



(Left) A group of dancers expressing the theme "Towards a Freer World".



A dazzling display by the Israeli Folk Dancing Group.

Sabbath service an experience to remember

The World Organisation of Jewish Deaf (WOJD) held its 5th Congress in London from 21st to 27th July. The theme was "Towards a Freer World".

The theme was particularly appropriate as, for the first time ever, Jewish Deaf people attended the Congress from East Europe including Russia and Hungary. Participants also came from Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Israel, South Africa, Sweden and the USA.

The Congress was declared open by Mr. Moshe Raviv, the Ambassador of Israel, and it was then blessed by Rabbi Jackson of the Chief Rabbi's cabinet. Among the many other distinguished speakers was Lord Jack Ashley, President of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

The papers presented during the WOJD Congress included information about Deaf Russian emigrants in Israel being given opportunities to learn Israeli Sign Language and being warmly welcomed at Deaf Clubs, and about the relationship between Deaf Israelis and Deaf Arabs in which their shared Deaf culture helps to overcome religious differences. Each paper was followed by a workshop to discuss the paper and ask questions and the main points were noted down for future reference and possible action by the WOJD.

There was a small exhibition which attracted interest from the 200 Congress participants and social events were held almost every evening, ending with the WOJD Banquet at the New Connaught Rooms.

One of the highlights of the WOJD Congress was the Sabbath service carried out by Rabbi Friedman of Baltimore, USA, who is the only qualified Deaf rabbi in the world able to carry out orthodox religious services in sign language. One of those who attended the service said: "We were able to follow the service right through - many of us were moved to tears at being able to access everything when for a long time we never had that experience. Yes, it was a day to remember!"

David Jackson was elected as the first British President of the World Organisation of Jewish Deaf. The term lasts for four years. David said: "I am expected to serve the role on a PR basis, increasing awareness of the WOJD and its aims. I will be giving a paper at the National Congress of Jewish Deaf in Chicago next July - the paper is about the experiences we had in helping Deaf people in East Europe".



Usher interpreter, Lian Dwek, communicating with Michael Conway.

Conway



David Jackson, Co-ordinator of the WOJD Congress, with two of the Russian delegates.