

GRAPEVINE
• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ THE RECENT celebrations of the 125th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress, held in Basel last month received widespread media coverage, but most reports failed to note the important gathering of several hundred Christians in the same venue of the Stadtcasino hall to kick off the three days of observances with a conference highlighting the Christian role in Israel's modern-day restoration.

The Swiss branch of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, led by ICEJ-Switzerland national director René Emmenegger, arranged the Christian gathering, which was held on Sunday, August 28, just before the hall was handed over to the World Zionist Organization.

The ICEJ conference featured an array of Christian and Jewish leaders and scholars, including representatives from both the mainline and free churches, which presented a powerful message of Christian support and friendship to the Jewish State.

ICEJ President Dr. Jürgen Bühler opened the conference and several scholars spoke on Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement. ICEJ Vice President of International Affairs Dr. Mojmir Kallus, gave the closing address.

"Fifty-one years after the First Zionist Congress, held in this very hall in 1897, the State of Israel was miraculously born," Bühler told the gathering. "I believe you can say

today that those founding fathers of the State of Israel who met here in this hall 125 years ago, they could have never imagined what is taking place in Eretz Israel today – that Israel became the Start-Up Nation and a leader in global research and development. We are here today to celebrate what God has done with the Jewish people, and also to affirm our stand and support for the Jewish state in the years to come."

The Christian delegates issued a series of resolutions affirming their support for Israel and addressing several important current issues facing the Jewish state and people. The resolutions first highlighted the remarkable successes of the Zionist movement over the decades, most notably the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948, but also that these successes came at a great cost and in particular with the Holocaust. The delegates also affirmed the historic Seelisberg Declaration of 1947, issued by prominent Christian and Jewish leaders also meeting in Switzerland in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, which sought to enlist Christians more fully in the fight against antisemitism and to create a new foundation for Jewish-Christian dialogue going forward.

Other key resolutions adopted at the Basel conference stated:

"We affirm the reborn nation of Israel today as evidence of God's faithfulness to His enduring covenant relationship with the Jewish people first sealed with the Patriarch Abraham some four thousand years ago. This covenant, which predates the Christian faith by two millennia, has never been terminated and in fact it is irrevocable according to God's word. It is important for Christians to understand and respect the central place of the Land of Israel in Judaism and Jewish identity.

"We affirm that Israel's right to exist as a nation in peace and security is indisputable. This principle was duly acknowledged by the international community when recognizing the historic, pre-existing rights and claims of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the San Remo Conference of 1920, the British Mandate over Palestine approved by the League of Nations in 1922, the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, and the acceptance of Israel as a UN member state in 1949. We celebrate today this legacy of Israel taking its rightful place among the nations, which is a fulfillment of Herzl's vision of a reconstituted Jewish state serving as a safe haven for Jewish communities from the dual threats of antisemitism and assimilation.

"We affirm that antisemitism remains a prevalent threat to the Jewish people today and must be rejected and opposed by Christians everywhere."

There is a tendency among many Jews to view any sign of Christian goodwill with suspicion. It comes after centuries of discrimination, persecution and murder at the hands of Christian Jew-haters. But not all Christians hate Jews, and certainly those who believe strongly in the Bible adhere to the content of the above-mentioned affirmations, and support both the Zionist enterprise and the Jewish people.

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