

Balance is the key to responsible reporting

VIEWPOINT

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In response to a controversial article in a Uniting Church publication, a Christian Zionist says responsible reporting on Israel requires historical and political facts from both sides. *Friday Dec. 4, 2009*

As a Christian who has just returned from a two-and-a-half week visit to Israel – including a trip to Bethlehem – I was deeply concerned to read the “Special Report on Ethical Tourism” in the November 2009 issue of *Crosslight*, published by the Uniting Church in Australia.

The posed lead picture and accompanying text of the little Palestinian boy, as well as the many one-sided pictures in the *Crosslight* report, reflect a biased perspective that completely ignores the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Of course, it is deeply saddening to see little children playing with rubber bullets and tear-gas canisters. But there are

reports that Hamas has long taught Palestinian children to hate Jews, and instructs them how to carry real weapons.

Did “responsible tourist” Kim Cain consider a visit to Sderot, to an area bombarded for the past eight years by more than 10,000 rockets that have claimed the lives of 28 Israelis? Furthermore, there have been more than 270 rocket attacks since the Gaza operation, and 6500 patient files have opened as a result of the trauma symptoms experienced by Sderot residents.

Cain writes of ordinary Palestinians “losing their houses, their lands and their hope. All lost to the Jewish extremists at the forefront of expansion into Palestine.” Is he aware of the charters, and continuing actions, of both Hamas and Fatah, that reflect a commitment to the annihilation of Israel and the Jewish people?

A passing reference to an extremist Jewish settler back in

1994, with no comment whatsoever on the untold number of Palestinian terrorists whose murderous attacks necessitated the construction of the security barrier, has no place in an article claiming to paint a “responsible” picture.

Did “responsible tourist” Kim Cain consider a visit to Sderot, in an area bombarded for the past eight years by more than 10,000 rockets?

Doesn’t Cain realise that Jesus was born and lived as a Jew, not a Palestinian? Is he aware that there has never historically been a Palestinian people until 20th century politics invented such a national identity?

A member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the leader of the al-Sa’iqa Organisation, Zahir Muhsein,

said in a 1977 interview to the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*: “The Palestinian people does not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel for our Arab unity.”

Just over a week ago, as on countless other occasions, I passed through the walled section (just five per cent of the total length) of the security barrier on my visit to Bethlehem.

Yes, there is real inconvenience because of the barrier – but the moment the Palestinian Authority seriously talks peace then that barrier will be gone.

“On the Israel side [of the separation barrier], ... every car, bus and truck is stopped and every person questioned by an armed Israeli soldier,” writes Cain. Well, I for one am glad for such security measures – despite the fact that in reality I personally have never been questioned by an armed Israeli soldier.

And if Cain is complaining that “everyone on our bus had

to get off ... because our bus had a Palestinian number-plate”, it needs to be remembered that Palestinian terrorists have used even ambulances to ferry suicide bombers into Israel.

There are so many lovely Palestinian people who are caught up in and exploited by the cynical political agendas and machinations of their own leaders.

I have met and enjoyed the company of delightful Palestinians. I really do feel for them, and especially for their children – like the eight-year-old boy in the *Crosslight* report.

But “responsible tourism” requires that historical and political facts are communicated without the appalling level of anti-Israel bias that pervades Cain’s accounts. I fear that Cain’s readers are themselves the “fair game for [his] propaganda”, rather than the tourists for whom he feels such concern.

Keith Buxton is the national director of Bridges for Peace.