



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The United Jewish Appeal announced that it is suspending its search for a new chief executive officer until April 1 in deference to efforts to forge a partnership with the Council of Jewish Federations that "could pave the way for an eventual merger." UJA cited as other reasons the success of its current fund-raising campaign and the enhanced relations with the federations, with which it runs a joint annual campaign.

■ The Jewish National Fund of America's leaders initiated steps to restore confidence in the charity, which was shaken by recent revelations of problems in fiscal management. Efforts are under way to increase the percentage of money the charity sends to Israel. [Page 3]

■ An independent panel probing allegations that Swiss banks are sitting on unclaimed wealth of Holocaust victims has selected three leading auditing firms to hunt for any missing assets. The panel, formed in May by Jewish groups and Swiss bankers, said the search could take until mid-1998.

■ World Jewish Congress executives are scheduled to meet next week in Oslo to decide policy on all issues related to Jewish assets missing since the end of World War II. Norwegian Prime Minister Thorbjorn Jagland and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy are set to attend the conference.

■ More than 80 rabbis and priests, after an unusual gathering to discuss intermarriage between Catholics and Jews, issued a statement "urging the deterrence" of such unions. The discussion was organized by the Interreligious Information Center, the New York Catholic Archdiocese and the New York regional associations of Reform and Conservative rabbis.

■ Two Israeli border police guards who were videotaped beating Palestinian workers north of Jerusalem were detained. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the soldiers' actions, but Palestinian officials said similar beatings by Israeli security forces were a frequent occurrence.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

G.A. delegates grapple with federations' relevance

By Cynthia Mann

SEATTLE (JTA) — The headlines may have focused on bomb threats, the Israeli prime minister and the politics of religious pluralism dividing the world Jewish family.

But there was another, albeit quieter, drama playing out here last week at the annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, the umbrella body serving 200 federations in North America.

Delegates grappled at workshops and plenary sessions with what role federations can and must play as the new century dawns. How, they asked, can federations be relevant to American Jews, half of whom are not affiliated with or engaged by the Jewish organizational world?

They also sought to redefine the meaning of Jewish community and brainstorm about how to reinvigorate its institutions.

Underpinning all the discussion, of course, was the pressure of knowing that to keep these institutions alive, federations must compete hard for Jewish dollars solicited for other causes. Arnold Eisen, religious studies professor at Stanford University, told delegates that the "task of imagining federations of the future begins by talking about communities."

He called on them to "redeem the future," saying that there will be few Jews left in North America "unless we reimagine and reconstruct our Jewish communities."

Jews are hungry for meaning and connection and "often don't find it in Jewish institutions." He said the central question is: "What are we going to make of the inheritance we received or chose?"

A central challenge in articulating a communal vision is embracing diversity and inclusiveness, he said. "We need the wisdom of all at the table at which Torah is studied."

The G.A. drew close to 3,000 participants. It featured a speech via satellite by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as an appearance by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres and by Natan Sharansky, former Soviet dissident-turned-Israeli minister of industry and trade.

The annual assembly also saw the torch of CJF presidential leadership pass from Maynard Wishner, who was not present due to illness, to Dr. Conrad Giles. Giles' first effort to deliver a keynote address was interrupted by a bomb scare, which forced the evacuation of the convention center where the meetings were held.

Addressing core questions

Drama and luminaries aside, G.A. organizers asked delegates to "begin a discussion which will continue in each community" that would address some core questions:

- When 50 percent of American Jewish households move every six years and the Internet has defined conversation, is community local, national and/or virtual?
- What concerns and visions will bind the Jewish community in the future?
- What will Jews expect and need from Jewish federations?
- What resources will be available?

Federations traditionally have been the central fund-raising body in local communities. They support the institutions, services and programs they decide are the highest priorities, including day school education, nursing homes and Jewish community centers. Half the money over the years typically went to the United Jewish Appeal for programs overseas, primarily Israel, though that portion has steadily been dropping in recent years.

The annual joint campaign by federations and UJA recently has raised roughly \$725 million. CJF and UJA are now holding talks on how to forge a closer partnership.

