

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Federation leaders resolved to double their campaign allocations to the Reform, Conservative and modern Orthodox movements in Israel. Meeting at the Council of Jewish Federations quarterly in Washington, the leaders also approved a plan to form a joint operating partnership with the United Jewish Appeal. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, arriving in Malta for the Euro-Mediterranean conference, exchanged warm greetings with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat. But Palestinian sources said European efforts to bring them together floundered.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in *Agostini vs. Felton*. The court is considering overturning its own 1985 ruling that prohibited public school teachers from instructing remedial classes at parochial schools. Orthodox Jewish groups and Jewish defense organizations are split on the issue.

■ Israeli police investigators submitted their recommendations to the state prosecutor about corruption allegations surrounding the short-lived appointment of Roni Bar-On as attorney general.

■ An Israeli man convicted of throwing hot tea in the face of Labor Knesset member Yael Dayan was sentenced to three years in prison. The court rejected Yisrael Lederman's claim that he had offered Dayan a cup of tea when she visited Hebron in October and that someone pushed him from behind.

■ The German government pledged to help to determine whether ex-Nazi soldiers who are in the United States and who collect German pensions are war criminals. In a letter to Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), a top German official said a list identifying the soldiers had been sent to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno.

Because of the Passover holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published April 22, 23 and 24.

CJF leaders move on pluralism, back partnership plan with UJA

By Cynthia Mann

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Responding to what they described as “tremendous” grass-roots pressure, federation leaders across North America have backed a plan to double campaign allocations to the Reform, Conservative and modern Orthodox movements in Israel.

The move, an important gesture designed to demonstrate the Diaspora fund-raising establishment's commitment to religious pluralism in Israel, came this week during quarterly meetings here of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Among the other significant developments that occurred during the three-day meeting of the federation umbrella body:

- The CJF executive committee unanimously approved a plan to form a joint operating partnership with the United Jewish Appeal. That plan will be subject to a national vote via satellite next month.

- CJF committed the federations to provide \$20 million over two years toward a special campaign being mounted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to ease the hunger of elderly Jews in the states that formerly constituted the Soviet Union.

- Extensive discussions were held to examine the federations' relationship with the Jewish Agency for Israel amid signs of growing frustration.

In deciding to double allocations to a wide range of religious institutions in Israel, federation leaders made it clear that they needed to be able to report to donors back home that the fund-raising system is taking action in the face of growing threats to non-Orthodox Judaism there.

Alarm has soared throughout the federation world in the wake of the Israeli Knesset's recent preliminary passage of legislation that would reinforce exclusive Orthodox control over conversions performed in Israel.

'This thing is going to grow'

During the CJF gathering here, communal leaders reported that anger at Israel over such actions was threatening contributions to the federation campaign and would reverberate even in the arena of U.S.-Israeli relations.

Michael Belman, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, said one donor rescinded his \$50,000 pledge because he did not want his money going to Israel and instead distributed it to five local agencies.

“This thing is going to grow,” Belman said.

Norman Tilles of Providence, R.I., agreed. “The issue of religious pluralism will exacerbate the trend for more money to stay locally and less to go overseas,” said Tilles, who is also national president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

That, in turn, will prompt Congress to ask, “Why should we give \$80 million to the Jewish Agency” for refugee resettlement “and billions to Israel when the American Jewish community is cutting back?”

But federation leaders also stressed that CJF should stop dealing with threats to religious pluralism on a crisis-by-crisis basis, and get into the business of helping to educate Israelis about Jewish diversity.

Murray Laulicht, president of the United Jewish Federation of MetroWest, N.J., said federations had to help “build Am Yisrael, klal Yisrael.”

“We have to support those in Israel yearning for religious expression,” he said. “If we take ourselves out of this, we will be irrelevant, and we will lose the battle.”

It was Laulicht who initiated the resolution calling for doubling allocations for projects of the various religious streams in next year's budget of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the campaign's vehicle to fund the religious movements in Israel.

The CJF executive committee unanimously approved the resolution, subject to the review of the CJF committee on pluralism.

A recommendation for the allocations increase is expected to be acted on in June at the Jewish Agency's annual assembly in Israel.

Currently, the agency spends about \$1 million a year each on Reform

and Conservative programs, and about \$450,000 on Orthodox programs.

The agency's total annual budget is \$400 million, with half contributed by the United Jewish Appeal and the federations. Sixty-five percent of its operating budget is spent on immigration and absorption.

UJA, meanwhile, has created new "opportunities" for donors to contribute directly to projects of the various religious movements in Israel, separate from donations to the annual campaign, said Richard Wexler, UJA's national chairman.

