Revival springs from Arab Winter

Is the sun really setting on Christianity in the Middle East?

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem • Comforting Israel, Educating the Church

It has now been a year since the Arab Spring began shaking the Middle East. From Morocco to Bahrain, the “Arab street” has seen unprecedented political upheavals. So far the long-standing rulers of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have been toppled, while the leaders of Syria and Yemen are close behind.

The Arab uprisings came unexpectedly and were launched by a surprising source – the ‘Facebook generation’ of young Arab students and intellectuals longing for the better life of the West. Thus many Western observers saw hope in the Arab Spring. Yet this quickly changed. At first the radical Muslim Brotherhood stayed away from the demonstrations, but then realised they were missing a golden opportunity. The Brotherhood has since used its highly organised networks to win elections in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The Arab Spring has turned into an Arab Winter.

**The End of Arab Christianity?**

In Egypt, Christians and Jews have been the early targets of the newly empowered Islamists.

Angry crowds stormed Israel’s embassy in Cairo, forcing the Israeli ambassador to flee. Numerous churches have been burned and even bombed, and Coptic Christians are facing new levels of hostility.

The mounting exodus of Christians from the entire region even prompted the leading Israeli news portal Ynet to recently declare the “End of Arab Christianity”.

The truth is the region is changing for the worse and there are many reasons to be pessimistic. Yet there are other developments which give us hope and these are namely signs of revival in the Arab world.

**Revival Fires in Iran**

Today, a unique move of God is underway in the Muslim world. The book “Iran: Desperate for God”, published recently by Voice of the Martyrs, states that “the fastest growing movement in the entire Muslim world today are Muslims in Iran converting to Christianity”. The book claims that after 30 years of suppression by the ayatollahs, most Iranians “grew weary of the grim, slavish, loveless loyalty to Allah, demanded by their state”.

According to native Iranian pastors, the Evangelical church in Iran before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 numbered a mere few hundred believers. Today, the Evangelical following is estimated at over 1 million strong.

“The truth is the region is changing and there are many reasons to be pessimistic. Yet there are other developments which give us hope.”

>> continued on center pages
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 is a non-denominational faith ministry, supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends across the globe. We invite you to join with us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by using the enclosed response slip to make your donation to the ongoing work and witness of the ICEJ.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM
P.O. Box 1192
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Support our ministry online at:
www.icej.org

Dear Friends,

Here in Jerusalem, we have started the new year once again in prayer and fasting. We are incredibly blessed with an exceptional staff who not only work with a desire for excellence but who also are dedicated to the things of the Spirit. To hear their prayers in our devotional times has given me much hope for the year ahead and I again want to invite you to join our Isaiah 62 Prayer Campaign as we intercede for Israel and the nations.

In one recent staff devotion, God spoke to us about King Cyrus of Persia. Here was a gentile king – possibly an idol worshipper – who received incredible promises of intervention and blessing from God as he helped the Jewish people return to their homeland, as recorded in Isaiah 45. How much more can we count on the backing and blessing of God as we His children fulfil a high calling to serve the Jewish people here in Israel and across the world? Be encouraged!

We also are very excited as the Lord is opening an incredible new door for us to proclaim the word of the Lord from Jerusalem through the medium of television. From February onwards, you will be able to view our weekly “ICEJ Report” as part of the Israel Now News broadcast on Daystar TV. Please pray for us as we enter into this promising new venture.

It is a little more than a year now since the demonstrations which erupted in Tunisia swept over the entire Middle East. This issue of the Word From Jerusalem focuses on the continuing turmoil in the Middle East and our hope-filled response to it. There are two ways to look at the region. One is in the political realm, which holds very troubling news every day. The other is through the lens of what God is doing with the Church throughout the region, and here a new and exciting dynamic is unfolding. As believers, we need to consider both realms in order to offer informed and effectual prayers for the peoples of the Middle East.

Finally I want to thank you for your ongoing support. Please keep us in your prayers and continue to stand with us as we stand with Israel.

