

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ President Clinton is expected to announce his opposition to any move to bring prayer to public school through a constitutional amendment. His announcement is scheduled to come during an address on religious freedom on Wednesday.

■ Jewish organizations welcomed the House of Representatives' approval of a \$12 billion foreign aid bill. The measure includes \$3 billion for Israel, \$2.1 billion for Egypt, \$100 million for the Palestinians and \$595 million for the former Soviet Union, most of which goes to Russia. Some groups expressed concern that the bill marked a reduction in U.S. foreign aid.

■ Representatives of the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Simon Wiesenthal Center testified at informal congressional hearings on the militia movement in America. The hearings, spearheaded by Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), focused in part on the ties between the militias and white supremacist groups.

■ Leaders of Israel's settlers movement described a meeting they had with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as a total failure. Rabin called the meeting to discuss his government's policies as Israel and the Palestinians move to reach an accord for extending Palestinian self-rule.

■ Swiss banks moved toward resolving the situation of remaining bank accounts of Holocaust victims. The banks agreed to appoint an independent arbitrator to oversee the transfer of the deposits to their rightful heirs. [Page 2]

■ The Palestinian Authority signed a 99-year lease from the Wakf, the Islamic religious council, on the site in western Jerusalem earmarked for the construction of a future U.S. Embassy. Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert cited documents that he said proved that this transaction took place.

■ The European Maccabiah Games opened in Amsterdam amid intense security. Lighting the flame at the opening ceremony was Anouk Spitzer, daughter of one of the Israelis who died in the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

**Jews come out in full force for religious amendment hearing**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, July 11 (JTA) — Jews of all political persuasions appeared in full force to stake out their ideological positions on a "religious equality amendment" this week, as a congressional subcommittee was considering the topic at a hearing in New York City.

The field hearing, the third of five being held across the country, was convened Monday at Hunter College on Manhattan's Upper East Side by the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution.

The proposed "religious equality amendment" has not yet been officially put forward by Republicans in Congress who back the idea. But the concept has been floated for several months.

The concept is a centerpiece of the Christian Coalition's recently unveiled "Contract with the American Family."

The Christian Coalition, founded by Pat Robertson, is considered the pre-eminent organization of the religious right and wields significant political power in the Republican Party.

Among other things, the proposed constitutional amendment is expected to call for voluntary, student-initiated prayer in the nation's public schools.

The issue has proved to be particularly polarizing in American society and the rhetoric from players on both sides of the issue is impassioned.

In a rare display of unity in the Jewish community, however, most mainstream Jewish groups, both religious and secular, have banded together to oppose a constitutional amendment.

Monday's hearing proved to be a far cry from Congress' usually sedate and decorous proceedings.

About 300 New Yorkers — including many Jews — attended. They added a uniquely Big Apple flavor by treating the hearing like a baseball game — cheering when a member of Congress or a witness offered an opinion they liked, booing when they did not agree and hissing and catcalling several times when they found the speaker's views particularly odious.

Rep. Charles Canady (R-Fla.), chairman of the subcommittee, seemed taken aback by the lack of decorum.

Canady had been criticized by Jewish groups for scheduling one of the field hearings on a Saturday.

**Tense series of exchanges**

Several times he asked the audience to refrain from commenting, but his request had little effect.

The exchange at times became intense as some members of Congress, including Reps. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) and Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), bickered among themselves.

The witnesses called to testify included Cardinal John O'Connor, the archbishop of New York, and the Rev. James Forbes, senior minister of Riverside Church in New York.

The Jews who testified at the hearing were Arthur Hertzberg, a Conservative rabbi and liberal political activist, and Mayer Schiller, a Chasidic rabbi who teaches at the Yeshiva University High School for Boys and who favors an amendment.

Also testifying was Lisa Herdahl, a Christian mother of six children who filed a lawsuit against the Pontotoc County, Mississippi School District in December because her children were ostracized and demeaned by teachers and students for not wanting to participate in mandated school Bible classes and morning prayers.

She and her family have been subjected to bomb and death threats, she said in her testimony, and her children "have been falsely called devil worshipers and atheists."

