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2 Kislev 5773

**Message to UK Christian leaders from H.E. Daniel Taub,
Ambassador of the State of Israel to the UK**

Thank you to all those of you who have contacted our embassy to express your solidarity with the people of Israel during recent events. Your support is truly appreciated, as is the important guidance and context you give your congregants, helping them make sense of the complex developments in our region.

In that spirit, let me share some thoughts with you about the latest events. Israel's operation in Gaza this week did not come in a vacuum. Last week, on the Jewish Sabbath, for the third time in a month, the civilians of southern Israel came under attack from the Gaza strip. An anti-tank missile was fired at an army jeep on the Israeli side of the border fence, injuring four IDF soldiers. Following that over 120 rockets were fired at Israeli civilians.

The practical impact of such attacks is that over one million Israelis find themselves within range of rocket fire and have to live their lives within 15 -30 seconds of the closest bomb shelter in case the siren sounds. Children spend extended periods not able to attend schools and grow up experiencing the trauma of life in the danger zone. Operation Pillar of Defense is a defensive operation to remove this threat to Israel's civilians. In a series of carefully planned strikes, Israel dealt a serious blow to the Hamas terrorist organisation, including successfully targeting its military leadership, and carrying out precise strikes against missile and ammunition sites. Israel succeeded in putting out of action a large proportion of the stocks of Iranian made Fajar long-range missiles, which have now reached as far as the suburbs of Tel Aviv.

The lethal nature of these missiles was brought home by the rocket attack on a home in Kiriath Malachi, which took the lives of three Israelis. Hamas not only directs its missile attacks against civilians but it also hides its stockpiles and missile launchers behind Palestinian civilians. This creates a complex challenge for Israel, which has to defend its citizens while doing its utmost to avoid injuring the innocent Palestinians being used as shields by the terrorists. Israel devotes enormous effort to these challenges. These include using, where possible, the Israeli developed 'iron dome' technology to intercept rockets in flight, and also dropping thousands of leaflets and making tens of thousands of phone calls, urging Palestinian civilians to leave areas of Hamas activity for their own safety.

This operation is taking place after years of restraint, and is intended only to ensure that Israeli citizens can live in peace and quiet. Israel, you will recall, withdrew all its 9000 citizens from the Gaza strip, along with their homes, schools and synagogues, in order to give the Palestinians the opportunity of establishing their independence.

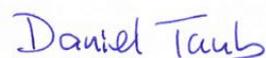
Tragically, Hamas took control and, instead of building a productive society, trashed the greenhouses and facilities Israel left behind, made life exceptionally difficult for Christians living in Gaza, and waged a war of rockets and missiles against Israel. Over time the threat has escalated, and the range of the missiles has extended as more sophisticated weapons have been smuggled into Gaza from Sudan, Libya and Iran. It is Israel's fervent hope that this operation will remove this threat, and enable the citizens of southern Israel to live without fear.

This week's Torah portion focuses on one of the forefathers, Isaac. Of the three forefathers Isaac is associated by the rabbis with the quality of 'gevura', courage. The act which leads the rabbis to associate this quality with him is found in this week's reading - the fact that Isaac redug the wells originally dug by his father Abraham. Courage, say the rabbis, consists less of pursuing our own ambitions and more of securing the achievements of our forefathers.

In many ways, this generation of Israelis parallels that of Isaac. The dramatic events surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel were brought about by a remarkable generation, which this one can only look up at with awe. But that battle is sadly not over, and it falls to the people of Israel today, with the help of its supporters, to redig those wells, and to continue the battle to ensure the lasting security of the State of Israel.

Thank you once again for your support and your prayers at this time.

B'shalom,



Daniel Taub