Yours in Christ,

Dr. Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ Executive Director

Word From Jerusalem

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Juha Ketola Named International Director

Season of transition brings new leadership for Grafted Program

As part of the continuing transition to new leadership within the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, we are pleased to announce that the current Chairman of our Board of Trustees, Rev. Juha Ketola, has been appointed to serve as the ministry’s new International Director. He takes over this key position from Dr. Jürgen Bühler, who is now serving as the Executive Director of the worldwide organisation.

Rev. Ketola has been a pastor and travelling evangelist in his native Finland as well as in Canada for many years, and took over as National Director of the ICEJ’s Finnish branch in 2005 from its founder Dr. Ulla Jarvilehto. He was elected Chairman of the international board last year and will now move on to the daily task of overseeing the ICEJ’s global network of more than 70 national branches.

“We clearly see God’s guidance in this decision and we know that Juha is the right person for this position”, Bühler added.

New Leadership for Grafted Program

In addition, the Grafted Young Adults department of the ICEJ will be welcoming a new director, as Jani Salokangas, also from Finland, will come take over from Liesl Maas in coming months. Jani is a talented and dedicated youth minister who has been increasingly involved in Grafted tours and activities in recent years. Jani will fill a strategic position which will serve as a link between Israel and young Christians worldwide.

Liesl Maas helped launch this special outreach to the young generation back in 2003 and built Grafted into a vanguard expression of Christian Zionism among young adults. Both Liesl and her husband Bram Maas will remain involved in the ministry from their new home in the Netherlands.

Profile: Juha Ketola

ICEJ International Director

Rev. Juha Ketola has been in full-time ministry since 1985, serving as a pastor and an evangelist in his native Finland as well as in Canada. He is a graduate of the International Bible Institute of London Kensington Temple in England and an ordained minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada and Finland. Since the summer of 2000, he has been ministering as an itinerant preacher, holding church meetings and gospel outreaches in various countries while also sharing about God’s plans concerning the modern-day restoration of Israel. He has been speaking at events for the ICEJ since 1996. Currently, he serves as Chairman of the ICEJ International Board of Trustees and as the National Director of ICEJ-Finland. Juha Ketola and his wife, Kati, have three children and two grandchildren. They will take up residence in Jerusalem in coming months.

Juha Ketola and his wife, Kati, have three children and two grandchildren. They will take up residence in Jerusalem in coming months.
ICEJ Focus on Arab Sector Needs
ICEJ AID Reaches out to Old City Christians; Disadvantaged Arab Youth

BY ESTERA WIEJA & EMANUEL MFOUKOU

One of the areas of pressing need within Israel which the ICEJ is seeking to address is that of disadvantaged members of the minority Arab community, and particularly Arab Christian families. Some 20% of our AID budget is used to assist the Arab, Druze and Bedouin communities, including enrichment programs for children and youth-at-risk, medical and financial assistance to the elderly, holiday gift packages to poor families, and so much more.

Following are examples of specific projects which we are currently sponsoring in the Arab sector:

ELDERLY CHRISTIANS IN THE OLD CITY
For many years now, the Christian Embassy has sponsored projects in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City in cooperation with Raja Salameh, director of the Good Samaritan Center. Currently, we are launching an initiative to build bathrooms and undertake other renovations in homes owned by elderly Arab Christians in the Old City.

Many of these dear saints are poor, suffer from illness, and live in small apartments where they must share bathrooms with neighbours. Some actually have to venture outside their homes to use communal bathrooms located nearby. But they are reluctant to do so because they are weak and can barely walk or climb stairs. They also are fearful to go outside, especially at night, due to the serious problems of crime and drug use among local youths.

“Some of the elderly will not leave their room if they hear voices outside”, explained Raja. “Many drug addicts in the area would take any opportunity to steal from the defenceless.”

Raja has been working with elderly Arab Christians in the Old City for the past decade. Many belong to traditional churches who have welcomed the assistance from evangelical Christians to their neediest parishioners, as they struggle just to meet daily needs and have no way of affording home renovations. In fact, many have turned over their home ownership papers to unscrupulous men who promise to remodel their homes and then do not deliver.

