

Jews and Christians Partner to Rescue Destitute Holocaust Survivors From Horrors of Ukraine

While most Jews fleeing the war in Ukraine have made it out on their own, several Holocaust survivors have needed help safely reaching neighboring countries on their way to Israel.

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) has been especially concerned for the elderly Holocaust survivors in Ukraine, who have already seen enough horrors and wars in their lives, and is working with an Israeli partner on the ground in Ukraine to extract them and bring them safely home to Israel.

The evacuation team includes Israeli and local volunteers who have been making long and dangerous journeys across Ukraine to locate and rescue Holocaust survivors living in cities under constant shelling like Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Dnipro and Mariupol. Many have been hunkered down in their homes for weeks, hungry and fearing for their lives.

One by one they are being picked up and brought to safer areas in western Ukraine. Each rescue mission from Lviv takes up to four days of driving round-trip and involves navigating numerous checkpoints, roadside wreckage, and rockets raining from above.

Most of these Holocaust survivors are now in their 80s and 90s and need wheelchairs or walkers to get around. With ICEJ funding, the rescue teams have hired specially equipped vans, ambulances and even stretchers to transport these disabled evacuees. Family members are usually there to help them say goodbye to homes they have lived in their whole lives. Some

close family then joins them in Israel.

Stories of Survival

Russian troops outside Kyiv forced Lilya Vladirovna, nearly 80 years old, to finally leave the home where she was born during World War II. The elderly Jewish woman had been locked up in her house alone for over two weeks as the capital city was slowly besieged. She was almost out of food and, due to difficulty walking, had trouble reaching a safer place in her apartment building every time the sirens wailed – which was many times a day.

“From the moment the fighting started, I did not leave the house because that is what we were ordered to do,” Lilya told the Israeli news site *Ynet*. “Every time I heard the alarms, I ran to the stairwell and heard the sound of explosions.”

Her son was looking for a way to get her out to safety and learned of the ICEJ-sponsored rescue team. They picked her up and took her to Lviv, where she was grateful to finally be safe, and headed for Israel.

“I was born in Kyiv when the city was constantly bombed by the Germans,” she added. “In my life, I never thought the Russian people would attack Ukraine. Now I feel like history repeats itself and even worse.”

The team also managed to extricate Holocaust survivors Samuel (94) and Mila Chiporniak (93) from Mariupol, where thousands of civilians have reportedly died in the incessant Russian bombing of the city. After reaching Lviv, Mila choked back tears when she spoke to an Israeli reporter with *Maariv* about her ordeal.

“I have no words to express my gratitude. I do not know how these angels from heaven suddenly came to us; I do not know them at all. It is obvious how they risked themselves under heavy fire,” she said. “I thank God for sending me these

rescuers.”

Firsthand Accounts

For over a decade now, the ICEJ has worked with our Israeli partner Shimon Sabag to care for needy Holocaust survivors in Israel. In the weeks before the war, Shimon was already in Ukraine preparing to help aging Holocaust survivors there. He quickly shifted to rescuing survivors from the worst-hit areas – and the ICEJ stepped in to sponsor the effort.

“You do not see it fully on television, but some of these cities are completely leveled,” Shimon told a recent ICEJ webinar audience. “When we got to Mariupol, there was no water, no electricity, no heat. It was -4 degrees, and we saw crowds of people shivering in the cold. But when we extracted the Holocaust survivors, it was an incredible feeling. I have worked with the Christian Embassy for 13 years now, and you guys do a great job. And make no mistake, together we rescued these people from certain death.”

“Many times, we have been under fire,” he added. “Some rockets have hit within 200 meters of us. Yet despite our fears, we did not flinch and felt God protecting us.”

On one rescue mission, the team went into the southern port city of Kherson and brought out several Holocaust survivors just three hours before Russian forces captured the bridge they crossed to enter the city.

They also went to Kyiv to bring out a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor with a serious heart condition and took her to the Israeli field hospital set up near Lviv, where they could diagnose her condition and save her life.

Sabag added that his rescue team is now known across Ukraine. Their daring efforts have even caught the attention of the Israeli and foreign press, with Reuters, BBC, NBC, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Maariv*, *Israel Hayom*, and Israeli TV Channels 12 and

13 reporting on their exploits. Israeli officials also have taken notice.

“I want to thank all our friends at the Christian Embassy for your support, prayers and donations, [and] for helping us bring more Jews from Ukraine to Israel,” said Ambassador Danny Danon, Israel’s former representative to the United Nations, in a special video message.

So far, our joint rescue efforts have extracted almost 90 Holocaust survivors – and counting – from dangerous locations all over Ukraine and brought them to Israel. Next comes the important task of settling them in homes and care facilities where their special needs can be met. No doubt, several will be received into the ICEJ’s unique Home for Holocaust Survivors in Haifa. {eoa}

*The **International Christian Embassy Jerusalem** represents millions of Christians, churches and denominations to the nation and people of Israel. Get involved in our Ukraine rescue efforts and/or our Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors.*

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