She said many families in her town also in opposition to the religious rituals that their children are forced to practice in their school "are afraid to come forward."

"If Congress acts to encourage school-sponsored prayer, it will heighten the oppression of my family and many others," she said.

In his remarks, Hertzberg told about his own experience in Baltimore

public schools in the 1930s. The Lord's Prayer was recited each day in his school, he said. Because he was Jewish and uncomfortable with the decidedly Christian prayer, he added, "I was made to feel that I was not quite an American, because a real American was a Christian of some sort."

"I came here to testify because I have three grandchildren and a fourth on the way," Hertzberg said. "I swore I would do everything in my power to make sure that this does not happen to them."

He continued: "There is a difference between types of religious expression, between a menorah in my synagogue and a menorah in a public school. We have no right to impose upon each other our religious symbols."

Schiller disagreed, saying an absence of religious speech or activity in a public school is in itself a bias against religion rather than neutrality.

"Everything projects a certain worldview and value. It is a lie of contemporary liberals that they are advocating a neutral situation," he said.

"For 180 years Americans lived with traditional values," he said. "The experiment of stripping America of traditional values has been tried for the last three decades and has failed utterly."

"It is time now to return to the system that for 180 years gave us the America for which we now yearn," he said.

One Jewish member of the audience, Fanshien Mellis, responded to that remark, telling a reporter, "Yeah, we should go back to segregation, slavery and women not permitted to vote?"

#### **Several Jewish groups join news conference**

Several of the Jewish groups opposed to the proposed amendment to the constitution participated in a news conference preceding Monday's hearing.

They were part of a coalition of religious groups that tried to swipe the spotlight from the hearing by holding a news conference at Hunter College of the City University of New York one hour before the hearing began.

Twenty-two of the 55 groups that comprise the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty, which convened the news conference, are Jewish organizations.

They range from the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations to Orthodoxy's Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and its Rabbinical Council of America, from the Workmen's Circle to the umbrella group, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

It also includes Baptists, evangelicals, humanists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Unitarians and the National Council on Islamic Affairs.

Rabbi David Saperstein, co-chairman of the coalition and director of the Reform movement's Washington-based Religious Action Center, described the proposed legislation as "bad theology, worse policy and horrendous law."

It "would allow a mixing of religion with government and government with religion that has historically been disastrous for both, reducing to a mere speed bump the strong wall separating church and state," Saperstein said at the news conference.

Saperstein rejected the comparison between religious speech and other types of speech, such as political speech, a comparison that is often made by supporters of a constitutional amendment.

That comparison is "degrading" to religion, Saperstein said.

"Prayer transforms the profane into the divine and is, therefore, much, much more than non-religious speech."

In an effort to one-up the liberal coalition, conservative ideologues who favor an amendment, including two Orthodox Jews, collared journalists before they could even get inside the college's doors for an impromptu news conference.

The two Orthodox Jews — Rabbis Yehuda Levin and Schiller — joined the Rev. Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition to back an amendment.

Levin is spokesman for a group calling itself Jews for Morality, an organization he described as having 5,000 Orthodox Jewish supporters.

Levin may be best known for failed runs in New York mayoral and congressional races on the Right to Life ticket, and for organizing bus caravans to Washington for Orthodox Jews to participate in anti-abortion rallies.

At the congressional hearing itself, the two were the lone Jews supporting the amendment in contrast to dozens of Jews who showed up to oppose the idea.

The first two congressional field hearings were held in Harrisonburg, Va., and Tampa, Fla. The last two are scheduled to be held Friday in Oklahoma City and Monday in Los Angeles. □

#### **Swiss banks move to restore Nazi victims' accounts to heirs**

*By Uriel Masad*

TEL AVIV, July 11 (JTA) — Swiss banks are taking steps to resolve the issue of bank deposits of Holocaust victims.

Top officials of Switzerland's major banks have reached an agreement to appoint an independent arbitrator to oversee the transfer of the deposits to their rightful heirs, according to the current issue of The Jerusalem Report. The banks will reportedly issue an official announcement in the near future.