“One of the elderly are preyed upon. They do not have children or other family members to turn to for help, and sometimes it’s the neighbours that pose difficulties”, explained Raja.

One elderly Christian Arab is Nasmah, a widow who lives alone. Her daughter resides in a Palestinian village and her son has been put in prison for violence. She handed over title to two rooms in her family home to a local clergyman who promised to help and protect her.

Yet sadly, the rooms have now been rented out to foreign workers and Nasmah has to share the bathroom with ten strangers. She has to climb steep stairs to get to a tiny bathroom that nobody cares to clean.

The ICEJ has decided to step in and assist Nasmah by installing a private bathroom next to her bedroom and kitchen. She will not have to climb stairs or fear for her safety at night. Her worried face lit upon hearing the good news.
Youth in the Galilee

In recent years, ICEJ AID has supported youth-at-risk in Arrabe, a mostly Muslim town in the Lower Galilee, in cooperation with the city council and local coordinator Madi Madi. This outreach has included a range of projects aimed at both physical and mental improvement and assisting children from disadvantaged families.

For instance, the local council has set up after-school clubs where youngsters can receive proper meals, get help with their homework, and enjoy sports. The ICEJ has provided these clubs with kitchen equipment, school books, and sports equipment. We have also donated basketballs, ping pong tables, and other new equipment to a local elementary school with some 250 students from low-income families.

Many young people in Arrabe join sports leagues that bring Arab and Jewish youths together for positive interaction. Without such outlets, the students often fall to the edge of society and end up in crime and violence, explained Madi. But these after-school programs give them better options and thus are “the place to be”, he said. “To take part in a league for ping pong, chess or basketball is like a dream for these kids.”

Madi noted that he can sense how some children are suffering from bad situations at home and struggle with behavioural problems, malnutrition or lack of basic clothing.

One example is Muhammad, who comes from a Muslim family of eight. Since his father is unemployed, Muhammad refused to go school because the family was unable to buy school books or shoes. But once he received help from ICEJ AID, Muhammad returned to school. Armed with new confidence, his grades jumped from an average of 60% to the top of his class at 96%.

“Thanks to the ICEJ, over 60 families have been touched”, said Madi. “Your organisation has had a great impact on Arrabe. In the name of all these families, we thank you for your help.”

Christian Families in Nazareth

Just down the road in Nazareth, ICEJ AID assisted twenty families over Christmas by providing food packages for festive holiday meals. This was done in coordination with Pastor Afif Saba of the Good Shepherd Baptist Church. Afif explained that these gifts went to widows, single-parent families and elderly citizens who did not expect the help and were highly appreciative.

“On behalf of our church and all these families, I want to thank the ICEJ’s donors for your love and concern”, said Pastor Afif. “Your gifts brought much joy and happiness this Christmas.”

Estera Wieja and Emanuel Mfoukou both serve as staff writers on the ICEJ Media Team in Jerusalem

Please help us to better the lives of members of the Arab Community in Israel!
Support the work of ICEJ AID today at: www.icej.org/aid
In 2006, even Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad angrily decried the rate of Muslim conversions to Christianity in his country. Iran’s underground churches are currently experiencing an annual growth of 20% - the highest rate worldwide (followed by Afghanistan at 16%).

**Glowing Reports from the Region**

A look at Algeria is also encouraging. An Algerian pastor who visited Jerusalem last autumn during the Feast of Tabernacles told us that a decade ago the churches there had only a few hundred members. Yet even as persecution from Islamic militants has intensified, this pastor reports that today the Evangelical churches in his country can claim more than 200,000 members. The revival started among the Berber tribes but is spreading now to other sectors and new fellowships are cropping up everywhere. But what is equally exciting is that these new Christian believers share a passionate love for Israel. The pastor asked me: “Our brothers back home love what you are doing for Israel. Can we open a branch of the International Christian Embassy in Algeria?”

