

Brainpower, innovations... We love Israel
By Viva Sarah Press
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ISRAEL21c's representative at a major cancer conference in New York finds journalists and researchers in the health industry have warm words of praise for the Jewish state.



Israel was represented by ISRAEL21c at the ACS Global Journalist Fellowship in New York City.

The official reason 44 journalists and 78 cancer and tobacco control advocates, representing all the world regions, converged at the Hilton DoubleTree in New York recently was to put cancer on the [world health agenda](#).

The three-day conference, hosted by the American Cancer Society, boasted a tight schedule of workshops, seminars and UN press briefings, leaving little time for idle chitchat.

But at every conference I have attended, as soon as someone hears that I'm from Israel, there always seems to be time for conversations to take place. And this was no different.

With anti-Israeli sentiment growing all the time, coupled with headlines about the Free Gaza movement, I wrongly assumed I'd be challenged to political debates.

As ISRAEL21c was the only media organization from Israel invited to take part in the event, delegates at this conference sought me out to tell me how much they admire Israel.

Brainpower and technological advances

"In Ghana, we love Israel," Rashida Nasamu, a presenter on E.TV Ghana, told me. "Your country is a superpower. You have brainpower and technological advances."

Nasamu said that many Ghanaians even have Israeli flags to reinforce their affection for the country.

I was a bit surprised to hear this. But her comments were echoed by other Africans at the meeting.

Journalists from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda all said their populations admire Israel's technological innovations and brainpower.

What I wanted to know, however, was what the average citizen in their countries knew about Israel - if anything.

Bart Kakooza, a veteran reporter at Ugandan TV, said those who know about Israel read political stories in the media but are more interested in Israel's technologies. After all, it is the Israeli Mekorot National Water Company that is now developing Uganda's water infrastructures.



Viva Sarah Press (center right) with foreign journalists at the American Cancer Society conference in New York.

Thai journalist Jittima Jantanamalaka, managing director of JICL Media and Communication Services, said the Thai media reports on the political unrest in Israel, but added that the more educated are "very aware of Israel's brainpower."

Rambam Medical Center in Haifa recently signed an agreement with Thailand's Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI) to begin cooperation in cancer research.

The Russian journalist Alla Astakhova was also full of praise for Israeli advances. In 2005, she toured Israel as part of a science delegation. Later that year, Astakhova, an editor at Itogy national weekly magazine, won a "Best Popular Science Article" award for her piece on medical innovations in Israel.

"In Russia, we don't have the infrastructure in our research to develop the way Israel has," Astakhova told ISRAEL21c. "Israel is very impressive."

'Israel is known for its research'

But it wasn't just the journalists who were excited to talk about Israel in a positive light.

One of the Indonesian attendees, who requested that her name not be used, said that although Israel and her country have no official ties, the scientific communities work together as much as possible. "We always invite Israeli researchers to our conferences," she said. "Israel is known for its research."

Perhaps the biggest compliment, however, was Filipina breast cancer survivor Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala's tribute to Miri Ziv, director-general of the **Israel Cancer Association**.

Upon hearing that I was from Israel, Magsanoc-Alikpala appeared thrilled and asked me to help her find Ziv.

"It's thanks to you that my advocacy group in the Philippines is a success," she excitedly told Ziv, after I reintroduced them.

It turns out that she met Ziv years back at another conference, heard how Ziv put the Israel Cancer Association's awareness campaigns on the Israeli agenda, and returned home to do the same.

Magsanoc-Alikpala started the **ICANSERVE Foundation**, an advocacy group and network of breast cancer survivors that promotes early breast cancer detection through community-based screenings and high-impact information campaigns. The foundation is the only one in the Philippines conducting a comprehensive community-based breast cancer-screening program.

The conference afforded me the chance to meet people from across the globe. Whether chatting to the delegate from Samoa or the survivor from New Zealand, this was the first conference I have ever attended where the only remarks about the Israel seen in news headlines did not become a topic of discussion. Instead, people only wanted to hear about Israeli innovations and research -- and when it might be best to visit in terms of weather.