120 wounded from the war. Thirteen babies were delivered with six of them requiring extremely difficult caesarian surgeries. Had it not been for the C-section deliveries, many of the births would have resulted in death for the mother, baby, or both.

The ICEJ has given the remaining funds of the designated donation to help purchase medical supplies for a new team going into Syria to equip them to serve for more than four months in rough conditions of snow and isolation. Recently, a nearby town suffered an attack of 50-barrel bombs, including chemical munitions. “Casualties had clamped muscles, were barely breathing, had spasms, and smelled of chlorine,” reported the medical team.

Debbie and I counted the cost before she went in, and we said yes to the voice of our Lord, knowing the risks involved. When I saw my wife escorted through the border fence by IDF soldiers coming out of Syria, tears of joy and relief flowed forth.

Imagine: Jews helping Christians show love to Muslims in a nation that has been in a state of war with Israel since 1948. A short while ago, this was an unimaginable thought.

Since the beginning of the chaotic conflict in Syria, over 500,000 Syrians have died, and many more have fled as refugees. During this time, Israel has taken in more than 5,000 sick and injured Syrians—including women, children, and men—with major illnesses and war-caused injuries. Help us demonstrate Christian love and care to these Syrian villagers working in cooperation with Israel.

To offer your support go to: www.icejusa.org/Israel-good-neighbor
Saving Lives in Syria

The ICEJ is a hub and staging point for an impressive range of activities. One morning this fall, Debbie Denison, the wife of ICEJ’s VP of Operations Barry Denison, returned to the Embassy to share about seven intense weeks in a Syrian war zone. With tears in her eyes, she recounted the horrific situations her medical team endured to shine the light of Jesus in a place that had no understanding of Christianity.

With two doctors, two nurses, two medics, and one photographer, God used a simple group of people to bring the love and healing of Jesus into a small village under attack. Debbie stated, “We were just a rag-tag team of non-military and medical people with a passion for the Lord and a desire to make an impact. God doesn’t need an army, He just needs people who are willing to say, ‘Yes Lord, use me!’”

Debbie explained how she and her husband counted the cost. “I had to say, ‘Yes Lord. I love you enough to lay down my life to show your love to a people who do not know you!’” she said.

Debbie also expressed her deep gratitude for all of the prayers people had prayed for her and her team while they were in Syria: “It was the prayers of those who stood behind us that helped us navigate some really difficult waters.” Please continue to pray fervently for the many other servants of God that are willing to go into places of war and death to bring the peace and life of Jesus Christ!

Debbie Denison offers care for the needy in Syria. For seven weeks, the team showed the love of Jesus in a Syrian village, treating over 1,000 individuals.

Light Came Into Darkness

By Deborah Denison, Wife of ICEJ Vice President of Operations Barry Denison

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be His disciples—to follow after Him, and to increasingly grow more into His likeness, His character, and His nature. We are called to love as He loved, and lay down our lives for others even as he laid down His life for us. He gave His everything for us though we never deserved such extravagant love. Jesus’ last instructions to His disciples, before being taken up to the Father, were to go into all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Making disciples is the call and responsibility of every believer.

The church has taken the message of the Lordship of Jesus and His kingdom around the world and to every continent. Yet today, there remain nations without an active witness, with no source of light or hope—nations that live in complete spiritual blindness and deception. These places are so dark the church has lacked strategy or access to bring the message of hope and redemption. The Middle East—the first region to be touched by the gospel of the kingdom after the death of Jesus—is now a region shrouded in darkness with little to no witness.

How does the church engage these nations that are enveloped in the spirit of Islam and the blood of Jihad? What should the gospel look like to a people who have only known the slavery of their religion?
and the tremendous suffering and hatred it has brought? How can we bring the good news and the hope of the kingdom into these unreached nations?

**An Open Door into Syria**

Frontier Alliance International (FAI) is a cutting edge mission organization whose focus has been reaching many of the unreached people of the Middle East. Last year, an amazing door of service and cooperation opened up for them to work in partnership with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) pioneering a work within Syria to care for the Syrian people ravaged by the destruction and violence of civil war. While the Syrian government is a historic enemy of Israel and the Israeli people, the IDF established a program seven years ago, with the beginning of the Syrian civil war, to be a good neighbor and to help meet the needs of the forgotten people of Syria who live near the Israeli border.