Media in Israel and elsewhere have reported that large amounts of money belonging to victims of the Holocaust are still being held in Swiss bank accounts.

So far, Swiss banks have refused to release the deposits to relatives of the deceased without proper documentation and accurate account numbers, much of which vanished during and after the war years.

Estimates of these accounts, deposited during World War II, range from tens of millions of dollars to nearly \$7 billion.

But the Swiss Bankers Association, the industry's leading organization, said the estimates are highly inflated.

"Recent numbers named by various parties in the press in reference to the amount of unclaimed assets from the Nazi era are massively exaggerated," the organization said in a statement.

In the past, Swiss banks strongly opposed the appointment of an independent arbitrator to mediate between the banks and relatives of Holocaust victims.

The banks had argued that attempts to help relatives provide documentation would violate the strict secrecy laws that have become the hallmark of the Swiss banking system.

But, reacting to persistent media attention to the issue, members of the Swiss Bankers Association met at the beginning of July to discuss the matter and the damage it caused to their image.

According to Hans Baer, a Jewish banker and the director-general of the Swiss Bank Julius Baer and Co., the banks agreed unanimously that an independent arbitrator should be appointed to mediate the claims.

Baer admitted that lists of such accounts which were made in the 1960s were incomplete. But he denied allegations that the banks stole money belonging to Jews. "The money is just lying in the banks," Baer said. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Syrian stance on surveillance seen as significant development**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 11 (JTA) — In a development seen as a significant step forward in the Syrian-Israeli peace process, Syria has announced that it is prepared to accept the presence of surveillance stations on the Golan Heights after an Israeli withdrawal from the area.

However, the Syrian position is that such stations cannot be staffed by Israeli personnel, but by "international or friendly forces." The move this week appeared to confirm a growing impression that the peace process — on the Syrian as well as on the Palestinian tracks — is moving ahead faster than the media have given it credit for.

Syria's position, aired on a radio broadcast Monday from Damascus, is seen as a reversal of Syria's previous rejection of any form of land-based surveillance on its sovereign soil. The position assumes an eventual Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for a peace accord with Syria.

The Syrian announcement came just hours before the Clinton administration's special Middle East coordinator, Dennis Ross, began a shuttle visit to Jerusalem and Damascus in order to push the Israeli-Syrian talks forward.

Ross met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and top aides and military officers Monday evening in Jerusalem. Ross flew to Damascus on Tuesday.

He was working to arrange for talks between senior Israeli and Syrian military officers in Washington later this month. These talks would serve as a follow-up to three days of talks between the two countries' chiefs of staff — Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak of Israel and his Syrian counterpart, Hikmat Shihabi — in the U.S. capital in late June.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is reported to be planning a shuttle of his own in late July or early August — and that would be followed, assuming all is still on course, by a round of military and civilian negotiations in Washington later in August.

**Available airborne equipment inadequate**

Israeli policy-makers were expected to welcome Syria's readiness to accept land-based surveillance facilities on the Golan, as the available airborne equipment does not, according to experts, provide an adequate alternative.

Current airborne equipment includes:

- U.S. satellites providing photographs to the two sides. Such arrangements have been in force since the 1974 Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement on the Golan, which followed the Yom Kippur War. It is up to Washington to decide what information to provide and at what speed.

- Israel's own satellite. The latest Israeli communications satellite, Ofek 3, is reported by foreign sources to be capable of beaming intelligence information back to Tel Aviv — but at considerably less sharp resolution than the best American space-based cameras.

- Airplane-based photographic and electronic equipment. This is highly accurate, even from side-angle shots that do not require a spy plane to cross the border. But the time of day or night and weather conditions have an impact on the efficacy of such information.

Land-based installations on Galilee mountaintops can watch over activity on the Golan, but not between the Golan and Damascus — the area now covered by Israel's installations on Mt. Hermon and on other Golan peaks.

