

Christians Show Solidarity With Israel on Capitol Hill

Thousands of Christians met in Washington, D.C., this week to do what some say the Obama administration has been reluctant to do: stand unwaveringly with Israel.

Roughly 4,500 people gathered for the fifth annual Christians United for Israel (CUFI) Washington Summit, where they lobbied lawmakers to maintain the nation's historic support for Israel and declared their solidarity with the Jewish state. The three-day event ended Thursday.

"Israel's enemies are our enemies; Israel's fight is our fight," CUFI founder John Hagee (pictured) told the crowd at the Night to Honor Israel event Wednesday. "If a line has to be drawn, then let it be drawn around both of us: Christians and Jews, Americans and Israelis."

On Capitol Hill Thursday, summit participants thanked members of Congress who helped pass Iran sanctions last month and who defended Israel in May against criticism of its raid on a Turkish flotilla seeking to break the Gaza blockade. But they also urged lawmakers to press the Obama administration to enforce the Iran sanctions and ease up on calls for Israel to make concessions in the Middle East peace process.

"Israel's not the problem in the Middle East," said CUFI Executive Director David Brog. "The Arab rejection of a Jewish state anywhere in the Middle East is really the problem and the source of the conflict."

"We think the administration should ... push the Arab states and entities to recognize Israel and be willing to live in peace with Israel, then we might see a changed dynamic that can bring peace," he added.

Brog said many Jewish leaders remain concerned that the Obama administration is wavering in its support for Israel, a theme that surfaced during the summit's Middle East briefing Wednesday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the meeting via satellite.

"Beyond the threats from Israel's enemies, there was also a concern expressed about Israel's friends, in particular the United States, concern that perhaps we're seeing daylight between the United States and Israel for the first time," Brog said of the briefing. "Speaker after speaker had some criticism for the administration that when there is this distance between Israel and the United States, it doesn't help further the peace process. It only emboldens Israel's enemies."

Participants said one of the most moving aspects of the summit was an art exhibit remembering the Holocaust created by students from the K-12 Christian school run by Word of Faith Fellowship in Spindale, N.C. The poignant paintings, drawings and sculptures captured not only the horror of the Holocaust but also the hope of Israel's restoration, Brog said. (View slideshows of the students' artwork.)

"What they produced is simply amazing," Brog said. "Even students who have never really been artists [and] know very little about art produced such stunning works, works that reveal such a love of the Jewish people and such an appreciation of the horrors of the Holocaust and such a celebration of the renewal of Israel. Everyone who went there, including Holocaust survivors, were deeply, deeply touched."

This year's Washington summit drew the largest participation in CUFI's short history and showed the growing strength of pro-Israel Christian activism, Brog said. He reports that CUFI membership has grown from 9,000 the first year to 300,000 in 2009 to 428,000 today.

“More and more people are understanding that CUFI is the umbrella for pro-Israel Christian activism in America,” Brog said. “We’re coming together. We’re finding each other. In finding each other there are not only numbers—we had more people than ever before with us despite the bad economy—but in coming together there’s real strength, and we saw that strength on display.”

“It was very encouraging,” he added. “I think everyone very much had the sense that ours is an organization and a movement that has not only grown rapidly, but our growth is only just beginning.”