But the G.A. program participants, both lay and professional, called on federations to join with other institutions, particularly synagogues, to enlarge their mission beyond fund raising and service delivery.

They are demanding that federations be the anchor of a community-building guided by Jewish values, learning and tradition. Rabbi Sidney

Schwarz, president of the Washington Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, said Jewish renewal is "exploding" in the federation world. But he said it is a relatively well-kept secret.

"A lot of communities are starting to ask the right questions" about how to energize people about Jewish life and Jewish education, he said.

But the Jewish public at large still does not see federations as relevant. "The demand is going through the roof" for programs on "how to combine Jewish values with engagement in the world," he said, noting that his institute alone is working with 90 different communities.

On the other hand, he said, "federations are gasping for air. Most federations are happy if they're not losing ground" in their campaigns.

Indeed, the marriage of money and meaning is a rocky one for federations, said Michele Rosen, president of the Federation of Greater Seattle, seated at a session called Jewish Identity and Continuity.

The challenge is "to translate values into a communal vision when money is the constant issue," Rosen said.

"It's what you wake up with and what you go to bed with and it shouldn't be," she said. "It should be about the enterprise."

As an example, Rosen said Seattle is trying to capitalize on the enormous outpouring of energy at the G.A., where 800 locals served as volunteers, both from "the center and the margins" of Jewish life.

The community is planning a Chanukah event called "Don't Let the Light Go Out" to expose people to other volunteer and learning opportunities.

Rabbi Devora Bartnoff, a member of the Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia, said at the same workshop that one of the most important tasks for the community is to "bring in the unaffiliated."

"A successful organized Jewish community would have enough entrance points" to accommodate everyone who wants to come inside, from folk-dancing to study to volunteering.

Forging closer ties with synagogues

But Marshal Spector, a 36-year-old attorney from Portland, Ore., is seeking more. "There is so much talk about outreach, but once people come in" to the system, there has to be something "substantive, with meaning and purpose, to have them stay."

The problem has been that religious institutions "kept what [they] did for themselves, and the federation world raised money," he said, adding, "The two have to come together."

Indeed, forging closer relations between synagogues and federations by eliminating negative stereotyping and power struggles was an important theme at the G.A.

A new handbook on the subject was made available, titled "Planning for Jewish Continuity: Synagogue-Federation Collaboration" and produced by the Jewish Education Service of North America, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and CJF in collaboration with the religious movements.

Meanwhile, Jacob Solomon, executive vice president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, agreed that in the Jewish community, there has been a "mechitzah" or separation "between kadosh (holy) and what's operational."

"Day-to-day acts have to be deeply infused with the Shechinah," he said, referring to the divine presence. Federations, for instance, need to learn to be effective recruiters of volunteers for performing mitzvot, and need to teach the volunteers the prayers to say when performing those mitzvot, he added.

Pamela Gorelick, who appeared to be in her 20s, came to the G.A. from the Washington, D.C., area as a representative of UJA's Young Leadership division. She said she witnesses a "big problem of retention" within the system among her peers. "A lot of people my age get turned off because they think there's so much emphasis on campaign" by the federation world.

Sometimes the system "loses sight of the fact that it also needs their involvement."

"But the fact is," she added, "it is money which drives a lot of the activities."

She said her own involvement is driven by the fact that "a big part of my identity is my Jewishness" and by the belief that "UJA is the most efficient way to channel resources into our communities around the world." □

Israeli rabbi not optimistic about her future on council

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Na'amah Kelman has been trying for seven years to be seated on the Jerusalem Religious Council.

But even though Israel's High Court of Justice ruled Sunday that she, as a Reform rabbi, must be allowed to serve on the Orthodox-controlled body, she does not expect it to happen any time soon.

"When Moshiach comes, I'll be on the council," Kelman said, invoking the Messiah, during a visit here this week. "When she comes, she'll seat me."

The council would rather be inactive than allow her to participate, said Kelman, who immigrated to Israel in 1976 and was the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in the Jewish state. Kelman, who was in New York teaching Torah to a group of New Israel Fund supporters, now works as the director of the department of education for the Israeli Progressive Movement, a counterpart to North America's Reform movement.