Libya also holds surprises. For decades under the dictatorial rule of Muammar Ghadaffi, it was one of the hardest countries to reach with the Gospel. But the missions guide “Operation World” reports in its latest 2010 edition that:

> “the spiritual climate in Libya has changed significantly... There is notable spiritual hunger among Libyans, but not enough Bibles for those seeking them...”

Concerning Morocco, the same source writes:

> “A Moroccan Church is emerging and accelerating in growth and maturity”.

The report on Tunisia reads:

> “New believers have increased and new church groups have come into being over the past few years.”

Meanwhile for Jordan, Operation World reports:

> “The evangelical Church is experiencing encouraging growth, doubling from 1995 to 2010.”

Similar reports are emerging from Syria and Lebanon. And in Iraq, although traditional Assyrian Christians are fleeing in droves, the number of Evangelicals has climbed to more than 50,000 in a few short years.

In recent years, multiple testimonies also have surfaced from the Arab Peninsula of Muslims having dreams and visions of the resurrected Jewish Messiah.

Back in Egypt, outdoor worship gatherings last autumn drew tens of thousands of Christians from Coptic, Catholic and Evangelical backgrounds to pray together for unity and revival in their country.

“God is doing in the Arab world now what He did in the days ahead may well hold the key to the solutions for the problems of tomorrow.”

Here in Jerusalem, we also are hearing wonderful testimonies from Arab Christians of a fresh move of God among their communities in...
Israel and the Palestinian areas. Just recently we received a report of a new Bible study group established in Jenin, once the suicide bomber capital of the West Bank. In the very first meeting 18 people professed faith in Jesus.

All this indicates that amid the great political upheavals in the Arab world, there is also a spiritual revolution taking place. What we see today is not the end of the Arab church but just the beginning of what may be an historic revival. Though they are starting from low raw numbers, the average rate of growth for churches in the Arab/Muslim world is between 5% and 10%, which is higher than in any Western country today. In fact, one of the most sustained revivals is taking place in Indonesia, which has the world’s largest Muslim population but is now around 30% Christian.

In January of last year, our first weekly staff prayer meeting in Jerusalem focused on praying for every single Arab country, both for revival and for an Arab church to emerge which would love Israel. We then felt led to launch a month-long prayer campaign, and understood why as the month drew to a close with the region suddenly in turmoil. It seems our prayers were being heard before we even started to pray.

In the months since, we have realised God is doing a hidden work in the Arab world. While the days ahead may bring huge challenges for the region, and in particular for the nation of Israel, we should also expect to see God moving powerfully among those He is calling.

'The Giant is Falling'

All this holds great relevance for those of us focused on Israel. For even within Arab countries which are outwardly hostile to the Jewish state, there is a growing remnant which loves Israel.

I will never forget the appeal of a well-known Israeli rabbi who once urged us: “Please send more Christian missionaries into the Arab world! If our neighbours believe what you believe, then we will have peace in the Middle East.”

A few weeks ago, I asked the same rabbi for his take on the Arab Spring-turned-Winter. He replied: “Jürgen, I am very optimistic. I believe what we see today is the last roar of the Islamic giant. But we will see him falling and the glory of God will shine over the region.”

So please join our Isaiah 62 Prayer Campaign as we continue to seek the Lord for Israel and the region. There was never a time when our prayers were more needed than today. Let us indeed expect God’s glory to shine over this region. Learn more at: www.icej.org/isaiah62

Please also consider making a generous gift towards the Arab outreach projects of our ICEJ AID department. Given the doors that are opening in the Arab sector in Israel and the Palestinian areas, we will be expanding this outreach in the months ahead in close partnership with evangelical Arab pastors and ministries in the land. You can read more about this in this magazine.

Dr. Jürgen Bühler serves as ICEJ Executive Director and lives with his wife Vesna and four children in Jerusalem. To support the ongoing work of ICEJ AID to improve the lives of Arab communities in Israel please go to: www.icej.org/aid
The Litmus test of the Arab Spring
Treatment of the Christian minority reveals the truth about Mideast reform

By David Parsons

Late in 2010, it seemed a pair of brutal terror assaults on Christian congregations in Egypt and Iraq had finally brought the plight of the Middle East’s embattled Christian minorities to the fore, at least to the point where Western leaders could no longer ignore this abysmal problem.

