

NEWS AT A GLANCE

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■ **The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council named Cornell University professor Steven Katz as the new director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Katz, who is known for his writings on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, succeeds the museum's founding director, Jeshajahu Weinberg, who is retiring. [Page 1]**

■ **Israeli officials denied rumors that another soldier was kidnapped. An anonymous caller told Israel Radio that Hamas had kidnapped a soldier, and right-wing Knesset member Yosef BaGad of Moledet announced he had information on the kidnapping. But an army investigation yielded no supporting evidence. [Page 3]**

■ **A Jewish woman who was the victim of an apparent anti-Semitic attack in Italy last summer has been assaulted again. Myriam Geelmuyden, a writer from Norway, was found unconscious, with her face cut, near the doorway of her home in the central Italian town of Assisi. [Page 4]**

■ **The wife of an Israeli diplomat posted in Nigeria was killed during what appeared to be an attempted robbery. Shira Arnon reportedly was traveling with her husband, David, and another couple when their car broke down outside the Nigerian capital of Lagos. Local residents approached them, offering help, but instead stabbed them with knives.**

■ **The Chief Rabbinate Council said it will not heed a High Court of Justice order to allow a company that imports non-kosher meat to import kosher meat as well. The council said that its decisions on kosher certification will be based solely on Torah and halacha, Jewish law, not on High Court decisions.**

New museum director promotes uniqueness of the Jewish genocide

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 3 (JTA) — The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council named a new director for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum this week who is known for his position on the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Steven Katz, a 50-year-old professor of history and religion at Cornell University, will succeed founding director Jeshajahu Weinberg, 76, who is retiring.

Katz's appointment has refocused attention on the debate over the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical event. It has also raised questions over the role of a federally funded museum in promoting the particularist vs. the universalist point of view in that debate.

Katz rose to the front lines of Holocaust scholarship this year with the publication of "The Holocaust in Historical Context, Volume 1: The Holocaust and Mass Death Before the Modern Age."

The 700-page volume, first in a projected trilogy, sets out to prove the uniqueness of the Holocaust as the only true example of genocide in history through comparisons with other events of mass death.

"He is a person of vision and high abilities and great research capacity," said Rabbi Irving Greenberg, praising Katz's appointment. Greenberg was director of the 1976 presidential commission that led to the museum's founding.

Greenberg said Katz is an ideal person to help the museum continue balancing the tensions between looking at the Holocaust as uniquely Jewish and generally relevant.

"If you pursue the universal too much, you end up denying the dimension of demonic specificity against the Jews," said Greenberg. "Taken to the other extreme, it becomes so self-contained you can't learn anything from it."

"The book made him an ideal candidate for the kind of leadership this project needs, to continue to avoid becoming so particularistic that it disconnects from non-Jews, or so non-particularist it becomes tribal," he said.

Katz's election was announced Tuesday, following balloting by the 65-member U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. His was the only name submitted for the full council's approval, following a five-month search that culminated in his unanimous nomination last month by the council's search committee.

'A deep and creative thinker'

In announcing the appointment, Miles Lerman, chairman of the Memorial Council, said of Katz: "He is a deep and creative thinker, with a demonstrated understanding of both the historical and moral lessons of the Holocaust."

"His selection underscores the museum's commitment to Holocaust education at every level, including the expansion of our archives, the strengthening of the current international community of scholarship and the training of our next generation of scholars," Lerman said.

Katz will take over the directorship in March.

Since opening in April 1993, the museum has received nearly 3.5 million visitors. Sixty percent of its \$41 million annual budget comes from the federal government, with the rest coming from private donations.

In selecting Katz, the museum's search committee passed over Michael Berenbaum, currently director of the museum's research institute and a candidate for the post.

In his book, Katz argues that the uniqueness of the Holocaust does not lie in the number of deaths, or in the percentage of Jews murdered.

Instead, the Holocaust is unique, writes Katz, because "never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate every man, woman and child belonging to a specific people."