Informed sources in Jerusalem, reacting to Syria's new position regarding surveillance stations on the Golan, said this week that Israel would want to have all the available airborne equipment in addition to U.S.-staffed

ground stations on the Golan. Beyond the specifics of an agreement regarding the surveillance stations — which is still to be hammered out in negotiations — Israeli sources welcomed the Syrian move as signaling an apparent resolve in Damascus to move ahead quickly in the peace process.

The Clinton administration has been urging the two sides to regard the end of 1995 as the effective closure of the "window of opportunity" for reaching a breakthrough in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations, given the fact that 1996 is an election year both in the United States and Israel.

Israeli sources said Syria has indicated in the past that it was prepared to accept American or other internationally staffed surveillance facilities on the Golan.

But it subsequently backed away from that position and adopted a more inflexible stance, rejecting all ground-based facilities on the Golan as an infringement on Syrian sovereignty.

Similarly, these sources said, Syria appears now to be returning to an earlier position — recently dropped in favor of a harder line — that recognized Israel's demand for deeper demilitarized and limitation-of-forces zones on the Syrian side of the border than on the Israeli side.

Israel has argued that the topography of the region — once the Golan is returned — would give the distinct advantage to Syria, and would therefore justify deeper security restraints on the Syrian side.

The notion that the peace process may be moving faster than the media has reported is evidenced, in part, by the surveillance issue. There was no indication in the Israeli media, after the recent talks between the chiefs of staff in Washington, that the land-based surveillance stations had become a viable proposition again.

**Away from the glare of media spotlight**

Similarly, the imminence of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the second phase of Palestinian self-rule seems to have taken the Israeli and Palestinian media somewhat by surprise.

While reporters in the region and abroad focused on the missed July 1 deadline for reaching an agreement to extend Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank, negotiators for both sides apparently have been working quietly to ensure a signing ceremony before the month ends.

Large delegations for the two sides were due to convene this week at an undisclosed site in Italy for an intensive effort, far from the glare of the media spotlight, to bridge remaining gaps and prepare a final agreement.

Among the issues still unresolved:

- Arrangements for Arab residents of eastern Jerusalem to stand for office and to vote in the Palestinian elections;

- Arrangements for joint patrols and separate police work in the rural areas of the West Bank once the Israel Defense Force has redeployed from most of the main Palestinian towns there;

- Control of water resources in the West Bank.

Confirmation of the extent of progress already made by the two sides came Monday from Rabin himself.

"There is no going back on the agreement," a determined-sounding prime minister told a delegation of West Bank Jewish settlers who were meeting with him at his initiative to review the evolving accord.

The prime minister said the IDF would do its utmost to provide security for the 120,000 Jewish residents of the West Bank. He added that the agreement sought to avoid any contact between settlers and members of the Palestinian police force.

But the settler leaders came away from the meeting somber and angry, warning of inevitable clashes between them and the Palestinians once the Israeli army is redeployed out of the main Palestinian cities. □

## Seeking more from Walesa, Jewish honoree speaks out

By Avi V. Stieglitz

NEW YORK, July 11 (JTA) — An official of the World Jewish Congress this week used an award ceremony, where he received a medal from the Polish government, to criticize Polish President Lech Walesa for failing to condemn his priest for making anti-Semitic statements.

"The international community expects swift reactions to such outbursts of anti-Semitism," Kalman Sultanik, WJC vice president, said in his acceptance speech at the presidential palace Monday in Warsaw.

Sultanik, a Holocaust survivor who was born in Poland and now lives in New York, was honored for his contribution to the "normalization of Polish-Jewish relations" and to the remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland, among other things.

"Silence in such instances is perceived as acquiescence, and brings back memories of the world's silence during the Second World War," said Sultanik, who is also chairman of the World Zionist Organization, Department in North America.

Sultanik was referring to Walesa's initial silence after his priest, Father Henryk Jankowski, blamed the Jews for starting World War II and equated the Jewish Star of David with the Nazi swastika and the Communist hammer and sickle.

Jankowski, who made the remarks during a June sermon in Gdansk in Walesa's presence, further fueled the controversy by later saying, "Like all other people, Jews happen to do unbecoming things in public life just as they happen to do very noble things indeed. I am talking chiefly about banking and finance circles."