By the IDF sending much needed food and supplies into Syria and bringing the sick into Israel to be cared for in Israeli hospitals, Israel hoped to tear down the walls of hatred and prejudice and create safe borders by being a “good neighbor.” One thing the IDF has been unable to do, however, has been to send Israelis into Syria to render aide—thus, the amazing partnership with FAI.

The IDF opened frontier borders to allow Christian medical teams sent by FAI into Syrian villages to render health care to meet the needs of huge populations of people that have been completely cut off from all assistance. These are forgotten people without hope.

I was amazingly privileged to have had the opportunity to be smuggled into Syria with a team of six others: Dr. Sally, a trauma surgeon and close friend; a physician for women and children; another nurse and myself (my background is trauma critical care); two medics; and a photographer. We were four Americans, two New Zealanders, and a Peruvian.

Local village leaders smuggled us into an area in active warfare. During the middle of the night, and under the cover of darkness, we traveled with a mule train of more than 15 mules and horses that carried the team and our medical supplies. It was a four-hour ride through the rugged mountain regions of the Syrian Golan.

Our team was hosted by people from a Syrian village who gave us a place to live and provided our daily meals. The basement of an abandoned school had been set up as a medical clinic that had at one time been used by Syrian doctors who had cared for the community. But they had long since fled the region due to the terrible violence and lack of safety. This was the beginning of our amazing and beautiful story.

We worked daily in the clinic providing care for the sick, the wounded, and the pregnant. We delivered 13 babies over the two months I was there. Dr. Sally performed six cesarean sections, something she had never been trained to do as a trauma surgeon. The C-sections were accomplished without the help of an anesthesiologist, and only under a Ketamine infusion into the vein. But the flip side of ushering in new life was treating trauma patients. We became a trauma center for the whole region and the casualties of the war were brought to us from far and wide.

There was no true way to measure the power of our presence among the people. As Christians in that place, we were not their enemies but became their brothers and sisters. Our love and mercy tore down walls of suspicion and distrust, and they in turn lavished us with their love as we served them. We celebrated new life with them; we grieved with them in their losses. We suffered hunger with them when the communities were under siege and nothing could get through. We sought refuge in bomb shelters with the people on a daily basis as we sought protection from bombing attacks and air raids.

We loved, laughed, ate, and cried together. We were Jesus’ hands and feet. While we saw no radical conversions during the time I was there, seeds were sown. Light penetrated the darkness. An army of heaven invaded an area of deep oppression. Powers and principalities were made witness to this small Gideon army empowered with the gift of love, mercy, and life to demonstrate the amazing hope that is offered to all men through Jesus. Come Holy Spirit and rain down life into the rugged mountain regions of the Syrian Golan.

Now that Russia and Iran have joined the war in favor of the regime, we have Russian jets and helicopters dropping bombs and Iranian ground troops as part of the invasion forces. They are making ground into the neighboring village and many men are laying down their lives to defend their lands. There are devastating consequences. It’s very stressful right now. We don’t know what the rest of the night holds. If these men are unable to hold their ground and these hills, this village is next.

The thought of how this town would have survived this day without us is unimaginable. Dr. Sally has been unbelievable! Everything has run around her. She directs the confusion and somehow unimaginable. Dr. Sally has been unbelievable! Everything has run around her. She directs the confusion and somehow somehow we have stabilized an army of men tonight.

Tonight we are one with these people. Tonight we grieve with them with each loss. Tonight we fight with them to preserve life. It's the most difficult thing I have ever done, by far, and I feel so honored that God allowed me to serve here. It has stretched me beyond imagination, but what an amazing place to be—totally dependent on Him for absolutely every breath I breathe. I will never be the same.
After almost seven years, Syria's fractious civil war seems to be winding down. Despite Israel's adversaries having expended much blood and treasure, the end of this war may provide them with an advantageous position to launch a lethal assault on the Jewish State.