The Jerusalem municipal body has been inactive since she and Ehud Bandel, a Conservative rabbi, were nominated to the local policy body by the left-wing Meretz Party.

The local religious councils, which control the municipal funding for religious causes, including synagogues, ritual baths and kashrut, have historically been composed of only Orthodox members. When non-Orthodox rabbis were nominated several years ago, the councils in several cities, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, stopped working in order to avoid including them.

A ruling from the High Court about 18 months ago said the Reform and Conservative representatives had to be seated on the councils. That ruling has been ignored, which led the court to take up the matter again.

This time, the court expressed displeasure with the Jerusalem Religious Council's procrastination and ordered the city of Jerusalem to pay the costs of the trial.

In Jerusalem, Orthodox rabbis and politicians immediately attacked the ruling. Jerusalem's chief rabbi, Yitzhak Kolitz, said it was "inconceivable" that persons who did not abide by halachah, or traditional Jewish law, could become part of a body whose task was to provide services based on that system.

Bandel of the Masorti movement, Israel's Conservative counterpart, said in a television interview that he did not intend to function on the council in a confrontational or provocative way.

The task of the religious councils, Bandel said, was to provide religious services to all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, belief or practice. □

(JTA correspondent David Landau in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JNF to shift management, resources in wake of probe

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish National Fund of America is moving to put its house in order following upheaval over its spending and accounting practices.

In its most dramatic move, the JNF will launch a search for a replacement for Samuel Cohen, the organization's top professional, who is shifting to the post of senior executive vice president.

The decision was made this week during meetings with regional and national leaders that were closed to the media.

JNF also decided to:

- Form a new committee charged with nominating new lay leaders.
- Establish a task force to see how best to increase the amount of JNF money that gets sent to Israel.

The disclosure that JNF spends much more money for programming in the United States than it does in Israel is part of what triggered a recent public storm around the charity.

- Hire an accounting firm to audit this year's spending and to review accounting procedures.

Cohen and JNF President Milton Shapiro said in a telephone interview after the meetings concluded Tuesday that accountants would also review the agency's management structure, both nationally and regionally. JNF has 24 regions across the country.

The actions follow revelations from an internal investigation that has shaken the charity's public image and threatened to hurt its capacity to raise money.

Roughly 20 percent to Israel

The probe, which included a partial independent audit, found no malfeasance by the organization.

Nonetheless, it found "management, accounting and fund-raising inefficiencies, as well as errors in JNF's financial statements."

The inquiry also pointed to the fact that only roughly 20 percent of the money it spends actually makes its way to Israel. The accounting system had obscured that fact.

This week's actions apparently reassured at least some of the leadership.

"Most people believe that the first steps have been taken to permit the organization to go forward with its mission and that the necessary public relations steps will be taken to help it raise money," said one JNF lay leader attending the meetings and who requested anonymity.

"Everybody realizes the negative publicity has hurt the organization very much," he said, characterizing the mood of the conference. JNF historically has described its central mission as reclaiming and developing the land of Israel. Officials now concede that the extent of their programming outside Israel was not widely known.

In 1994, of \$26.9 million in total expenditures, \$5.5 million arrived in Israel. At the same time, \$6.3 million of so-called "Israel programming" actually was used for educational purposes in the United States and another \$4.5 million was spent in the United States on Zionist education.

Cohen, in the telephone interview, said that this week's meetings showed that there is "a clear consensus" that JNF should "forward much more money to Israel."

Surveys of scores of JNF representatives from across the country taken at the conference found that leaders want to see 50 percent of the funds go to the Jewish state.

To that end, said Cohen, all programming will be

"re-examined." At the same time, both he and Shapiro defend JNF's past spending choices. "Every penny spent by JNF is spent on or on behalf of Israel," Shapiro said. "Am Yisrael is not housed only in Israel."

