

CHIEF GAINS INSIGHT FROM POLICE IN ISRAEL

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Staff Writer

News of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks make some think of Israel as a war zone, but York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge found a different reality on his trip to Israel.

"When you go into Jerusalem, despite the fact they deal with terrorist attacks on a weekly or monthly basis, life goes on as if everything was normal," explained Chief La Barge, who arrived in Israel less than a week after a nightclub bombing in Tel Aviv. "They don't want to be paralysed by fear and they don't want to allow the terrorist to rule their way of living."

Part of the reason for the mission to Israel, organized by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the province, the Canadian Jewish Congress Ontario Region and United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto, was to learn how Israeli law enforcement and the military deal with the constant threat of terrorism.

While the chief saw experts in counter-terrorism do their jobs, and was interested in a closed circuit camera system in the old city

of Jerusalem, he was most impressed by how the entire community worked to maintain public safety.

"It was amazing to see the partnerships that exist between police, ambulance, armed forces and border police. But what's really interesting is that there are 23,000 police officers in Israel and 23,000 volunteers. They're similar to our auxiliary, except they can carry firearms. They don't have the power to arrest, but they do have detention powers," he said.

"There's also private security who are licensed to be armed and their roles and responsibility are seen as being part of the community, so it's not like they're working for ABC security company, they're actually working to protect the state and the citizens themselves."

Making the community partly responsible for their own safety and protection is a great help to law enforcement, Chief La Barge added.

"It is community policing and they put a great deal of emphasis on that. In an area where terrorism is a reality, it is so critical that if you see something suspicious, you call the police.

"If you see something that just



York Regional Chief Armand La Barge spends time with Israeli officers at a juvenile correctional facility in Northern Israel March 2 during a five-day Ontario Police Chiefs mission to Israel, sponsored by UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Canadian Jewish

Congress, El Al Israel Airlines and The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. The tour was co-chaired by Ontario's Community Safety and Correctional Services Minister Monte Kwinter, Chief La Barge and CJC Ontario Region chairperson Joel Richler.

doesn't seem to fit, you call police, because you could be stopping a terrorist act or a suicide bomber," he said.

York Region has the third largest Jewish population in Canada and Chief La Barge said he has returned from Israel with a greater appreciation for their commitment to the country.

"I think it gave us some sense as to how something happening in the West Bank or Gaza or Ramallah can have an impact on our Jewish community back here in York Region," he said.

"And it does have significant impact."

Chief La Barge has always been committed to stamping out anti-Semitism, racism and hate crimes, but a visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum gave him even more insight on how even the smallest act of anti-Semitism concerns the entire Jewish community.

"You see why they become so concerned about an act of anti-Semitism because they've seen the murder of six million Jews and it started with things like that," he said.

"The approach is never again."

The delegation met with the survivor of a suicide bombing and a terrorist attack, attended lectures on the state of politics in the area and met with Palestinian authorities, giving them a true window on the troubled area and the current road map to peace in the Middle East.

"There is a high level optimism on the Israeli side, a little less from Palestinians, but there seems to be true commitment right now so we're hopeful we will see some peace in that area soon," he said.

IN BRIEF

Students celebrate elimination of discrimination

More than 500 people are expected to celebrate Markham's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at Milliken Mills High School on March 20 from noon to 5 p.m.

Food, cultural performances and display booths are part of the event.

The event is an opportunity for community partners to come together to "reaffirm our commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination, while at the same time acknowledge and celebrate the strength of our diversity," York

Regional Police Sgt. Ricky Veerapan said.

This marks the second year the event has been held.

"It will be bigger this year," he said. "We have more groups taking part. They represent multicultural, ethnic and religious groups. There will be more performances and more displays."

Indira Naidoo, an anchor person with Omni Television, is master of ceremonies. Herbert Carnegie of Future Aces Foundation and a recipient of the Order of Canada is the guest speaker.

The event is being held in partnership with the York Regional Police and Markham cultural groups.

Admission is free. Milliken Mills High is on Kennedy Road south of 14th Avenue.

Drivers escape injury in Hwy. 407 crash

Alexis Fowler was on her way to Toronto for a job interview when she saw her life flash before her eyes. "We were incredibly lucky," she said, visibly shaken, after two trucks flew across the Hwy. 407 median into oncoming traffic near Pine Valley Drive Friday morning.

"We were driving along and all I saw was this huge transport truck bounce out in front of us. Then, it was just twisting and sliding toward

us and I guess we just stopped. I didn't even know anything hit us until we got out and saw (the damage)."

The bumper of one of the trucks impaled the front grill of her severely damaged car.

"We were that close," said her husband, Trevor Fowler. "I need a beer."

Two other drivers were taken to hospital with serious injuries after their cars were hit by the truck and a second truck that also flipped over the median.

With the two trucks burrowed into the hill on the side of the highway and three mangled wrecks left in the centre of the roadway, the eastbound lanes of the toll highway

were shut down at Pine Valley and remained closed for most of the morning.

Ontario Provincial Police are still investigating how the crash began. Details on the cause and the extent of the other drivers' injuries were not available Friday afternoon.

Adult video store robber

A Markham adult video store was robbed Wednesday for the second time in the past month.

Around 9 p.m., two men entered the Adult Video Depot on Hwy. 7 and while one demanded cash and merchandise, the other showed off what appeared to be a gun tucked into his waist and fled the store.

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