An al-Qaida cell’s shocking raid on a Baghdad cathedral in late October left 53 people dead. Then on New Year’s Day, a powerful car bombing targeted a Coptic church in Alexandria, killing 25 parishioners just as they were finishing midnight Mass.

As a long-time observer of the Middle East, I held out hope at the time that these tragedies would prove to be a tipping point, and the West would finally come to the rescue of the dwindling and battered Christian communities of the region. But then the Arab Spring erupted and realpolitik took over. Sadly, there was no time to deal with radical Muslim attacks on Christians when the entire Middle East was convulsing with unprecedented mass protests.

Still, the vicious slaughter in Alexandria had left Egyptian Copts with an uneasy sense that the Mubarak regime was no longer able to protect them. So many withdrew their traditional support for the government and joined the mass demonstrations in Tahrir Square.

Yet now that the Muslim Brotherhood and an even more militant Salafist faction have won some 70% of the seats in the next parliament in Cairo, many Copts are having second thoughts. Having already faced discrimination and harassment from a secular regime, they realise things could actually get a lot worse under the Islamists.

An ancient Christian community dating to the first century, Copts today comprise nearly 10 percent of Egypt’s 80 million people. They are a proud faith community which has survived centuries of Muslim persecution. This pride goes even to the point that many Copts have small green crosses tattooed on their wrists.
Yet they are faced with a dilemma under the emerging new order in Egypt. The nation’s laws require that everyone over age 16 must carry an identity card containing their personal details, including their religion. The card is necessary for employment, education, access to public services, and even to be married and buried. Thus, for good reason Copts want to be identified as Christians. Yet holding such a card means facing certain discrimination in job opportunities, education, and other pursuits in life.

As a result, the Copts are anxious to see whether the new constitution being drawn up for the country will guarantee them both equal rights as citizens and full religious freedoms as a distinct faith community. They also are fearful the army and courts will no longer be there to shield them from Muslim agitators and terrorists. Some have serious doubts on both accounts and Western embassies in Cairo are already reporting an increase in Coptic Christians seeking to apply for emigration abroad.

So as the Arab Spring runs its course, the litmus test of whether democracy truly is taking root in Egypt and elsewhere in the region is if the emerging rulers respect the rights of their Christian minorities and secure their place in society.

Now there is good reason to seriously doubt that this will come about naturally. In fact, it is wholly dependent on Western leaders becoming vocally outraged at any manifestations of Christian persecution and a determined diplomatic campaign to ensure the rights and safety of the Middle East’s indigenous Christians.

There is clear historic precedent for such outside intervention in the Arab/Muslim world to protect Christian communities. As Ottoman rule over the Middle East began to wane, the Great Powers of Europe moved into the region, each concluding deals with the Sultanate in Istanbul to provide protection to various imperilled Christian denominations.

Along with private American initiatives, these Western interlocutors brought with them schools, hospitals and other modern institutions, thus vastly improving the education, health and job opportunities of the local Christians. With this benevolent influx also came advances for all peoples of the region.

Some locals are sure to object to any renewed Western intervention on behalf of Mideast Christians as a form of neo-colonialism. But no one has territorial designs here anymore. It is just a matter of plain human decency.

Yet beyond the urgent need for Western diplomatic intervention, there are signs of hope that revival is hitting the Christians of the region. Reports out of Egypt, for instance, maintain that churches there are indeed persecuted but they are also thriving. “Our pews are fuller than ever on Sundays”, one Protestant ministry leader stated last year.

A video recently posted on YouTube captured a remarkable scene of some 70,000 Egyptian Christians from Coptic, Catholic and Evangelical backgrounds who had gathered several months ago for an outdoor worship service which lasted all night. Their collective sense of joy and pride in their faith was clearly evident.

