

Israeli Interior Ministry Apologizes to Christian Zionist Groups, Will Resume Issuing Clergy Visas for Their Staffs

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JERUSALEM, ISRAEL – A tense and frustrating stand-off between the Israeli Ministry of Interior and three Christian Zionist groups based here has finally been resolved positively.

In August, ALL ISRAEL NEWS reported that the Interior Ministry had “suddenly turned against pro-Israel Evangelical organizations that are operating in the country and is threatening to cripple their important work.”

“Specifically, the Ministry of Interior—currently led by Minister Moshe Arbel, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi and Knesset Member who is part of the religious Shas political party—has stopped issuing clergy visas for staff working at the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) and similar Christian Zionist groups,” we noted.

That said, we noted that it was not clear whether the problem was coming from the top or from middle level bureaucrats in the department, operating on their biases.

After trying to resolve the situation behind the scenes for more than a year, one organization—the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem—decided to go public, hoping to alert and thus move senior government officials to intervene to resolve the standoff.

Dr. Juergen Buehler, president of the ICEJ, told ALL ISRAEL NEWS that “the situation we face at the moment with the Ministry of Interior is unprecedented. It has made us unable to operate effectively in our mission to stand and support the State of Israel.”

Fortunately, the problem finally has been resolved.

“The Meeting Could Not Have Been Better”

Eyal Siso, the new director general of the Population Administration within the Ministry of Interior, met this week with senior leaders of three leading global Christian Zionist organizations based in Israel.

Also in the meeting was Calev Myers, the groups’ legal counsel.

“The meeting could not have been better,” Myers told ALL ISRAEL NEWS in a phone interview on Thursday.

“The director general reiterated several times throughout the meeting how appreciative Israel is to these Christian Zionist organizations and how important they are to the government of Israel and the diplomatic work and standing around the world,” Myers said.

“He also apologized several times that the organizations felt that the government had changed its policies and making the attainment of visas for them more difficult,” Myers noted, quoting the director general as telling the groups, “We appreciate you. We’re sorry. What can we do for you?”

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“I’m very happy that the government clarified its position and has decided to keep the status quo which is beneficial for these Evangelical organizations, which are Israel’s best

advocates around the world,” Myers added.

Christian Zionist Groups Grateful Impasse Has Been Resolved Without a Court Battle

“Mr. Siso assured the representatives from the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Bridges For Peace and Christian Friends of Israel that there is no change in the policy of the State of Israel regarding the Christian Zionist organizations, adding that their presence in the country is warmly welcomed and their support for Israel is appreciated,” noted David Parsons, vice president of ICEJ, in a late afternoon press release on Thursday.

“It was agreed that the prior understanding from 2020 concerning visas available to the three Christian organizations would be upheld by the Ministry of Interior until any new regulations are approved that will meet the long-term staffing needs of the organizations,” Parsons noted.

The press release echoed the encouragement Myers felt from the meeting.

“The Christian organizations expressed their gratitude to Mr. Siso for the clarifications and the very positive attitude towards their work on Israel’s behalf.”

The groups were considering taking the Interior Ministry to court for violating written agreements giving them an annual quota of clergy visas.

The resolution of the matter, fortunately, means legal action won’t be necessary. {eoa}

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