

# Annual Christian Celebration of Sukkot Drawing Thousands to Jerusalem

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is welcoming more than 6,000 Christian pilgrims from up to 100 nations for its annual celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which begins Thursday evening at Jerusalem's International Convention Center.

Also called Sukkot or Feast of Booths, the Feast of Tabernacles is a biblical holiday and one of three mandated Jewish festivals to return to the temple in Jerusalem. The weeklong festivities mark Israel's largest annual tourist event and the largest solidarity mission to Israel this year, injecting an estimated \$15 million to \$18 million into the local economy.

"It is a privilege to build on the unmatched record we have established over the past three decades for Christian tourism and solidarity with Israel," says Dr. Juergen Buehler, the ICEJ's incoming executive director. "This year's gathering will again underline our message that Israel is not isolated but has millions of Christian advocates and admirers worldwide. Large delegations from some exciting new countries show this support is growing, and we all look forward to celebrating the joyous festival of Sukkot with our Jewish friends."

A number of Israeli dignitaries will address the gathering, including deputy foreign minister Daniel Ayalon, deputy minister Gila Gamliel, MK David Rotem, chairman of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, and Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Tourism Stas Misezhnikov will deliver greetings by video.

Among this year's pilgrims are large delegations from Australia, Brazil, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Norway, Russia, South Africa, Thailand and the United States.

Featured speakers this year include Angus Buchan, a South African farmer-turned-evangelist whose inspiring story is told in the book and movie, *Faith Like Potatoes*. Pastor Werner Oder, the son of a Nazi war criminal from Austria who is a Christian minister in England and an outspoken friend of Israel, will also appear.

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded during the very first public Christian celebration of the Feast in September 1980, at a time when the last remaining 13 national embassies had just left the city for Tel Aviv. In response, some 1,000 pilgrims from 40 nations decided to open a Christian Embassy in Jerusalem as an act of comfort and solidarity with the 3,000-year-old Jewish claim and connection to this city. Today, the Christian Embassy is considered the world's largest pro-Israel Christian organization, with branches in 65 nations and a reach into over 130 nations around the globe.