

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 3, 2019*** ***(26<sup>th</sup> Tevet, 5779)***



## ***For the Yachad Report Newsletter For January 2019***

**NETANYAHU MEETS WITH CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF ISRAEL IN BRAZIL:** PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Sara Netanyahu met with Christian Friends of Israel in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Sunday 30 Dec. 2018. During the event the post office of the Brazilian state of Amazonas launched a stamp that had been prepared by Christian Friends of Israel in honor of 70 years of Israel's independence. Netanyahu and his wife were on the third day of a six-day visit to Brazil to attend the inauguration of Brazilian president-elect Jair Bolsonaro. Netanyahu spoke at the event, "We have no better friends in the world than the Evangelical community, and the Evangelical community has no better friend in the world than the State of Israel. In other countries in the Middle East, Christians must either be very careful or leave the country, but not in Israel. You are our brothers and sisters, and we defend Christian rights just like we defend the rights of all religions. It is not solely a matter of justice or values; it is a matter of deep recognition of our common ancient customs and our common heritage.

"Our histories, our beliefs and our values are intertwined. Every time we dig in our land we uncover ancient synagogues or ancient churches. When you come to Israel today, you see a country that accepts you as brothers and sisters, you see a country that values freedom of religion, you see a country that is proud of our past and carries our values into the future. We now have the opportunity to create the future in Brazil together. President Bolsonaro said we were brothers. We are brothers and we will grasp the future together. I invite all of you to come to Israel in 2019. We will welcome you with all the love and warmth reserved for family members. I look forward to seeing you in Jerusalem".

**ISRAEL SAW RECORD-BREAKING 4 MILLION TOURISTS IN 2018:** Israel welcomed some four million tourists over the course of 2018, breaking a new record, the Tourism Ministry reported last week. 2018 saw an increase in tourist arrivals of 13 percent over 2017, and 38% compared to 2016, while tourism revenue exceeded \$6.3 billion, according to the ministry. "This historical record, of more than 4 million

tourists in a year, is the realization of a decades-old dream of all those involved in the Israel tourism industry,” said Tourism Minister Yariv Levin. Levin said the growth a “result of a significant revolution in marketing Israel includes the opening of dozens of new air routes and creating unprecedented collaborations with the largest travel agents in the world. Today tourism makes a huge contribution to Israel’s economy and employment and the many tourists who come here serve as ambassadors of good will.” The ministry said 40% of tourists who arrived in Israel last year were returning visitors, “proof that Israel is a desirable destination in the world.” Last month, UK-based market research firm EuroMonitor named Jerusalem as the fastest-growing tourism destination in the world, more than any other city globally.

**INCREASE IN ALIYAH IN 2018:** The Jewish Agency for Israel on Sunday, 30 Dec. 2018, published its official year-end data on Aliyah. According to the figures, more than 29,600 people immigrated to Israel from around the world last year, compared with 28,220 new immigrants in 2017, a 5-percent increase over the previous year. The country with the largest number of olim (immigrants to Israel) in 2018 was Russia, with more than 10,500 immigrants, representing a 45% increase from 2017. Jewish Agency Chairman Isaac Herzog said, “Every Jew who comes to Israel and establishes a home here completes another piece of the wonderful mosaic of the Jewish people in their historic homeland. After 70 years of the state’s independence and the tremendous number of olim who have already made it to Israel, the potential for even greater Aliyah remains significant and The Jewish Agency will continue to work to achieve that goal.”

**SUCCESSSES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM:** In 2018, there were a variety of important actions against anti-Semitism. One is the expanding acceptance of the definition of anti-Semitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Another is success in the fight against the BDS movement which aims to delegitimize the State of Israel. In Nov. 2018, Kentucky became the 26th American state to pass legislation to ban awarding state contracts to companies that endorse the BDS movement. The governors of all 50 states have signed a declaration condemning the BDS movement as antithetical to American values. In Germany, anti-Semitism commissioners have been appointed in a variety of federal states. A French manifesto against Muslim anti-Semitism was signed by 250 Jewish and non-Jewish personalities. The Council of the European Union (EU) approved the first declaration of its kind to fight anti-Semitism and strengthen the security of Jewish communities in Europe. British media have exposed the substantial anti-Semitism in the British Labour Party.

**USA, ISRAEL WORK TO BLOCK UNILATERAL PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD DRIVE AT UN:** The United States and Israel are working to block a renewed Palestinian Authority drive to become a member state of the United Nations. “We are preparing to stop the initiative,” said Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon. The move would effectively hand the Palestinians unilateral statehood recognition outside the context of any final status agreement with Israel. Under past peace initiatives, including the Oslo Accord, Palestinian statehood recognition was expected to be granted at the conclusion of a peace process with Israel. For the last decade the Palestinians have attempted to separate the process and attain unilateral statehood recognition, particularly through acceptance as a member state of the UN.