At present, the general trend of the Arab Spring is that Islamist factions are sweeping into power across the region, as seen in recent elections in Morocco, Tunisia and now Egypt. These are political parties which declare that Islam is the answer to all the region’s problems. But many Arabs know that Islam will not solve the social, economic and even spiritual ills of the Middle East. They are looking for other answers and many are turning to Christianity.

For some, they are being drawn by the steadfast faith of Christians in the face of increasing persecution. This ‘witness’ of the reality of Christ in their lives is having a big impact on many of their Muslim neighbours.

So although the Arab Spring has disrupted normal functioning of Middle Eastern societies, one of the by-products seems to be a loosening of curbs on free speech to the point that the Gospel is being proclaimed like never before in the Arab and Muslim worlds. This is an open door for ministry which all Christians should do their best to support.

David Parsons serves as ICEJ Media Director and Contributing Christian Editor of The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition. He lives with his family in Jerusalem.
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MONDAY, OCTOBER 1
► COMMUNION SERVICE - ENGLISH // 10:00-12:00
  THE GARDEN TOMB
► COMMUNION SERVICE - ENGLISH/PORTUGUESE // 13:00-15:00
  THE GARDEN TOMB
► EVENING CELEBRATION // 19:30-21:30
► INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER JERUSALEM

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2
► MORNING SESSIONS // 8:00-13:00
► EVENING CELEBRATION // 19:30-21:30

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3
► MORNING SESSIONS // 8:00-13:00
► EVENING CELEBRATION // 19:30-21:30

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4
► MORNING SESSIONS // 8:00-13:00
► GRAND FINALE EVENING CELEBRATION // 9:30-21:30

For more information visit www.icej.org

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The prophet Jeremiah declares: "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’" (Jeremiah 31:10)

This is one of the core callings of the Christian Embassy, to proclaim the hope for all people which flows from the restoration of Israel. It is an especially important prophetic message for the Church, as it speaks of God’s faithfulness to His promises and also of the soon return of His son, Jesus. For more than 30 years now, the Lord has helped us to deliver this message of hope around the world.

Over the past year, the Lord has placed a special burden on our hearts to spread this message to even more nations worldwide. A scripture which God has impressed on our hearts is Matthew 5:15-16: “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men…”

This means we must employ new methods of communication. In particular, we have sensed a strong leading to move more into television and video broadcasting.

By faith, we started to launch this initiative last year by designing plans for a TV studio in our Jerusalem headquarters. Our initial goal was to broadcast via the Internet, and to eventually believe for an opening into Christian television networks.

But just a few short weeks ago, we were invited by a long-standing Israeli friend of the ICEJ to consider becoming a partner in his new show “Israel Now News”, a half-hour news program which is airing twice every Sunday on the Daystar television channel. This show was launched to bring truth and reliable news coverage from Israel to Christians around the world. In less than two months, it has quickly become the second most watched program on Daystar, with millions of viewers tuning in from around the world.

Thus we are excited to announce that we have concluded a very reasonable deal with “Israel Now News” to become a weekly contributor on this exceptional new program. Our role will be to bring a Christian outlook to the news broadcasts, and we will be able to freely share from the Word of God about His promises for Israel. This is an incredible opportunity to expand the reach of the ICEJ’s ministry to millions of new people in every corner of the globe.

To accomplish this, we urgently need to complete our television studio here at our Embassy building. Thankfully, we already have in place qualified staff to handle all the production efforts, but we must now acquire an array of new equipment, such as state-of-the-art TV cameras and video editing tools.

A total sum of $US 250,000 is needed to equip our studio and to produce 52 shows for the first year of broadcasting. We want to invite you to partner with us in this vital undertaking for our ministry. We firmly believe this seed money will reap a harvest in the crucial days ahead. You can make your online donation to this project at: www.icej.org/daystar.

Please stand with us as we fulfill together our great calling to send forth the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Thank you for responding.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ Executive Director

Watch us on “Israel Now News” from February 5th at 7.00am (EST) and 3.00pm (EST) on Daystar TV.