### Fell short of satisfying critics

After a week of silence, public pressure both at home and abroad forced Walesa to issue a statement saying that "anti-Semitism [is] despicable" and that he would not tolerate it. In his statement, Walesa reiterated his respect for Jews and distanced himself from his former Solidarity union ally. But he fell short of satisfying his critics by not condemning Jankowski directly.

In a meeting late last month in San Francisco with leaders of the American Jewish Committee, Walesa reportedly said he should not be expected to react to every anti-Semitic statement in Poland.

He also said a personal statement was unnecessary because Polish Catholic bishops had already condemned it.

Indeed, Jankowski's superiors in the Catholic Church reprimanded him for his remarks, and Jankowski has since apologized for his words.

The archbishop of Gdansk, Taduesz Goclowski, also apparently warned Jankowski that any new anti-Semitic outburst would prompt disciplinary action by the church. Goclowski's words drew praise from the Anti-Defamation League and others.

But for Sultanik, the issue had shifted to Walesa's unwillingness to directly condemn his priest's words.

Sultanik, who has said he was under intense pressure from Jewish leaders not to accept the Polish award because of the controversy, decided to use the occasion to directly confront Walesa. Before his departure, he also expressed hope that Walesa would use the award ceremony as an occasion to condemn Jankowski's remarks.

However, that was not to be. Walesa ended up not showing up to present the Commander's Cross of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland to Sultanik as had been planned. An aide who presented the medal in Walesa's place said the president was on vacation.

But Sultanik is not giving up.

He delivered a similar message Tuesday on the need to speak up to members of the Budget and Finance Committee of the Auschwitz Museum Council, which includes dignitaries from the Polish and U.S. governments.

"I still hope that Walesa will condemn Jankowski for his remarks," Sultanik said in a telephone interview from his hotel in Warsaw. □

## Holocaust memorial director: Sites at camps in need of funds

By Gil Sedan

BONN, July 11 (JTA) — Unless needed funds are provided to the memorial site of the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp in northern Germany, it may close temporarily next year and workers may be laid off, said Jurgen Dietberger, the memorial director.

Dan Tichon, an Israeli member of Knesset and chairman of the parliamentary friendship committee between Israel and Germany, sent a sharp protest about the possible closure to the German government.

However, Jerzy Kanak, chairman of the Berlin Jewish Community, said in an interview that the former camp would not close under any circumstances.

The rumors of a possible closure stem from financial difficulties, he said.

Several administrators at memorial sites at former concentration camps in Germany have complained about budget cuts. The federal and regional governments usually provide about half of the budget needed to run the sites.

Some 27,000 people took part in this year's ceremonies at the Sachsenhausen and Ravensbruck camps, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the camps. Because of the turnout, memorial directors have applied for a budget of \$11.4 million for next year. Only half was approved.

This year's budget stood at \$7 million.

Kanak said the plight of the sites was also being played up by opponents of the plan to establish a giant central memorial in Berlin for Holocaust victims.

They say funds for the Berlin monument would detract from funds provided to the camps. □

## European Parliament calls for Holocaust Remembrance Day

By Joseph Kopel

BRUSSELS (JTA) — The European Parliament has called for the institution of an annual European Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust in order to combat the emergence of revisionists.

The Parliament, the legislative body of the European Union, adopted a resolution at a recent session in Strasbourg, France, asking for the member states to institute the day of commemoration.

Parliament members stressed their concern about the upsurge of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia facing the international community.

In the resolution, the 626-member body said, "Europe must respond firmly and clearly to these threats. Peace in Western Europe since 1945 will not continue if the totalitarian and racist ideologies of the Nazis, which led to the Holocaust of the Jews, the genocide of the Gypsies, the mass murder of millions of others are not prevented from spreading their pernicious influence."

Members also talked of the importance of education in the preservation of memories.

The Parliament said that on the European Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust, activities should be organized that illustrate to young people the dangers of totalitarian and racist ideologies. □