Cohen, who said he is shifting posts at his own request, agreed. "We've been investing in our future and these investments have paid solid dividends," Cohen said, pointing to increased income, stepped-up involvement, especially by young people, and "a solid basis for hope for the future."

Cohen also denied that the organization had been damaged by the probe, saying that "there has been no evidence of loss of income."

He said he is confident that JNF "will emerge strengthened from the process."

Bob Levine, JNF's national campaign chairman, echoed this optimistic view.

He said two recent fund-raising events in New Jersey took in donations that "equaled or surpassed" donations at the same events last year.

Some of JNF's critics are mollified for now.

Assuming that JNF makes good on its pledges, "we are quite optimistic that things really are going to be changed and that the mission of JNF will come back to being what it's supposed to be," said Sandra Breslauer of Houston. Breslauer and her husband, Steve, were JNF lay activists whose questions about the charity had helped spur the probe.

Meanwhile, Shapiro publicly defended Cohen's role and performance. In a statement, Shapiro said that Cohen "has been an inspiration to all who have worked with him and he has motivated countless people of all ages to love the land of Israel and the JNF."

No longer responsible for the day-to-day operations, Cohen will "concentrate on long-range strategic planning to bring the message of the Jewish National Fund to the broader community," read a JNF announcement.

The JNF lay leader who requested anonymity said that JNF needs "a Mr. Clean who is a great operating officer to put his imprimatur" on the charity as the new chief executive. □

Israeli border police caught on video beating Palestinians

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two Israeli border policemen who were videotaped beating Palestinians at a roadblock in northern Jerusalem have been placed in detention.

The incident, which occurred several weeks ago, was recorded on video by a Palestinian who happened to be nearby. The video was broadcast worldwide this week.

The tape showed scenes of the two soldiers kicking and beating six Palestinians who had attempted to enter Israel without the proper work permits.

Israeli leaders were quick to condemn the incident.

"We cannot accept it. It is unpardonable," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters. "It flies in the face of the strict standards of conduct that are kept by the overwhelming majority of Israeli soldiers and police." He added that the two would be brought to trial and that "the full weight of the law will be applied against them."

Palestinians and human rights workers said similar beatings by Israeli security forces were frequent.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani ordered the immediate suspension of the two soldiers, pending an investigation of the incident. The two soldiers, David Ben Abu, 20, and Tsahi Shmaya, 19, were questioned for five hours Tuesday by the Justice Ministry's division for the investigation of police. □

Bronfman turns on Farrakhan after dining with black leader

By Eric J. Greenberg
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — Edgar Bronfman broke ranks with fellow Jewish organization leaders in the spring when he quietly hosted Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan for dinner to initiate a black Muslim-Jewish dialogue.

But two days after they dined, Farrakhan again invoked the Holocaust in a way the World Jewish Congress head believed was inappropriate. Bronfman, convinced that the controversial Nation of Islam leader is "evil personified," quickly terminated his overture.

These events, which occurred in mid-April, came to light after Bronfman, also the owner of Seagram, sent letters Nov. 4 to veteran journalist Mike Wallace, who initiated the dinner meeting, and to Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Foxman and other Jewish leaders have steadfastly refused Farrakhan's call for face-to-face meetings because of his openly anti-Semitic stance.

Why Bronfman took six months to write the letters, obtained by the Jewish Week, remains a mystery.

The idea for the unusual dinner came, Wallace said, after he became convinced that Farrakhan was sincere about having a dialogue with Jewish leaders. His interview with the Nation of Islam leader for the CBS newsmagazine "60 Minutes" aired April 14.

After a few Jewish organization leaders turned him down, Wallace approached Bronfman. Farrakhan, his wife and two associates, as well as Wallace and his wife, were invited to Bronfman's New York apartment for "a very pleasant" dinner, Wallace said. Participants discussed "all manner of things having to do with the relationship between the black and Jewish communities," he said.

Wallace added, "There was a kind of interesting meeting of the minds about the necessity for reconciliation and the desire for reconciliation. By the time we left, all concerned seemed to be on reasonably good terms."