The Assad regime has been preserved, thanks to Russia's military, economic, and diplomatic support, along with the enormous numbers of Shi'ite fighters from around the region that were mobilized, trained, armed, and transported to Syria by Iran. The most dangerous of these Shi'ite militias is the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah that fought an inadvertent 34-day war with Israel in 2006 and has been threatening to renew hostilities ever since.

Intelligence officials warn that because of the estimated 120,000 rockets Hezbollah has aimed at Israel, along with the battlefield experience it has gained by fighting in Syria, it is much more dangerous than it was in 2006. If Israel does not aggressively react to meet these threats in a future war, its home front will be subject to severe disruption and devastation. Moreover, Iran has used the war in Syria as a cover to move various military assets, Shi'ite militias, weapons manufacturing, and logistical equipment into Syria and Lebanon. These moves are part of its strategic ambition to establish a land corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea, which will enable Iran to menace Israel directly.

One ominous development has been the construction of an Iranian military base close to the Golan Heights. The IDF recently struck this base, but dealing with such threats now carries greater risks due to the proximity of Russian forces. One silver lining, however, is that much of the Sunni Arab world feels equally threatened by Iran's growing strategic reach, providing new opportunities for Israeli diplomacy.
ICEJ DONATES NEW BOMB SHELTER

Jonathan Dekel-Chen, the director of Bikurim Youth Village for the Performing Arts in Eshkol, Israel, recently wrote a letter expressing his gratefulness for ICEJ-sponsored bomb shelters:

“I returned home earlier this week and was thrilled to see the two new shelters in place in the courtyard adjacent to Bikurim’s dining room. As you may have heard—and may want to relay to your partners—these two shelters were profoundly important, especially a couple of weeks ago. The air raid sirens went off in the middle of the day throughout the Eshkol region due to a launch of a couple of rockets from Gaza. In that moment, our students were all in or near the dining room and ran immediately to the two new shelters. The Bikurim staff told me that the kids reacted really well to the sirens. Thank you for providing the new shelters, because our students were able to quickly feel safe despite the unnerving circumstances.”

Shabbat shalom,
Jonathan
HELP PROTECT ISRAELIS
WITH YOUR PRAYERS & GENEROUS SUPPORT

HELP US PURCHASE MORE BOMB SHELTERS FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

GIVE TO WWW.ICEJUSA.ORG/BOMBSHELTER
The Holocaust Survivors who live in our Haifa Home have found a place that brings healing to the wounds of their past. Some Survivors say their time living at the home has been the best of their lives.

When we launched the project in 2010, I wondered how it would all turn out. We were placing several traumatized people together under one roof, and the Survivors were still struggling with nightmares and flashbacks from the camps in Auschwitz or Theresienstadt, or from traumatic experiences during the Nazi occupation of Russia.

Today, each time I visit our Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors, I go there with expectation because the home has become a place of healing and joy! Each time I hear the residents singing and see them dancing I realize I am observing a miracle I never thought possible.

I am reminded of the prophecy from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, ... to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:1–3).

However, in its current state, our center is packed to capacity with a long waiting list. Therefore, the time has come to expand the home by adding an additional building that can host another 13 Holocaust Survivors.

We have found the property and we ask for your help for the purchase and the renovation of the new home. We have already received a very generous starting gift from our German branch, but $700,000 is still needed.

Please stand with us, for the time to bless these hurting people is running out. Every day their number dwindles, yet the home in Haifa is a great way to bless these Survivors in their last days. Make your donation today at www.icejusa.org/haifa_building

By Dr. Jürgen Bühler, ICEJ President

Through your giving, the ICEJ is bringing hope and comfort to the people of Israel in practical, life-changing ways. Thank you for being a faithful friend to the Jewish people and to the ICEJ!
NO TIME TO LOSE

Many Holocaust Survivors who were children and teenagers during World War II are now nearing the final season of their lives. This is our last chance to make a positive difference in lives that began in severe adversity and abject cruelty. We were not there for them at their desperate beginning, but we can give them our love and support now for a different ending. The ICEJ’s Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors is the living manifestation of this desire.

The growing number of aging Survivors means that we need to expand our care facility. To provide the best treatment possible and to keep our residents within the community of people they know and love, our aging Survivors need a separate building near the Haifa Home community.