Nonetheless, he rejects the view that the Holocaust is so unique that it stands outside history and rational discussion.

Only by comparing the Holocaust to other mass tragedies, he writes, is it possible to establish its uniqueness and to comprehend it.

In the volume already published, Katz compares the Holocaust to

Roman slavery, medieval anti-Semitism, and medieval persecution of witches, homosexuals and heretics.

The second volume, which Katz hopes to publish within two years, will be much more politically charged.

Titled "Mass Death in the Modern Age," it will discuss black slavery in the New World, the decimation of native Americans and the mass killings this century in Armenia, Biafra and Cambodia.

Already, Katz has taken aim at feminists who have referred to witch hunts as "Gynocide," and books about Native Americans which refer to an "American Holocaust."

Regarding present-day events, Katz said in an interview that the killings in Bosnia are "clearly not genocide."

But he said the museum's current exhibition on Bosnia is "clearly appropriate."

"The object of the museum was to provide a kind of concern for the human condition," he said.

"The crime of the Holocaust doesn't mean that other deaths are inconsequential. When I talk of all these other events, I never intend to denigrate or reduce the suffering of others, or make improper moral comparisons. All these other events are immoral," he said.

Other historians critical

Katz's approach has drawn fire from other historians.

"If one happens to be interested in the problem of uniqueness, then I don't believe one can bypass the work done by Katz," said Raul Hilberg, author of "The Destruction of European Jews."

"The question is whether you consider uniqueness important, and whether you define uniqueness in terms of your own choosing.

"Any historical event is unique, but by the same token every historical event lacks uniqueness if you bring it into a broad context," said Hilberg, a former member of the Holocaust Council.

More critical still was David Biale, professor of Jewish history at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.

Reviewing Katz's book in the January issue of Tikkun, Biale questions its premise that it is undertaking a historical examination.

"What is the point of undertaking this enormous enterprise if it not some kind of extra-historical claim?" writes Biale.

For Biale, the need to defend the Holocaust's uniqueness is "a way of defending the particularity of Jewish identity, a new secular form of the chosenness of the Jews."

And Biale worries that "if what happened to the Jews is unique, then what kind of solidarity becomes possible with others who suffer other forms of evil?"

But Katz received strong support from at least one of the members of the Holocaust Council who has long taken the more universalist side in internal museum debates.

Father John Pawlikowski, professor of social ethics at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, said he was "in very substantial agreement with the orientation" Katz took.

Pawlikowski said he anticipated possible disagreement — when Katz reaches his third volume, covering the Nazi regime — over the role of the handicapped, the Gypsies and the Poles as planned victims of genocide.

But whatever their disagreement, said Pawlikowski, "Katz has amply demonstrated his understanding of and compassion for the many victims of human brutality throughout history." □

Who's who in the new Washington: A guide to new key committee chairs

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3 (JTA) — With Republicans in control of the gavel in both chambers of Congress for the first time in decades, a combination of familiar faces and new personalities are emerging as powerbrokers on issues of concern to the Jewish community.

The following is a list of some of the key committee chairs who will be shaping policy on issues from foreign aid to welfare reform:

- **Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.)**, a staunch supporter of Israel in recent years but an outspoken opponent of foreign aid to other nations, will serve as chairman of the Senate International Relations Committee, formerly called the Foreign Relations Committee. Helms has called the Middle East peace process a "fraud."

- **Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.)**, one of 33 Jews in the new Congress, will be Helms' counterpart in the House. Gilman has strong pro-Israel ties and has consistently championed the cause of aid to Israel. In an effort to ensure his leadership over Middle East policy in the new House, Gilman dissolved the Middle East and Europe Subcommittee. Under new Republican rules, Gilman, as chair of the House International Relations Committee, would not have been able to chair the subcommittee as well.

- **Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.)** will chair the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, which is responsible for writing the actual foreign aid spending bill. McConnell's proposal to drastically reduce foreign aid, which he unveiled last month, leaves aid to the Middle East intact.

