

# A TRUE FRIEND OF ISRAEL

LIGHTING A CANDLE IN THE DARKNESS National Post 23 Dec 2023 BARBARA Kay

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**Members of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem were prominently represented among the thousands of people who gathered at Parliament Hill on Dec. 4 for a rally against antisemitism.**

Since Oct. 7, I have been writing columns about alarming spikes in antisemitism and the revival of Jews' historical fears. But in this, my pre-christmas and final column of 2023, I feel bound to light a candle instead of cursing the darkness. So I'm shifting my focus to gratitude for Christian philosemitism.

I am grateful for all the warm and sympathetic emails I have received from Christian readers, both Catholic and Protestant, who immediately understood Hamas's pogrom for exactly what it was — terrorism and an act of pure evil — and were horrified by those who strove to give it “context,” or to explain it as an act of “decolonization” or “resistance.” Some of them even sought advice from me as to which Israeli charities I would recommend for a material token of their solidarity. These gestures of fellowship in a dark hour were a comfort and a morale booster.

As a Zionist, though, I am particularly grateful for the **International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)**, which has branch offices in 86\* (94) countries and represents millions of Christians worldwide.

I am ashamed to say that until this crisis, it never occupied valuable real estate on my J-dar. It was only when I saw a video clip from a Dec. 4 rally against antisemitism on Parliament Hill, where ICEJ members were prominently represented, that my interest was piqued.

Christian Zionists don't get much respect from secularists in general, but many Jews are conflicted: they appreciate the moral and material support Christian Zionists bring to the table, but, considering the painfully consequential centuries-long history of Christian antisemitism, they are distrustful of contemporary philosemitism.

They tend to believe the objective of present-day Christian Zionism is to effect the transfer of God's covenant with Israel to Christians, according to the theory of “supersessionism.” Supersessionism may be implicit in the mission of some evangelical groups, but, happily, a spokesperson for ICEJ responded to my query with an unequivocal statement: *“ICEJ is fully opposed to supersessionism. We regard it as antagonistic to the State of Israel and a form of antisemitism. We are Christian Zionists who fully support the Jewish right to their ancient homeland in their full identity as Jews. The heart of Christianity was intended to be one of love, truth and*

*justice. These characteristics undergird ICEJ'S unequivocal support for Israel and the Jewish people in the face of historic antisemitism and particularly now, given the Hamas atrocities of Oct. 7."*

I spoke with Donna Holbrook, ICEJ Canada's longtime national executive director.

Holbrook has been to Israel more than 50 times, never missing the organization's annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration (Sukkot), when thousands of Christian tourists bear witness to their cause in Galilee, Jerusalem and the Negev.

Just two days before the Oct. 7 massacre, Holbrook attended a dedication ceremony for the Christian Embassy Nature Park, part of a joint project with the Jewish National Fund to replant a 50-hectare section of the forest destroyed by incendiary balloon attacks from Gaza in 2021.

Nearby Kibbutz Be'eri was invaded by Hamas on Oct. 7, when Holbrook and her team were heading to the airport. If the ceremony had been held two days later, ICEJ attendees could well have been amongst the victims.

Holbrook seemed unfazed by her temporal brush with disaster. She has been present at the margins of a battle in southern Israel before, close enough to witness actual gunfire. A reminder, as I've long been aware, that Jewish tourism from the diaspora pretty well stops dead in its tracks in times of conflict, but, good times or bad, the Christian Zionists keep coming. All honour to them for their faith-bred gallantry.

Speaking of faith, before Oct. 7, Holbrook told me that ICEJ members in Canada would remotely attend a prayer session with people in Jerusalem once a week. Since Oct. 7, Jerusalem has led prayers for two hours every day. That's an impressive commitment of time and energy.

Prayer is not a substitute for action, of course, nor is it meant to be. The work ICEJ does in Israel ranges from occupational training assistance, to support for Holocaust survivors. ICEJ has facilitated the repatriation of 170,000 Jews to Israel. It offers integration assistance for new immigrants and helps combat antisemitism through education programs. In a 2021 ICEJ video, a first responder to Hamas's incendiary balloon attacks on farms in southern Israel credits ICEJ'S gift of fire extinguishers suited to their ATVS for having "saved \*3,000 lives." *(The video showed two projects which got confused. It was ICEJ CA's fulfillment of much needed communication devices two years prior that security said saved 3,000 lives on Oct 7<sup>th</sup>)*

After the Oct. 7 massacre, ICEJ **CA\*** made three emergency appeals and was able to send \$1 million to Israel, designated for emergency needs. Amongst those needs is providing trauma training for Israeli professionals, who have been overwhelmed by a deluge of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder patients since the event.

According to Nicole Yoder, ICEJ'S vice-president for aid and aliyah, *"We jumped at the opportunity to partner with the Joint Distribution Committee to sponsor a pilot course on resilience and trauma training for 30 select managers from hospitals around Israel, knowing it would positively impact thousands."*

ICEJ has formed many solid partnerships in Israel, including the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, which *"works with Christians who support Israel alongside those who are undecided on their position towards Israel."* Small wonder then that ICEJ is cherished in Israel.

Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, told a gathering at the Israel Allies Foundation Gala Awards in Texas that Christians organizations like ICEJ were Israel's "Iron Dome of truth" in Washington. "*For that,*" he said, "*the State of Israel could not be more grateful.*" Nor could I.

Yasher koach to ICEJ, as Jews often say to those whose deeds call forth our admiration, may you go from strength to strength.

ALL HONOUR TO THEM FOR THEIR FAITH-BRED GALLANTRY.

Corrections by Donna Holbrook