

Global Christian Media Personalities Reflect on Israel's Christian Media Summit

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Last month, Israel's Government Press Office hosted the sixth Christian Media Summit in Jerusalem, the first one in person since 2019. More than 150 participants came from dozens of nations, some for the first time, and many for the first time in more than three years

In a recent conversation on the Inspiration from Zion podcast, a diverse group spoke about their experiences and how and why it was an important event:

Felicia Ferreira is CEO and Editor in Chief of Dagen, a Christian Swedish publication. Her experience as a first timer at the Summit was unique coming from a very secular country where a small percent even believe in God. When asked to speak at one of the Summit's plenaries, she was mindful and grateful to bring in a European perspective. Ferreira was "super impressed" coming from Europe to be able to participate in a government sponsored Christian media summit, not something to take for granted.

Elise Allen covers the Vatican in Rome for Crux, one of the Catholic media outlets to participate. Among other aspects of covering the Vatican internally, she also focuses on the Vatican's interaction with other faith communities. It was only her second visit to Israel, and first Christian Media Summit.

Her previous trip was covering Pope Francis' visit in 2014

which primarily reported on Israel through the lens of his visit. She called the Summit “eye opening,” enjoying the experience overall, including many interesting site visits and conversations. Because the Catholic church has a distinct hierarchy, and the Vatican representing the intersection of faith and an independent state, she related to Israel on that level as well as the Jewish state.

Risto Huvila is Chair of the Finland-Israel Friendship Association, Vice Chair of the Finnish Holocaust Association, and Secretary of the Finnish parliamentary group against anti-Semitism, the only such group in the entire EU. He writes widely in Finland and Israel’s Anglo press, and is a Summit veteran. Huvila noted that this was a deeper experience than previous Summits, especially the visit Israel’s Gaza border communities. He noted that most people visit Jerusalem and the holy sites, but expressed how seeing Gaza border communities changes one’s perspective, even for someone as aware and engaged with Israel as he is. Seeing the actual threats and not how it’s reported in their local news, Huvila called it “powerful” to understand how people live given the daily threat of rockets and terror.

Johnny Kim from Seoul, Korea, is with the Global Christian Network, a 24/7 Christian TV channel. Not only was he not a first timer, when asked to pray at an event with Jerusalem’s mayor as the guest speaker, Kim sang a moving rendition of “Jerusalem of Gold,” in Hebrew. Kim echoed the experiences visiting Israel’s Gaza border communities, speaking of their “resilience,” given the threats and that the residents have as little as 15 seconds warning when terrorists fire rockets. Kim brought a unique perspective, addressing the Korean parallel with having a dangerous border with North Korea, which also has tunnels like the Gaza terror tunnels. Mindful of this, Kim noted that when he was at the Gaza border, he prayed for “the civilians to live in peace.”

Indeed, one of the highlights for all participants was the

excursion to the Gaza border area. Ferreira noted it was “impressive and generous how Jews living on the border acknowledged that the Palestinian Arabs in Gaza are suffering there, (being) caught in the middle, but want nothing more than for peace and for them to succeed as well. Ordinary Jewish person after Jewish person said that (they wanted to build their own) country, but also want to help (their) neighbors, even though they are at war with us and even though they are trying to kill us. These were not PR spokesmen but real people.” She observed that, “You’ll hear (this) wherever you go in Israel from regular people.”

Allen added that the visit to the Gaza area was striking, especially seeing the protected playgrounds where climbing toys are made of concrete to protect the children who play there from terrorist rockets. On the same day as the visit to the Gaza border communities, Summit participants visited an IDF training base and learned about the army’s ethical code and how they operate. Allen noted that “nothing is as valuable to be there and see yourself.”

Another important take-away the participants shared was the importance of connecting young Christians with Israel. Huvila observed that its “not enough just to read the Bible for youth, but we need to provide political and historical facts and context. My concern is that we are losing the younger generation.”

This was also a theme of Ferreira’s speech during the Summit. “The new generations growing up in the church do not have the same connection to Israel. New generations will ask why (have a connection to Israel).” She cautioned about providing accurate details and not “over-romanticizing Israel.” Based on her reporting from the Summit, she received an email from a priest, asking how her honest comments were received, having noted that the younger generation wants to connect with Israel but also has compassion for the Palestinian Arabs. It’s not strange to combine these thoughts for a younger generation,

(but explain that) it's OK to support Israel and have compassion for the Palestinians."

Reaching the younger generation came up at the closing session when participants' feedback was welcomed. Kim spoke of this as an imperative, and the need to harness digital media to reach younger people.

❌ Another big takeaway was the understanding of nuance and perspectives of "the conflict." Ferreira noted that Israel is so much more than the conflict, but it's "normal" to keep circling back to it. Allen added that "understanding the conflict is conversations need to be nuanced, not black and white. Tying to incorporate the nuance is going to be a big thing" in her reporting. {eo}

God rested after six days, but one thing is clear from the perspective of these journalists and others, the sixth Christian Media Summit should not be a completion but a jumping off point to more in the future. {eo}

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Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation, which builds bridges between Jews and Christians. Hear and understand more about this subject, including the backstory on the *Inspiration from Zion* podcast.