**The Scene on the Street During UN Week**

*Rallies respond to Durban III and Palestinian statehood bid; pro-Israel Christians come out in full force.*

By Masha Rifkin/JointMedia News Service

A block away from the United Nations, multiple rallies were held at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza throughout the first week of the General Assembly. They ranged from protests against China’s treatment of Tibetan nomads to the situation in the Congo, leaving the plaza rarely empty. Among the rallies were two in support of Israel.

The first, organized by the International Center for Christian Leadership, brought together a large coalition of Christian and Jewish groups on Wednesday, Sept. 21, to protest the Palestinian bid for statehood. Hundreds poured into the plaza, waving Israeli flags, holding signs, and cheering along the speakers.

Robert Stearns, director of the Eagles’ Wings ministry, gave an impassioned speech at the podium before closing the formal portion of the rally with a singing of *Hatikvah*, Israel’s national anthem. Of the UN's disregard for Israel's rights and global human rights, he said “the sin of silence of the church of Europe in the 30s will not be repeated on our watch.”

“We are here unified by one overwhelming fact—our support for the only viable democracy in the Middle East, the state of Israel,” Stearns continued.

Pastor Ben Agdani, originally from the Philippines, told JointMedia News Service he has prayed for Israel every day for 11 years, and even holds a monthly prayer rally for Jerusalem. He expressed disappointment “in American leadership trying to marginalize Israel.”

Madan Das, a Nepali Fulbright scholar and retired member of the government of Nepal, came to the rally with the Seat of Abraham, a messianic church, in order to show his support. “I have studied about Israel,” Das said, “how they are suffering, improving, and if I can do something for them, I should.”

Phoebe, who now goes by her chosen Hebrew name Puvi, was one of the most colorful participants at the rally. A petite Asian woman, she stood off to the side waving an enormous Israeli flag, conversing with passersby, educating them about Judaism, even speaking in Hebrew with those who could keep up.

Her voice broke slightly as she mentioned the IDF, “Young people have to risk their lives, because they happen to be God’s chosen people,” she continued, “Netanyahu is just a man, we have to pray for him.”

New York City resident Samuel Bahn was also at the rally on an educational mission. He handed out flyers explaining that the recent “Be on Our Side” campaign—which placed 25 advertisements in 18 subway stations asking to “End U.S. military aid to Israel”—violates three of the Metropolitan Transit Authority's (MTA) 18 standards. The ads were “false and deceptive” because they equated peace with justice, “patently offensive and improper” for suggesting the withholding of aid Israel needs to defend itself against rocket and other terror attacks, and demeaning to the majority of a “national origin” (Israelis in America and Israel), according to Bahn’s literature.

“I wanted to give ammunition to people who find the ads objectionable but don't know on what basis to respond,” Bahn told JointMedia News Service.

In addition to protesting the Palestinian statehood bid, the rally also served as an appeal to boycott Durban III. Organizers even housed a petition on their website, calling on the United Nations to “denounce and desist from this relentless condemnation of Israel, and restore the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance to its rightful purpose of addressing this great evil in our day.”

The next day, thousands of Iranian-Americans gathered to protest Ahmadinejad during his address to the United Nations. The crowd radiated yellow, with flags and t-shirts, the color signifying Iran's political opposition led by Maryam Rajavi. Many wore masks of Ahmadinejad, Assad, and Gaddafi. Former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge addressed the crowd, stating his support for Rajavi’s resistance group.

StandWithUs, a pro-Israel education and advocacy organization based in Los Angeles, also hosted a rally on Thursday, protesting the notoriously anti-Semitic Durban III conference. The event, entitled “Durban Three-Ring Circus of Hypocrisy,” was meant to “expose the shocking hypocrisy of the United Nations” according to a StandWithUs press release.

The rally labeled Durban as a “forum for hypocrisy, racism, and lies,” and was meant to make a visual point, with organizers handing out wigs, masks, and clown costumes to protestors.

Todd Bronshtein, a first year student at Yeshiva University who arrived early to help organize the rally, said that 1000 people were expected to attend. “There was a lot of unity,” Bronshtein said, “this common feeling that…this Arab bloc that has developed in the UN is taking advantage of its power, and Israel has been paying for it.”

“One good way to counter the Durban conference’s hypocritical travesty of human rights is with parody. Sometimes humor reveals the deepest truths… We plan to fight the UN ‘clowns’ with actual clowns that expose their hypocrisy and perversity,” explained Roz Rothstein, CEO of StandWithUs.

*—With reporting by Jacob Kamaras*