- **Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.)**, will serve as McConnell's counterpart as chairman of the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee. Callahan, who has never voted in favor of a foreign aid bill, could pose problems for foreign assistance. But advocates here remain optimistic in light of statements by Callahan's aide that as chairman he will now "take a hard look at changing his position" on foreign aid.

- **Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.)** will rise to head the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugees, a move that many Jewish leaders fear will lead to a cut in the number of immigrants and refugees allowed into the United States each year. Simpson has advocated cutting the numbers of refugees from the former Soviet Union.

On the domestic front, the rise of many conservative lawmakers has many in the Jewish community who champion liberal causes worried.

- **Rep. Clay Shaw (R-Fla.)** will head the House Ways and Means committee responsible for welfare reform. Shaw will spearhead GOP proposals to end the entitlement status for welfare programs, which enables anyone who meets eligibility requirements to receive benefits. Under Republican proposals, these programs would be subject to the annual appropriations process.

- **Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.)** will chair the Labor and Human Resources Committee. She will oversee debates on welfare reform in the Senate. More moderate than her House counterparts, Kassebaum has expressed reservations about many aspects of the House proposals, including those that would cut aid to children on welfare.

- **Rep. Jim Istook (R-Okla.)** has been tapped as the unofficial school prayer kingpin for the 104th Congress. Moderate Republicans are increasing the pressure on the new House speaker, Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), to shelve the school prayer debate until next year. But Istook has vowed to press ahead for a vote on a constitutional amendment in the House by July 4. □

Tense atmosphere grips talks in wake of killings of Palestinians

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Jan. 3 (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resumed their talks this week in a tense atmosphere, following a fatal clash between Israeli troops and Palestinian police near the Erez checkpoint in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli and Palestinian officials had differing accounts of what happened Monday night, when three Palestinian police officers were killed in a shootout with Israeli soldiers.

The joint Israeli-Palestinian Supreme Liaison Committee, which oversees the ongoing negotiations by the two sides, met Tuesday to investigate the incident.

Israeli officers said the Israeli troops were carrying out a routine patrol on the Israeli side of the Gaza Strip border when they were fired on from the Palestinian side of the boundary. The Israeli soldiers returned fire.

Reinforcements that arrived on the scene also came under fire when they crossed the border to catch the gunmen, officials said.

After the soldiers called on the gunmen to surrender, one Palestinian policeman emerged from the building with his hands up.

But another came out firing, and in the ensuing shootout, three Palestinian police officers were killed, according to Israeli officials.

None of the Israeli soldiers was hurt.

Palestinian police officials said that they did not start the confrontation.

One Palestinian source said the three officers were shot in their sleep by Israeli soldiers.

There was some speculation that the original shots may have been fired by a third group deliberately firing on the Israelis from a spot near the building where the Palestinian police were based, Israel Radio reported.

The dead policemen were members of the Palestine Liberation Organization who came to Gaza from Libya. They reportedly had no connection to the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, which has vowed to derail the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Peres meets with Mubarak

Palestine Liberation Chairman Yasser Arafat, addressing a crowd of some 2,000 Palestinians at the funeral for the Palestinian policemen Tuesday, said the policemen should be regarded as martyrs who died during the struggle to establish Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

"Let no one think that they can scare us with their stronger weapons, for we have a mightier weapon, the weapon of faith, the weapon of martyrdom, the weapon of Jihad (holy war)," Arafat said.

In Cairo, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said the Israeli soldiers had acted properly under the circumstances. He also expressed regret for the outcome of the confrontation.

Peres, along with Environment Minister Yossi Sarid and Police Minister Moshe Shahal, flew to Cairo on Tuesday to attend the meeting of the liaison committee. Israeli and Palestinians attended scheduled talks to address the next phase of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath told reporters that he and Peres were holding their meetings in an atmosphere of crisis.

"There is no doubt there is a major sense of urgency and crisis that has brought us here to this meeting," he said.