CJF's move to back a joint operating partnership with UJA comes on the heels of a similar move last week by UJA's board.

The central Jewish fund-raising campaign for both overseas and local needs is already run jointly by the local federations and the UJA.

The partnership calls for an administrative consolidation to save money and increase fund-raising efficiency to boost the campaigns.

At last spring's CJF quarterly, a more comprehensive plan to merge the two organizations collapsed after complaints that the plan was too radical and did not reflect enough consultation with the local federations.

That plan also called for the two bodies that own UJA to join the merger. But under the plan approved this week, the United Israel Appeal and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee will remain separate and autonomous.

"Nobody should underestimate the importance of getting our own community-building and fund-raising apparatus in order," said Dr. Conrad Giles, CJF's president.

Such restructuring "will put us in a position to respond better to the needs of our community and of Jews outside our community."

Also high on the quarterly agenda this week was re-examining the relationship between the campaign and the Jewish Agency.

The Jewish Agency leadership is asking federations to preserve that relationship for at least two more years in light of the agency's own reform and restructuring efforts.

In contract, the Jewish Agency is the primary recipient in Israel of federation campaign proceeds earmarked for overseas needs. But many in the federation world have become increasingly frustrated with the agency, claiming that it is not as efficient, responsive or relevant as it should be.

A recent jolt

That frustration has been matched by a decline in federations' overseas allocations. Federations decide autonomously how much to give to UJA for overseas distribution and how much to keep at home for local programs.

The system suffered a jolt in the recent decision by San Francisco's federation to reduce its UJA allocation by \$1 million. Half will still go to Israel through other non-specified channels more reflective of donors' concerns. The other half will stay home for local projects.

The state of relations between the campaign and the Jewish Agency has surfaced again as an issue because the bodies that fund the agency must decide by September whether they want to renegotiate the terms of their contract with it.

The Jewish Agency leadership is asking federations to hold off on reopening negotiations as it implements a new restructuring plan aimed at remedying some of the most serious organizational ills.

The restructuring plan calls for the Jewish Agency to assume control of the bulk of the operations of its

organizational partner, the World Zionist Organization. The agency's commitment to fund the WZO, long a bone of contention for many federations, ends after two years.

Consolidating the two administrations into one would result in a seven-figure savings, according to Charles Goodman, chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors.

The agency would also assume full control of the Joint Authority for Jewish and Zionist Education, a responsibility it has shared with the WZO. The semi-autonomous body's politics and lack of accountability have been a major source of frustration for the federations.

Much hinges on whether this restructuring plan clears its next hurdle, however, according to Shoshana Cardin, chair of the United Israel Appeal, which funnels UJA campaign proceeds to the Jewish Agency and acts as its agent in the United States.

Cardin is also a member of the agency's restructuring subcommittee. The group is slated to travel to London this week to win support for the plan by UJA's two partners in the Jewish Agency: the WZO and Keren Hayesod, which raises money for Israel in Diaspora communities outside North America.

She said winning that endorsement and moving forward with the plan would help boost confidence in the system on the part of the federations.

But some federation leaders say privately that momentum is building to push for a renegotiation of the relationship spelled out by the contract.

During the CJF meetings here, there were two closed focus groups with federation leaders to try to find out what they want and need from the Jewish Agency.

Sources say that even some of the federations that are most dissatisfied with and skeptical about the Jewish Agency recognize that there is no other entity which could perform its central role of resettling immigrants.

But at the same time, if they remain dissatisfied, amid growing campaign pressures, federations will be increasingly likely to cut their allocations to UJA and bypass the Jewish Agency in the pattern of San Francisco.

'National system has had to be more flexible'

For his part, Wayne Feinstein, executive director of the San Francisco federation, said, "We feel very strongly about the need for collective action on agreed Jewish national priorities," such as aliyah and "strengthening Jewish identity."

Beyond that, San Francisco has long felt that "the national system has had to be more flexible and responsive and needed to facilitate opportunities for Jews in our community to have direct connections with Jews in Israel and elsewhere overseas."

The agency's funding of the WZO over the years and the failure of the UJA-CJF merger last year "accelerated" San Francisco's feeling that "if we didn't begin to take steps to meet what donors expected and demanded of our federation, then our campaign would erode," said Feinstein.

He said his community believes that it should notify the UJA in the fall it wants to reopen the contract, because "we no longer see the Jewish Agency as the exclusive instrument for Diaspora philanthropy in Israel."

Meanwhile, federations threw in their support here this week for a \$46 million campaign being mounted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to help ease poverty among elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union.