The USA, which has veto power at the UNSC, has historically opposed any Palestinian UN membership drives and would be expected to veto this latest initiative. Israel’s Mission to the UN said it believes that the UNSC will debate the matter at its 15 Jan. 2019 quarterly open meeting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It added that the USA and Israel were working to halt the initiative. “Even as it continues to pay salaries to terrorists every month, encourage violence and lead an unrelenting campaign of incitement against Israel, the Palestinian Authority has the audacity to ask the Security Council to recognize it as a full member state of the United Nations,” Danon said. “Instead of focusing on building a better and more hopeful future for the Palestinians and helping to ensure stability in the region, the Palestinian leadership is continuing its destructive policies that have encouraged recent terror attacks, including the murder of the four-day-old baby,” he said.

**IDF: 1,000 ROCKETS AND MORTARS FIRED AT ISRAEL FROM GAZA IN 2018:** 1,000 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza into Israel over the past year, a dramatic rise from the past three years when there were 71 in total. 250 were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system and 45 fell in urban areas. The IDF destroyed 15 terror tunnels which infiltrated into Israeli territory from Gaza last year, and completed 27 km. of an underground barrier designed to block tunnels. 7 soldiers and 9 civilians were killed and 199 injured in 87 terror attacks in 2018, compared to 20 killed and 169 injured in 97 terror attacks in 2017.

**UN YEAR IN REVIEW: 21 CONDEMNATIONS FOR ISRAEL, NONE FOR HAMAS OR CHINA:** Over the course of 2018, the United Nations has voted to adopt some 27 condemnations - the vast majority of which were directed at the nation of Israel. According to Hillel Neuer, executive director of United Nations Watch, 21 of the 27 condemnations were aimed at Israel. Iran, Syria, North Korea, Russia, Myanmar and the United States each received one. What is perhaps more striking is the fact that totalitarian China had none - and neither did the terrorist organization Hamas. A number of Trump administration officials -including the out-going Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley - have been harsh critics of the double standard the international body has regarding Israel.

**NETANYAHU: IF HEZBOLLAH PROVOKES US – IT WILL GET HIT HARD:** PM Netanyahu on Sunday 30 Dec. 2018 gave an interview to Israel's Russian-language Channel 9. On the issue of the Lebanon-based Hezbollah terrorist group and its relations with Iran, Netanyahu said, "Iran is the biggest problem, Hezbollah is the second biggest problem. Iran wanted to arm itself with nuclear weapons, and I fought against them all over the world. We are conducting the campaign against Hezbollah so that when we are tested, we will not only have the upper hand, but we will be able to respond with a crushing response. Hezbollah will make a terrible mistake if it tries to attack us. Action against us on their part will cause us to hit them hard," the prime minister added. He also discussed the Trump administration's peace plan for Israel and the Palestinian Arabs, which has been dubbed "the Deal of the Century". "Only when I see the plan will I be able to respond to it. I am hearing all kinds of things, but I can say that Jerusalem will not be divided. I do not divide Jerusalem nor do I uproot communities," stressed Netanyahu.

**HOLY LAND CHRISTIAN STATISTICS FOR CHRISTMAS 2018:** Just in time for Christmas, the Israel Bureau of Statistics published figures on Christians living in Israel. According to the report, around 175,000 Christians live in the Holy Land, which makes them 2% of the population. Of those, 77.7% are Arab Christians. In 2017, the Christian population in Israel grew by 2.2%, in contrast to the shrinking Christian populations in many of the neighboring Arab states, including the Palestinian Authority. Most of Israel's Christians, 70.6% of them, live in the north of the country. Of the non-Arab Christians, 40.9% live in Tel Aviv and other central districts, and 33.8% live in the north and in Haifa. The cities with the most Christian inhabitants are Nazareth (22,100), Haifa (15,800), Jerusalem (12,600) and Shfar'am (10,200).

**THOUSANDS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM WITH DWINDLING CHRISTIAN ARABS:** Thousands of Palestinians and international visitors celebrated Christmas Eve in Bethlehem on Mon. night 24 Dec. 2018, in numbers not seen in years. When Israel handed Bethlehem over to the Palestinian Authority in 1995, it had "a Christian population of roughly 80%. Now it's about 20%," Israel's PM Netanyahu said in Oct. 2018.

**ISRAEL'S DEMOCRACY IS IN GOOD HEALTH:** Israel now ranks 30th out of 167 countries in the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual survey of national democracies. It is sandwiched between France and Belgium. Since 2009, Israel has moved up seven places in the Economist Intelligence Unit's ranking of democracies.