But Peres attempted to sound a more optimistic

note, saying, "We have to overcome a great deal of difficulties and we are trying to do our best. We are building a new history."

Earlier in the day, Peres held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The Egyptian leader reassured the Israeli foreign minister that resolutions adopted last week by Arab leaders at a summit in Alexandria would not impact Egypt's relations with Israel.

At their Dec. 29 meeting, Mubarak, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and Syrian President Hafez Assad agreed that peace in the Middle East should be achieved on the basis of U.N. Security Council resolutions calling on Israel to withdraw from Arab lands and on the principle of land for peace.

The leaders also called on Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria.

The surprise summit meeting had reportedly angered Israeli officials.

Monday's shootout in Gaza was not the only source of tensions that day between Israelis and Palestinians.

In a separate incident occurring near the village of Tekoa in the West Bank, Israeli troops shot dead two members of Hamas.

Israel Television reported that the two men, ages 22 and 32, were in a car on their way to Jerusalem to carry out a terrorist attack. They aroused the suspicion of an army patrol, which ordered them to pull over.

The occupants opened fire on the soldiers with automatic weapons.

In the shootout, the two men were killed, and another occupant was believed to have escaped.

Palestinians held a general strike in Bethlehem on Tuesday to protest the killings. □

Israel is denying rumors that soldier was kidnapped

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Jan. 3 (JTA) — Police and military sources have denied rumors that an Israeli soldier was kidnapped this week.

Israel Radio reported on Tuesday that an anonymous caller had phoned the radio's Arabic news department claiming that the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement had kidnapped a soldier by the name of Ilan Mordecai on Tuesday morning.

The caller added that the soldier would be killed by 9 p.m. if Israel did not release some 500 Hamas prisoners, according to the report.

Israeli security officials launched an investigation after they were informed of the call.

Later in the day, Moledet Knesset member Yosef BaGad announced at the Knesset podium that he had information that an Israeli soldier had been kidnapped from the French Hill neighborhood in Jerusalem.

"A soldier has been kidnapped," he said. "I have his name written down here, but I won't say who it is, since his family has not yet been notified."

BaGad's comments were broadcast live on cable television.

They drew angry responses from the floor of the Knesset, and Knesset Speaker Shevach Weiss criticized BaGad for exploiting his time at the podium to make what Weiss called an unsubstantiated and irresponsible statement.

Meanwhile, an army spokesman issued a statement that investigations were continuing, but that no proof of a kidnapping, nor of the existence of a soldier by that name, had been found. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Golan residents working hard to influence Israeli public opinion***By Michele Chabin*

KATZRIN, Israel (JTA) — Afraid that the government will relinquish the Golan Heights to Syria as part of a future peace treaty with Damascus, many of the residents of the hotly contested region have gone on the offensive.

More than a year ago, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced his intention to place the Golan on the negotiating table. Ever since, people here have worked day and night to convince Israelis and Diaspora Jews alike that keeping the Golan is vital to Israel's security.

While settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have held demonstrations and raised funds locally and abroad for several years, such activities are relatively new to the Golan.

Until Rabin dropped the "Golan bombshell" — as some residents have dubbed the prime minister's decision to negotiate the territory — people here considered themselves far from the territorial fray.

After capturing the Golan from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel officially annexed the area in 1981. Given this government stamp of approval, along with financial incentives provided by the government, Jews ultimately established 32 settlements, or, as Golan residents say, "communities."

Today, some 3,500 Jewish families, comprising some 13,500 individuals, make their home in the small but flourishing town of Katzrin, or in the kibbutzim and moshavim that dot the Golan.

Homes still being built

Despite the current political uncertainty, many homes are still being built and families are continuing to move to the area.

Unlike the West Bank and Gaza, where a disproportionate percentage of residents are Orthodox and right-wing, the majority of Golan residents are secular. Most supported the Labor Party in the last national election.

The irony that the party they voted for may give away the land they live on does not escape the people of the Golan.

