

# Israel News Desk

with BPF Secretary Steve Lloyd  
February 2018

It is with some intrepidation that I follow in the well worn shoes of David Hoyle in writing this edition of News from Israel. David is taking a back seat role after keeping us all updated with what is happening in Israel and to Israel for many years.

January saw National Holocaust Day and it was so good to see so many people, especially on facebook posting their "I remember" selfies. Despite those who would say it never happened, we must keep this memorial alive so that no one forgets the awful atrocities of the past.

With the whole of Europe being deluged with refugees from Africa and the Middle East, once again Israel is being singled out for its stand on its dealings with the vast numbers of refugees, mainly from Eritrea who are swamping the tiny country. When there were just 100's coming to Israel they were welcomed and given jobs but now it has gone into the thousands and Israel cannot cope. It has begun the deportation of these refugees through secret negotiations with Uganda and other African countries who are willing to take them, along with a £3500 cash payout. The TV News station Al Jazerra was quick to show its bias against Israel for its actions, which are not illegal.

Despite its own problems with the weather recently, Israel has again been sending aid and rescue teams around the world. Over the festive period 40 volunteers from the Israeli recovery and rescue organisation ZAKA helped with clean up and relief efforts after storms ripped through homes in Johannesburg, South Africa. ZAKA also assisted with operations over the same period in France, Costa Rica, Ukraine and Russia.

The IDF has destroyed another Hamas terror tunnel that stretched from the Gaza Strip, through Israel and into Egypt. The mile-long tunnel ran past Israel military posts as well as gas and fuel lines. It also went underneath the Kerem Shalom border crossing - Gaza's main point of entry for humanitarian aid.

UN - Following President Trump's declaration to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, the UN was quick to denounce his actions. Only a few small nations backed his move. The UK, one of the United States closest allies also denounced the move. Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci said his mainly Muslim nation would have voted with America against the UN resolution condemning Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital. He told the Albanian newspaper 'Express' that if Kosovo achieved full UN membership, it would vote "all the time" with America.

USA - President Trump has been as good as his word - and slashed aid to the Palestinians by half. America will still give a UN Agency \$60 million for Palestinians...but will withhold another \$65 Million for 'future consideration'. The decision is likely to compound the difficulty in reviving peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians and to further undermine Arabs faith that America can act as an impartial arbitrator. Trump's aim is to Force Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas to the table to thrash out a peace deal with Israel.

Mike Pence the Vice President kicked off his recent visit to Israel by telling Prime Minister Netanyahu that it was an "honour to be in Israel's capital, Jerusalem". It was the first time a visiting dignitary had been able to utter those words with Mr Netanyahu. The Vice President added that he was hopeful "we are at the dawn of a new era of renewed discussions to achieve a peaceful resolution to a decades-long conflict. Pence told the Knesset that the US embassy would move to Jerusalem no later than the end of next year.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has denied a Jewish connection to Israel in a rambling, invective-filled, fiery speech to the Palestinian Leadership. "Israel is a colonial project that has nothing to do with Jews" he said. He also pronounced the peace process as dead and accused Israel of killing it. In reply whilst travelling in India, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Abbas had "torn off the mask" and exposed what he called "the truth". "For too long, the Palestinian Authority has been pampered by the International community, which did not dare to tell them the truth, that has changed, for the first time, someone is telling him the truth to his face".

India - India's leader, Narendra Modi gave Prime Minister Netanyahu and his wife a very warm welcome on their 6 day visit in January. The Indian Prime Minister insisted on being on the tarmac when the El Al plane touched down, breaking the original plans and protocol - something he had only done before for Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The two leaders signed 9 key deals in areas like defence, agriculture, aviation, cyber-defence, security and science. Modi even tweeted in Hebrew and used a Hebrew greeting when they met for 2 hours of talks.

UK - Labour Friends of Israel chairman Joan Ryan secured a recent Commons debate to proscribe Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. Labour urged its MPs not to outlaw the terror group Hezbollah. It advised them that an outright ban could harm Middle East Peace talks. Slamming the decision Labour MP Louise Ellman said "I am concerned that the Labour Party does not appear to recognise the terrorist and anti-Semitic nature of Hezbollah". She went on "This organisation's activists are inciting hatred on the streets of London and the Police have not taken any action against them. This is no time for equivocation - it is time to recognise that Hezbollah should be banned in its entirety"

The UK branch of Amnesty International caused anger when they cancelled a Jewish Leadership Council meeting that was due to be held at their London offices at the last minute.

JLC Chairman Jonathan Goldstein said the action was 'disgraceful'.

Amnesty claimed they could not "upset their partners" by entertaining people who were opposed to their anti-Israel policies. Mr Goldstein said "It is disgraceful that a Jewish Charity is being barred from Amnesty International UK Offices. For a long time the Anglo-Jewish community has been deeply disappointed by Amnesty International UK's approach to Israel and the Jewish community, yet, despite this, the JLC had continually sought positive engagement." he added that by withdrawing the offer to host the event, it was clear that Amnesty's claim "to protect freedom of expression" was only on their terms".

Russia - Putin may face a Jewish rival. Grigory Yavlinsky, a Jewish liberal politician, is emerging as the main presidential challenger to the powerful Vladimir Putin. He has submitted the required 100,000 signatures required to enter the presidential race in March. At the age of 65, a co-founder of the Yabloko party now has the chance of rallying the fractious opposition behind him following the disqualification of Alexai Navalny, who was the only other recognised opposition. Watch this space.

Winter Olympics - Israel's delegation to the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, will number 10 athletes, doubling the country's previous high. Seven will take part in the figure skating and one in the Skeleton, the other two will take part in speed skating and alpine skiing.

Keep praying for Israel, for the peace of Jerusalem and for the salvation of the Jewish people.

Maranatha

Steve