

Shana Tova



Rosh haShana 5773

Letter from ICCJ President Dr. Deborah Weissman,

Shalom from Jerusalem.

I am writing this message on the eve of the Jewish High Holydays and specifically want to wish our Jewish members a happy, healthy, peaceful and sweet New Year. But I also want to take this opportunity to comment on an issue that has recently stirred up a great deal of controversy in inter-religious circles, particularly in the UK—namely, the World Council of Churches' EAPPI.

From their Web site:

“The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) brings internationals to the West Bank to experience life under occupation. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace. When they return home, EAs campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions. “

In July, the General Synod of the Church of England met and passed a resolution committing the church to endorsement and support of this program. On July 22, the Jewish Chronicle published a piece by Professor Geoffrey Alderman, an Anglo-Jewish historian, entitled, “The end of interfaith relations?” Alderman attributed the move to antisemitism and took the opportunity to attack inter-religious initiatives, including our own, calling the CCJ “completely useless.” Alderman, unfortunately, seems to imply that if you support the Ecumenical Accompaniers program, you are anti-Israel, and therefore, antisemitic, which renders all dialogue impossible.

I have lived here in Israel for the past 40 years and have served as an education officer in the IDF. I spend a great deal of time and effort combating antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and any inappropriate criticism of Israel intended to delegitimise the existence of a Jewish state. Jews definitely have real enemies in the world, and we must be vigilant against them. On the other hand, in our Jewish tradition, we are told that a true hero is one who can turn an enemy into a friend--not one who labels both friends and potential

friends as enemies. Moreover, in this season of repentance: Maimonides says that one of the greatest obstacles to *Teshuva* or repentance is being suspicious of people who are innocent. I believe that some Jews in the UK have misspoken about the EAPPI.

In August, I had an excellent meeting here in Jerusalem with two leaders of the EAPPI program: Pauline Nunu, the local program coordinator, and Rev. Katarina Stewart, whose title is "team supporter." In attendance with me was Anne Sender, an active member of the Oslo Jewish community, who is currently participating in the program and plans to write a book about her experiences. Anne is active in inter-religious dialogue in Scandinavia and the struggle against antisemitism and anti-Zionism. When I was in England, someone (I'm sorry I can't remember who it was) told me that the EA's spend only one day in Israel, out of 90. When I suggested that rather than boycotting the program (esp. if we object to boycotts as a tactic,) we should try to negotiate for them to spend 2 or 3 days in Israel, that person said to me, "They won't allow it; we've tried."

Well, it turns out that all the EA's spend a minimum of 18 out of the 90 days in Israel. They visit Jerusalem—including Yad Vashem— Haifa and S'derot, and meet with lots of Israeli Jews, inc. a settler from Efrat. The leaders of the program are looking for wider contacts within the Jewish community, and we discussed some possibilities for further cooperation. It is certainly possible that some of the graduates of the program have returned to the UK and badmouthed Israel. I'm not defending that. It is also possible that some of them were simply telling about what they had seen and experienced.

I know that the ICCJ is an organization that includes within it a fairly wide range of views on the question of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This pluralism is one of the factors making our Research Council project on "Promise, Land and Hope" so dynamic and interesting. I'm not trying to push us in a specific political direction, but I am suggesting that if we have problems with what people are saying, we should engage with them and with the issues they raise and not boycott them. For example, for several years, we have hosted groups of EA's in our synagogue in Jerusalem for Shabbat services and sometimes Friday night dinners in Jewish homes. I wish we could find more synagogues to share in this work. I hope to increase my own involvement with these groups in the future.

On their Web site, sixteen countries are listed as being in their network—in 13 of them, we have CCJ's and in one other, some interested members-at-large. That is a big potential for engagement. May I also suggest that these questions not be off-limits for discussion within the framework of a local CCJ? It may actually be that within the

supportive atmosphere of a CCJ, where trust among the members has been built up for years, we can learn to develop a model for dialogue on these thorny issues. I will conclude with some references to our 2009 Berlin Document, which outlines some of the guidelines for this engagement:

4. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem

- By critiquing the policies of Israeli and Palestinian governmental and social institutions when such criticism is morally warranted, at the same time acknowledging both communities' deep attachment to the land.
- By critiquing attacks on Zionism when they become expressions of antisemitism.
- By joining with Jewish, Christian and Muslim peace workers, with Israelis and Palestinians, to build trust and peace in a Middle East where all can live secure in independent, viable states rooted in international law and guaranteed human rights.

7. To differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism

- By understanding and promoting biblical examples of just criticism as expressions of loyalty and love.

8. To offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfill the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world

- By ensuring equal rights for religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, living within the Jewish state.
- By achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

May this be God's will, speedily and in our days. And may the New Year bring new beginnings for us all.

Debbie Weissman
ICCJ President