We now have the opportunity to purchase and provide the operating costs for such a building. This building, following renovations, will become a home to 13 Survivors who require nursing care around the clock. There are already several residents in our Home that would greatly benefit from this new facility. We have no time to lose.
Holocaust Survivors at the Haifa Home could never have dreamed that they’d be so well cared for through the generous donations of Christians like you.

There is, however, a growing number of aging Survivors in need of care which means we urgently need to expand our care facility.

We now have the opportunity to purchase and renovate a building that will become home to 13 Survivors who require nursing care around the clock.

Here’s the goal (and the progress generous donors like you have helped us make thus far). ☝️

$0 $300,000 Goal: $1,000,000
0% 100%

A Haifa Home worker assists Yacov

SEND YOUR GIFT

Your support and prayers can make a difference!

The ICEJ is conscious of the privilege of supporting these Holocaust Survivors, and also that time is running out as thousands of Survivors pass away each year. Our involvement and responsibility to the Home is vital. Please consider joining us by sending in your gift today.

BY CREDIT CARD
Visit www.icejusa.org/haifa_building and click on the DONATE button!

BY CHECK
Send it to:
MSC 7505
ICEJ - USA, Inc.
PO Box 415000
Nashville, TN 37241-7505

In the event that the project funding target is fully met, excess funds will go toward other pressing needs within the Haifa Home project.
Shoshanna Kolmer was the daughter of a Jewish merchant family and lived a very good life in Mukatschewe (in present-day Ukraine). However, when the war broke out, Jews were placed under curfew and increasingly marginalized from society. In 1944, Shoshanna’s parents, sisters, and grandmother were sent to the ghetto in Mukatschewe. Meanwhile, Shoshanna managed to escape temporarily before being caught and deported to Auschwitz in March of 1944. Shoshanna endured unimaginable suffering and even survived the death marches as the German army retreated westward. She was liberated on May 2, 1945, by Soviet troops. She was in a terrible state and had lice, pneumonia, and typhoid. Amazingly, Shoshanna managed to immigrate to Israel and start a family of her own.

GOOD ENDINGS
In 2013, Shoshanna Kolmer moved into the Haifa Home, together with her mentally challenged son. She was so happy to have found a loving community that not only took care of her but also her son, whom she had looked after all her life. However, now at the age of 98, she herself needs full-time care. The ICEJ is proud and privileged over our pivotal role in Israel’s first care facility exclusively dedicated to Holocaust Survivors. We want to do our part and make sure that Jews will never again have reason to doubt Christian love and compassion for God’s people. Their end should in no way resemble their beginning.

Thanks to Christian support, Shoshanna’s physical and emotional needs are met at the ICEJ-sponsored Haifa Home. You can send your most generous gift to www.icejusa.org/Haifa
Throughout the world, January 27 marked International Holocaust Memorial Day, which is the date of the liberation of Auschwitz extermination camp 73 years ago. During a soccer game between Maccabi Haifa and Maccabi Petah Tikva, the players commemorated one of the most important days in Jewish history. Before the opening whistle was blown, Motke, Shalom, and Yudit walked with the players on the field to do the kick-off of the game. These players honored the Holocaust Survivors, showing who the real winners and heroes are.

On Sunday, January 28, a ceremony was held at the Haifa Home to mark this day. The sun shone which gave the heavy atmosphere a soft touch. David Parsons, the ICEJ spokesmen, gave a beautiful message, speaking to the hearts of these precious Survivors that “you have friends, many Christians around the world stand with Israel.” Many dignitaries, including First Lady Sarah Netanyahu, honored this occasion with their presence.

**Super Stars**

All of the Haifa Home residents are in their 80s or 90s. As they get older, their health deteriorates. Such was the case with Yacov. Yacov was always a very strong and healthy man, until last year when he was admitted to the hospital. Afterward, he was weak, had lost some memory, and as a result hardly left his home. Yacov became lonely, missing fellow residents at mealtime and fellowship at the different activities. When one of the nurses noticed this, she started to take him out for small walks to exercise. She hoped the walks would also help activate his brain. It worked. His memory came back. Several residents encouraged Yacov to keep exercising.