"We feel betrayed," said Avi Zeira, a member of the activist Golan Heights Residents' Committee, sipping coffee in downtown Katzrin.

"Just before the national elections in '92, (then-candidate) Yitzhak Rabin came up to the Golan and assured us that he would never relinquish the Heights to Syria.

"Now," Zeira said, "Rabin has totally reversed his position. It's unbelievable."

Determined to gain support for their cause both in Israel and abroad, the residents' committee undertook a grass-roots public-relations campaign that highlighted Rabin's complete about-face on the Golan issue.

Thanks to money raised mostly from abroad, the committee printed up hundreds of thousands of banners and bumper-stickers with the words "The people are with the Golan."

The committee also paid for a short commercial, shown at movie theaters around Israel, depicting the prime minister's speech in Katzrin prior to the 1992 elections.

"It is inconceivable that we (should) withdraw from the Golan Heights even in peace," Rabin declares in the commercial, shown on 15-foot-high screens. "He who considers withdrawing from the Golan Heights forsakes the security of Israel."

But by far the most successful part of the campaign was a hunger strike in September 1994 by several Golan

residents. During the 19-day rike, which attracted international media attention, a whopping 250,000 Israelis visited the Golan in a show of solidarity.

Zeira believes that the committee's efforts are having an important effect.

"Since the '92 elections, the government has been leading a campaign to convince the public that we can live without the Golan," he said.

"At first, our public support went down. But now, according to opinion polls, at least 60 percent of Israelis are against any withdrawal from the Golan. Another 20 percent are willing to stay in the Golan, provided there is some compromise on territory."

If it were up to Zeira, "we would keep the status quo. Of course, we want real peace, but what does that mean? Personally, I trust (Syrian President Hafez) Assad, but tomorrow there could be a revolution and Islamic fundamentalists could replace him. The only ones we can trust are ourselves."

'Our lives revolved around attacks'

Drora Sherk, 44, a 25-year resident of Kibbutz Morom Golan, does not trust the Syrians, with or without Assad at the helm.

Working in the administration building of the kibbutz, which is located about a mile from the Syrian border, Sherk recalls her early years in the Golan.

"Until 1974, there were attacks every day. The children were living in the shelters, sleeping in the shelters. Our lives revolved around these attacks," she said.

Reminded of a recent statement by Syrian Prime Minister Farouk al-Sharaa claiming that Syria never shelled civilian targets, Sherk replied angrily, "It's one big lie. I feel about his comment the same way I feel about peace with Syria — there's nothing behind it."

Yoaz Tsur, a resident of Katzrin, has the opposite opinion. "I believe we must make peace with our neighbors," he said. "We must take a chance and sit down with Syria at the negotiating table."

Though he does not relish the idea, "if the bottom line is leaving the Golan, that's what we'll have to do," he said.

Despite Rabin's new stance on the Golan, Tsur said he trusts the government. "Rabin knows security better than anyone on the Golan committee," he said.

In early 1994, Tsur tried to form a group called Golan Residents for Peace. It never got off the ground, he said, "because people here don't want to say publicly that they are willing to leave in exchange for real peace."

Although he has no statistics to back up his opinion, Tsur believes that "about 40 percent of the residents would be prepared to leave" in the event that Syria offers a real peace with Israel.

"Personally, leaving the Golan would be the worst thing that could happen to me. But I see myself first as a citizen of Israel. I must do what is in the best interest of my country, not just what is in my own best interest," he said. □

Jewish woman attacked again in Italy

ROME, Jan. 3 (JTA) — A Norwegian Jewish woman who last summer was the victim of an apparent anti-Semitic attack has been assaulted again.

Myriam Geelmuyden was found unconscious and with her face cut Monday evening near the doorway of her home in the central Italian town of Assisi.

Geelmuyden, a writer, said she believed her attacker may have been one of three youths who assaulted her in the street last August, slashing her face and yelling anti-Semitic slogans. The police are investigating. □