**JEWISH GROUPS OFFER ASSISTANCE AFTER INDONESIAN TSUNAMI:** Jewish groups are offering assistance in the wake of a tsunami in Indonesia that has left more than 400 dead and thousands homeless. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is providing emergency relief and assessing surfacing needs in the Kalianda and Rajabasa subdistricts of Lampung, a province on the southern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, which was hard hit by the tsunami. Some 14,000 people also were injured in the natural disaster. The aid provided so far includes health services, clean water and supplies for survivors. Israel's Foreign Ministry in a tweet offered "profound sympathies" for all those affected by the natural disaster, but did not offer concrete aid. Indonesia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel and has rejected previous offers of aid. The tsunami hit last weekend without warning, and may have been caused by a volcanic eruption on Anak Krakatau, a volcanic island. Over 100 people are still reported missing.

**HONDURAS PREPARED TO MOVE EMBASSY – FOR A PRICE:** Honduras is prepared to relocate its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem – but at a price – according to a report this week by Israel's Channel 2. President Hernandez has dispatched a senior diplomatic team to Israel, which met with the director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Yuval Rotem. While the team expressed Honduras' willingness to relocate its embassy in Israel, the diplomatic team added that it expected that Israel reciprocate with its own changes vis-à-vis its relationship with Honduras. Chief among the Honduran requests is the call for Israel to upgrade its diplomatic mission in Honduras by opening a full embassy. At present, Israel only maintains a consulate in Tegucigalpa. The cost of maintaining a full-fledged embassy has been estimated at one million dollars a year. Other demands include closer economic ties, as well as technical assistance from Israel.

**NETANYAHU: 'WE HAVE DEPRIVED HEZBOLLAH OF ITS ATTACK TUNNELS':** Israel's PM Netanyahu on Tues. 25 Dec. 2018 toured the area on the northern border where the IDF has carried out Operation Northern Shield together with the other members of the Political Security Cabinet. The ministers heard reports of the progress of Operation Northern Shield and the situation in Syria from the chief of staff, the commander of the Northern Command and other senior officers. At the end of the tour, the prime minister said: "The IDF presented us with its actions regarding the neutralization of the tunnels. This operation is almost entirely behind us." Netanyahu added, "There is an extraordinary job here that has deprived Hezbollah of its use of weapon's tunnels." Education Minister Bennett wrote on Twitter after the tour: "We had a thorough tour of Operation Northern Shield in the north. The direction is good, the forces understand the mission well, and we have to be creative and proactive in order to reduce Hezbollah's capabilities."

**SUSPECTED ISRAELI AIRSTRIKE ROCKS DAMASCUS AIRPORT, HITS HEZBOLLAH TERRORIST LEADERS:** A series of explosions rocked Damascus on Tue. night 25 Dec. 2018 as Israel allegedly hit Hezbollah and Iranian targets. A USA Defense Department official said Israeli sources had told him that a number of senior Hezbollah leaders were targeted as they boarded a plane for Iran. Also struck were strategic Iranian supplies to Hezbollah, including advanced GPS components for use in the many, many missiles that the Lebanese terror group has aimed at Israel. The Syrians said they had downed a number of aircraft, but there were no reports of any Israeli planes being hit. One Syrian air defense missile entered Israeli airspace, triggering Israel's air defenses. The IDF reported that the threat had been neutralized, but did not provide specifics. If Israel was indeed behind the airstrike, which Israel has neither denied nor confirmed, it was a clear message to Syria, Iran and Russia that the Jewish state would continue to take decisive action against threats to its northern border despite the recent installation of advanced Russian anti-aircraft systems in the war-torn country.

**2,000-YEAR-OLD RING DISCOVERED IN JERUSALEM'S CITY OF DAVID:** A two-thousand-year-old ring with a single gem stone was uncovered in archaeological excavations in the City of David National Park in Jerusalem. The ring was found by archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority in an ancient mikveh (ritual bath) on the Pilgrimage Road which dates back to the time of the second Temple period.

According to one Authority source: "Just like today, it would appear that in the past, rings and jewelry were removed before bathing, and sometimes forgotten. This phenomenon, perhaps, is behind the discovery of the ring. This ring allows us to personally connect with an individual's personal story from 2,000 years ago." The City of David is Israel's largest active archaeological site, situated upon the ancient city of Jerusalem. It is the place recorded in the Bible upon which King David established Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel 3,000 years ago, and which remained the seat of the Davidic dynasty for centuries thereafter. The City of David is an Israeli National Heritage Site with over half-a-million visitors annually where some of the most compelling personalities and seminal events of the Biblical period unfolded.



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