One afternoon, Yacov managed to walk to the dining hall and sat in the garden. Upon seeing him, Yacov Huber, another resident, embraced Yacov warmly. Huber encouraged Yacov to keep walking so that one day he might not need an oxygen tank any longer. Through daily exercise and the love shown him by the residents and staff, Yacov has found new motivation and hope. This is the beauty of the Haifa Home.

**SMALL STEPS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE**

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Let’s help while we still can!

Time is running out. There are many Survivors waiting to find a loving home and community. With no government funding the Haifa Home is completely dependent on donors such as you! With the growing needs of an increasingly older population, here is how you can help. We need:

- $19,200 to purchase seven nursing beds for our new facility;
- $20,250 to purchase new equipment for our Physiotherapy Room;
- Staff salaries for a nurse, an assistant cook, an administrative assistant, and others;
- To continually renovate and restore the equipment and buildings used to care for the Survivors.

Show your love today by donating to www.icejusa.org/haifa
SHINING ISRAEL’S LIGHT IN AFRICA

BY ICEJ STAFF

Give yourself a moment and “Ouagadougou” will roll right off your tongue. This is the name of Burkina Faso’s capital, where the local ICEJ branch held its first “Light on Israel” conference. Attending were people from many denominations and partner organizations with ICEJ’s Arise Director, Jani Salokangas, as the main speaker. Jani focused on the importance of understanding God’s covenant relationship with Israel: “If we are confused about God’s covenant for Israel, we will be confused about the Bible.”

ICEJ’s West African Director Abdou Maiga emphasized the importance of these conferences because they help mobilize people from different churches to learn about God’s heart for Israel. “People here are generally for Israel, but a lot of this support is based on emotions and not knowledge of the Word of God,” stated Abdou. The Q & A session at the end of the conference sparked great questions and discussions, which revealed the genuine interest and hunger of the people to understand this part of the Bible.

The ICEJ continues its strategic work in West Africa to empower the church to understand God’s purposes for Israel. Keep praying for our work and the church in this predominantly Muslim region. God has opened this amazing door for our work, and we believe that it will bear much fruit through faith, prayer, and hard work.

A new chapter has begun in Australia under the leadership of Dan Steege. The ICEJ is pleased to have a dynamic and visionary national director to head up the reincorporated Australian branch.

NURTURING THE ICEJ’S VISION FOR ISRAEL IN BRAZIL

BY ICEJ STAFF

Our VP of Operations Barry Denison had a whirlwind tour in Brazil reaching out to churches and the Brazilian populace via nationwide television. Barry’s knowledge of and love for Brazil stems from an eight-year stint serving in the land of the Amazon. This makes him expertly positioned to communicate the ICEJ’s sound and visionary views for Israel and the church.
In recent years, the number of ICEJ branches worldwide has been increasing at a constant rate. Currently, we have offices or representatives in 90 countries and contacts in 176 nations around the world. This blessing, however, also brings a great challenge: How can we work together in unity as a global team, learning from one another, and fulfilling our calling in each country to comfort the Jewish people and connect the churches to Israel?

To meet this challenge and strengthen the development of our international work, we envision bringing our branches together in regional meetings to provide the opportunity to get to know one another, spend time together in prayer, and share practical insights.

Belgrade Regional Conference
The Serbian capital, Belgrade, witnessed the first regional conference of this kind in October. Sixteen European nations were represented from east and west of the continent. The participants included national directors and members of staff from our strong and experienced branches like Germany, the UK, and Finland, and also from new branches like Albania and Bulgaria. The ICEJ team of speakers was led by ICEJ President Jürgen Bühler and ICEJ VP – International Affairs Mojmir Kallus, as well as our US Branch Director Susan Michael and Director of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem Susanna Kokkonen.

The three-day program kicked off with a reception for local, political, and church leaders. The impressive line-up of speakers included the deputy speaker of the Serbian parliament and the Chief Rabbi of Serbia. The organizers from the local Serbian branch, led by National Director Rodoljub Orešcanin, proved they are already well connected in their country.

