

Will God Curse Africa or Bless It?

I just returned home to Israel after an extraordinary 10-day trip in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, a massive country in central Africa. I had always wanted to visit Africa but until several months ago, Congo was not on my top 10 list, or even on my radar.

I visited in the context of my work as President of the Genesis 123 Foundation which builds bridges between Jews and Christians, and Christians with Israel in ways that are new, unique and meaningful. Most Israeli Jews like myself who engage in building bridges between Jews and Christians do so in North America.

Partly, that's where the money is, partly the language and common Judeo-Christian culture are familiar and partly Israel is western and looking to the west is natural.

Part of our efforts, however, face south. Through managing an incredible WhatsApp group of Christians throughout Africa, "Africa Praying for Israel," I have established strong relationships and deep friendships. I experience genuine love and support for Israel and the Jewish people, often from people for whom I am the first Jew they have ever met, albeit in most cases virtually.

Congo is unique. It's the second largest country in Africa in size, the fourth largest in terms of population and it's 90% Christian. As a Christian nation whose president, Félix Tshisekedi, is both a devout Christian and ardent Zionist, support and love for Israel is palpable from the top down.

It's why I visited when I did. President Tshisekedi served as head of the African Union where he advocated for Israel to return to the AU as an observer, meeting fierce resistance

from Islamic and anti-Semitic countries.

My visit took place a week before the AU vote on Israel's status, hosted by Congo Bless Israel. We were received by the Senate President, and dozens of governmental, ministerial, religious and business leaders. Throughout the trip, everywhere I went, I experienced overwhelming love and support for Israel and the Jewish people.

Our purpose was to widen and deepen relationships, support President Tshisekedi and the other Congolese and African leaders supporting Israel, and pray and advocate for Israel in the AU, raising Congo as an example not just for Africa but the world.

It's not to be taken for granted that throughout my visit I walked openly as an Orthodox Jew everywhere. It's common when traveling in (many) parts of the world where Jews are not as welcome, or where it's outright dangerous, for Jewish men to hide their identity by covering up their kippa with a baseball hat, and removing or hiding other religious symbols.

That's hard for non-Jews who love Israel to understand. Throughout Kinshasa, complete strangers came up to me multiple times, telling me "Shalom," how they love Israel, asking to take a selfie. Amazingly, people sell Israeli flags on the street alongside the Congolese flag. It's something I have never experienced and wouldn't happen if the love wasn't sincere (and it was good business).

Israel and the Jewish people have a long history in Africa from Abraham, Joseph, Jacob and Solomon, to more recent expressions of support for meaningful relations from Theodor Herzl, Golda Meir and massive amounts of Israeli support for many of the newly independent nations in Africa, emerging from colonialism within years of Israel's declaring independence.

The recent establishment of diplomatic relationships with Morocco, Chad and Sudan are also important. I reminded many

people that another significant, yet unfulfilled vision was the British idea to create a Jewish state in Uganda, 120 years ago. Fortunately, we didn't become neighbors that way, but it's another pillar of a long relationship that continues to blossom.

Many Congolese not only believe that Israel has an important role in Congo, and Congo needs and wants to have an expansive relationship with Israel, but that part of the reason Congo is "cursed" as such a poor and largely undeveloped nation, rests on Congo breaking relations with Israel following Arab League pressure in the 1970s.

On one hand, Congo is so big and abundant with resources, yet these are largely undeveloped, the lack of basic infrastructure is jarring and there are provinces with millions having virtually no fresh water or electricity. Poverty is widespread. People refer to "Rich Congo, Poor Congolese." Nevertheless, Congo is a beautiful, colorful and lively nation. There's a great sense of national pride evident by flags being sold on street corners (not just around independence day), to singing joyful songs about their country as part of church worship services.

Congo is an important leader in Africa, and ally of Israel. There's a sense that the time is ripe for relations to blossom. Many noted that the Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis and Lebanese who are so present are there to reap from Congo's mineral wealth, but not to invest.

Israel on the other hand, brings resources that will build Congo, not rape it. Israel would be well served to reopen its embassy in Kinshasa, where one in five Congolese live.

During my visit, as part of our wider "Africa Praying for Israel" initiative, I hosted a virtual Africa-wide prayer event, regarding Israel's status as an AU observer member. Dozens participated from nations throughout Africa, offering

fervent prayers each from their local perspective and in several languages reflecting their former western colonizers.

Much of the prayers focused on blessing Israel and being blessed. Relating to the diplomatic vote at the AU, one pastor noted that “Blessings come from blessing Israel” and referred to Genesis 12:3 as “God’s foreign policy statement.”

Participants from South Africa and Nigeria expressed sadness and repented from their nations’ taking the lead in opposing Israel. They prayed for God to forgive their leaders, for not understanding the truth, for wisdom for African leadership and governments and to remove the stain which many label Israel an apartheid state.

 Since the leadership of Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, Israel’s status in the AU has been a battle. They are set to vote on a wide agenda of items including Israel’s status from February 18-19.

Prayers are encouraged and can be sent to Gen123Fdn@ to be brought to the Western Wall as well.

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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.*