But Bronfman wrote in his letters, "I agreed to have the dinner because Mike Wallace assured me that he was convinced that Farrakhan was sincere in trying to build bridges to the Jewish community."

Made Holocaust comparison

After the dinner, Bronfman sent Seagram Executive Vice President Steve Herbits to meet with Farrakhan chief of staff and son-in-law Elijah Mohammed for further conversations. "Herbits made it clear that the first thing that must happen is that the language used by Minister Farrakhan must be drastically changed," particularly Farrakhan's references to the Holocaust, Bronfman said. "Those two agreed on starting a dialogue between one representative from each side to try and accomplish this."

But on the day the two aides met, Bronfman said, Farrakhan was in Brooklyn, "where he compared Iraqi children to the children of the Holocaust."

"You'll also remember that we forcefully pointed out to Minister Farrakhan at that dinner that such references to the Holocaust were totally unacceptable to the Jewish community — indeed we called such usage inflammatory," Bronfman stated in a letter to Wallace.

"I was hoping, as were you, that Minister Farrakhan had been serious when he discussed with you, after you had taped your interview with him, in creating a new era in relations between the black Muslims and the Jews," Bronfman wrote.

"We now know that he cannot find it in his heart to renounce his own anti-Semitism. That is rather sad."

In his letter to the ADL's Foxman, Bronfman wrote: "Two things have become totally clear. One is that what Farrakhan and his gang are after is money. Number two, leopards don't change their spots, and this man is evil personified." Commenting on Foxman's refusal to meet with Farrakhan, Bronfman wrote, "Looking back, your position has been reinforced. No self-respecting person, let alone a Jew, should have anything to do with him."

Foxman referred to the unpublicized Bronfman dinner during a speech at this month's ADL national convention. Foxman said the outcome was not a surprise to him or the ADL. "As you know, we have steadfastly rejected meeting [Farrakhan] until he publicly and consistently ceases his anti-Semitism," Foxman said.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, defended his boss. "It's not the first time that Edgar has taken a risk for the Jewish people," he said. "He put Farrakhan to the test and Farrakhan failed." □

JDC dispatches medical team to assist refugees in Africa

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — An American Jewish organization has dispatched a medical team to Tanzania to help the huge influx of refugees from surrounding African nations resulting from ethnic strife in the region.

Rick Hodes, the doctor who heads the three-person Ethiopia-based team, has been in Tanzania since Saturday, said Gideon Taylor, assistant executive vice president for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The team, which is working with the International Rescue Committee, a U.S.-based group, will initially be based in Kigoma, Tanzania, to provide medical aid to the Rwandan and Zairian refugees there. The JDC sent its team to Tanzania because "at the moment, that is where there is a shortage of medical personnel," Taylor said, adding that the team will be there for at least a month.

The JDC has had a presence in the region since the 1994 civil war in Rwanda, which saw the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people and which precipitated the current crisis in the region. "I think many American Jews were struck by the scale and volume of the massacres" in Rwanda and thought that "in light of Jewish history" a response was important, Taylor said of those early events.

That commitment continues.

The central African crisis, based largely on enmity between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes, recently exploded with renewed fighting in eastern Zaire. The latest developments enabled hundreds of thousands of mostly Rwandan refugees to flee camps in Zaire after more than two years. The conflict in Zaire, a huge country with nine neighbors, threatens the stability of the region, observers have said.

The efforts by the JDC come as the international community, including the United Nations, is in the process of determining its response to the upheaval in the region.

The medical team's presence in Tanzania is a continuation of the efforts of the 39 international Jewish groups that came together in 1994 "to facilitate a Jewish, humanitarian response" to the crisis in Rwanda. The JDC is the coalition's operating arm.

Some of the 20,000 refugees already in Kigoma are "fleeing the fighting, many with gunshot wounds," Taylor said.

The JDC, which is sending medical supplies as well, will also assist the tens of thousands of Burundian refugees streaming into neighboring Tanzania as a result of civil strife in their nation. Taylor said the JDC, which is accepting donations, is planning to send a medical team to Rwanda, where hundreds of thousands of refugees are streaming back from Zaire. □