Fellowship and Team Spirit
Jürgen Bühler presented the DNA of our organization, which was a highly appreciated understanding of our identity. Other sessions addressed questions on how to grow a branch and the basics of fundraising, while providing tips for interesting projects. Many fresh ideas came from round-table discussions, but the most important element was the fellowship. A strong sense of unity and team spirit developed, which implanted a fresh dose of encouragement and inspiration to all.

The first regional conference exceeded expectations, and will be followed in the coming months by similar events in other parts of the world that will be adapted to local needs and cultures.
How Can We Help Palestinian Refugees?

By Susan Michael, ICEJ USA Director

Seventy years ago, the United Nations voted to declare Israel a modern state. When Prime Minister Ben Gurion read Israel’s Proclamation of Independence on May 14, 1948, he urged the Arab population to remain “on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all bodies and institutions.” The Jewish population danced and sang on Israel’s streets. Their joy was short-lived.

The Cause of the Refugee Problem

Arab armies from Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon attacked the nascent state the next day. Their leaders ordered Arabs to leave their villages and cities promising a quick victory and return to their homes. The roughly 160,000 Arabs who stayed have grown into 1.5 million Israeli-Arab citizens with full rights in a thriving country with Hebrew and Arabic as the official languages.

Most, however, left—roughly 720,000. A few years later, the Jordanian newspaper Ad Difaa quoted one who had fled to Jordan saying, “The Arab governments told us, ‘Get out so that we can get in.’ So, we got out, but they did not get in.”

The 1947 UN Partition Plan had provided for two states, one for Jews and one for Arabs. Had Arab leaders accepted the UN solution, those who fled in 1948 would now reside in their own state. There would be no Palestinian refugees. The Jews accepted the UN Plan, and even though more than 850,000 Jewish people had to flee Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria in 1948, Israel absorbed all of the ones wishing to resettle in their ancestral homeland.

The UN Has Not Helped

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the main agency working with the 22.5 million refugees worldwide. Its goal is resettlement in one of 37 countries with programs to do so.

However, a second and separate agency was created for Palestinians—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA’s goal is not to resettle Palestinian refugees but to “protect and assist” them. It has even expanded the definition of a refugee to include descendants. This means that in addition to the roughly 20,000–30,000 original refugees still alive today, UNRWA has added another 5.3 million Palestinians to its registry.

UNRWA itself has been a burgeoning bureaucracy of 30,000 staff members with an annual budget of $800 million. It is in UNRWA’s own interest to perpetuate the problem, because solving it through resettlement would mean the end of its existence.

UNRWA is Part of the Problem

UNRWA has fueled the Palestinian refugee problem for decades by treating the Palestinians differently than other refugees and holding out hopes that have not, and likely will not, materialize—to return to ancestral homes. No other refugee population in the world benefits from a specialized agency nor do descendants of refugees have hope of repatriation efforts.

Donor countries have given $6 billion to UNRWA since 1950 with the United States as the largest donor nation. But instead of solving the problem, UNRWA uses Palestinian refugees as political pawns in a campaign against Israel. Even worse, many UNRWA employees are affiliated with Hamas, teaching and promoting hatred among young people and hiding weapons in their facilities in Gaza.

What Are Some Practical Solutions?

UNRWA must give the Palestinians an honest assessment of their future and change its charter to adopt similar resettlement goals as UNHCR.

Only those refugees without citizenship or permanent residency in their host country should be registered as a refugee. All funding to UNRWA should be redirected for the purposes of resettlement and the agency put on a five-year plan to shut down.

Refugee camps in the West Bank governed by the Palestinian Authority and in Gaza under Hamas should be shut down. Future donations to these governments should be allocated for the absorption of the refugees, and if the Palestinian authorities refuse, the refugees should be offered the right to resettle elsewhere.

Working together, Israel, UNHCR, and UNRWA can identify bona fide refugees and implement workable, effective plans. Putting UNRWA out of business and redirecting its budget into fresh, workable solutions would be a godsend to the Palestinian refugees.

“The Arab governments told us, ‘Get out so that we can get in.’ So, we got out, but they did not get in.”
Travel to Israel for the Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles and tour the land of the Bible. Join thousands of Christians from more than 90 nations to worship the King of kings in Jerusalem! There is no better time to visit Israel than during this Feast of the Lord!
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