



Israel: 60 Years and Lost Lives

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

Preparations for the celebration of the State of Israel's 60-year anniversary are well under way.

Before Yom Ha'atzmaut, Independence Day, comes Yom Hazikaron, the Israeli national remembrance day for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism. Placing Yom Hazikaron on the day before Yom Ha'atzmaut is a meaningful way to recognize the fact that freedom and independence have cost – and still cost – sacrifices and lives.

The State of Israel is a democratic state, based on Jewish values. The Declaration of Independence says that the State of Israel "will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture ..."

On Yom Hazikaron, the approximately 25,000 persons killed in action or in acts of terrorism are remembered. This number corresponds to approximately half of the abortions performed in Israel every year.

Being a non-Jew, I would not dare to mention such a comparison myself. But it is part of the debate in Israel.

According to press releases, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel ruled on December 24, 2007, that abortion is "a grave sin." But not only that, this grave sin is "delaying the coming of the Messiah."

The director of the anti-abortion organization Efrat, Dr. Eli Shusheim, presented the statistical material to the Chief Rabbinate: More than 50,000 abortions are performed annually in Israel; of these only 20,000 are legal.

The same figures are posted on Efrat's web site, together with this statement: "Many of these abortions could be prevented, if only the woman was provided some basic social and financial support. Last year alone, Efrat saved the lives of 1,806 Jewish children in Israel. If we had twice our budget we could have saved twice as many children."

At the bottom of the page is the following:

Last year in an average week in Israel:

- 9 people were killed in road accidents,
- 1 Israeli was murdered by terrorists, but
- over 900 babies were lost to abortion, mainly due to economic concerns!

Similar notes are struck by Be'ad Chaim (Prolife), the Messianic Jewish anti-abortion organization in Israel. In *Mishkan* 49 (2006, p. 71), Sandy Shoshani wrote: "Estimates have been made that since 1948, over 2 million babies have been aborted in Israel ... Had those two million babies been born rather than aborted, the difficult issues of Jewish/Arab demographics would not exist."

However, the reference to demographics will hardly make supporters of abortion change their minds, and secular Jews who do not live in the hope of the coming of the Messiah will scarcely heed the Chief Rabbinate's warning that abortion delays his coming.

By legalizing abortion – within the limits imposed by law – the State of Israel, which otherwise is based on *Jewish* values, is like a number of states built on *Christian* values that have also legalized abortion. The State of Israel is neither better nor worse in this respect.

The figures are shocking, but it is no use ignoring reality. Whether we like it or not, abortion has somehow become a part of democracy in the Western world, the democracy we do not want to be without and which we need for a number of reasons. So, in one way or another, we are deadlocked. No matter how they may justify their decision, not many opponents of abortion – although they believe abortion is murder – would be willing to support the bill put forward in the Israeli parliament in 1997 by the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, which would allow abortion practitioners to be tried for first-degree murder.

And why would they – or we – not support that bill? Because we recognize that the world should not be ruled by theocratic thinking. The next victims might be gays and lesbians. And then Messianic Jews, with a prohibition against their activities in Israel. It is worth considering that when some have tried to limit Messianic Jews' work and freedom of speech in Israel through legislation, the Knesset has refused to pass such legislation because it would be inconsistent with the principles of democracy.

There is no indication that Western democracies, the State of Israel included, want any substantial changes in abortion legislation. Such is reality. But this does not mean that pro-life advocates should resign. Orthodox Jews, Messianic Jews, and Christians – who on this topic base their views on the same biblical values – still have a prophetic role to play. And through their efforts they save lives – not as many as they would like, but some nonetheless. And they reach out to those who once chose abortion and now live with the pain, trying to give them new hope – and new life.

As a friend of the State of Israel, I want to congratulate it on its sixty years. These congratulations do not imply blind support for all that happens in Israel, but I am glad that the State of Israel is a democracy, not a theocracy.