Federations are slated to commit, on a pro-rated, voluntary basis, \$10 million a year to the effort over two years. The amounts they contribute to the effort will be credited as increases in their allocations to the UJA. □

U.S. rabbis welcome proposal to resolve conversion dispute*By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Reform and Conservative leaders in the United States are welcoming a proposal that could lead to recognition of their conversions performed in Israel.

The Israeli government's point man on religious issues, Third Way Knesset member Alexander Lubotsky, presented his proposal last Friday in a meeting here with the liberal movements aimed at crafting a compromise on conversion legislation pending in the Knesset.

The bill has been vigorously opposed by the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel and in the Diaspora.

His proposal would have all converts listed on their Israeli identity cards as Jewish, but the population registry would specify what kind of conversion they underwent.

Lubotsky said such a differentiation would serve the Orthodox rabbinate for purposes of marriage, but would also give Conservative and Reform converts recognition.

The Orthodox rabbinate has control over all matters related to personal status, including marriage, divorce and burial.

"This is the first time since this crisis began that there was real dialogue," Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said of the meeting.

"It wasn't a matter of one side having a monologue with the other.

"There was an evident willingness of both sides to try to find some solutions."

The most important outcome was that the Israeli government representatives "understood that part of the problem was that they had not made enough effort to stay in touch with us," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, who also participated in the meeting.

The controversial conversion measure, which passed a preliminary Knesset vote earlier this month, would cement into law the long-standing practice of giving the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate exclusive control over conversions performed in Israel.

Consideration of the bill has been temporarily suspended to allow for a possible compromise to be negotiated.

Anxious to be reassured

Lubotsky was joined at the negotiations by Bobby Brown, the prime minister's adviser on Diaspora affairs, and Gideon Meir, who similarly advises the foreign minister.

Any compromise would require the approval of the Orthodox parties in Netanyahu's governing coalition, which have made the passage of the legislation a condition of their remaining in the government.

It also would necessitate consultations with the Reform and Conservative movement leadership in Israel.

Lubotsky told the four representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements at the meeting in New York that leaders of the Israeli Orthodox political parties had voiced no objection to the proposal, said one participant.

The night before the meeting, the Israeli officials met with representatives of Orthodox organizations, who were anxious to be reassured that the religious status quo in Israel would not change.

The Orthodox Union, Agudath Israel of America, Rabbinical Council of America, Emunah Women and Amit requested the meeting with the Israeli government officials.

The half-dozen Orthodox leaders listened to Lubotsky's proposal "and didn't come to any conclusions," according to Betty Ehrenberg, director of international affairs for the Orthodox Union.

"We just said that we hoped that the resolution would be found quickly because we're very disturbed by the rift that seems to be widening in the Jewish community" in the United States as well as Israel over religious pluralism, she said.

Putting the conversion bill on hold was predicated upon the non-Orthodox denominations' agreeing to freeze legal actions now before the High Court of Justice, and to desist from further such legal actions while negotiations are under way.

But at Friday's meeting, the liberal movements' representatives balked at Lubotsky's request that they drop their litigation in exchange for the Knesset dropping the conversion bill.

In fact, Hirsch said the Reform movement in Israel would file four more cases with the High Court of Justice.

The liberal movements will continue to fight for recognition in every venue possible, said Hirsch.

"We're committed to dismantling the Orthodox monopoly in Israel and will use every means at our disposal to do so."

The Israeli officials and U.S. Reform and Conservative leaders tentatively scheduled to talk again in about six to eight weeks, said participants. □

Elite Israeli army unit kills Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Members of an elite Israeli army unit operating north of the security zone in southern Lebanon killed three Hezbollah gunmen and wounded several others in an overnight ambush.

No Israeli forces were hurt in the Monday night operation, which was carried out by members of the Egoz unit, a special team established more than two years ago to be used exclusively against Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon.

According to reports, the Egoz unit crossed the security zone on foot, reaching a village just north of the security zone that had become a springboard for Hezbollah attacks against Israeli and South Lebanon Army forces in the region.

The unit opened fire when it came upon a group of Hezbollah fighters. After the firefight, the Israeli troops crossed back safely to the security zone.

The head of the Israel Defense Force northern command, Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, praised the unit and said the operation was intended to send a clear message to Hezbollah to stop activities that violate the cease-fire reached after Operation Grapes of Wrath, the 16-day cross-border offensive Israel launched against Hezbollah one year ago.

Under the terms of the cease-fire, both sides agreed not to launch attacks from or on civilian areas in the region.

Israeli troops in southern Lebanon are on high alert this week, which marks one year after Israeli shelled the Kana U.N. camp in southern Lebanon, killing at least 91 Lebanese refugees who had taken shelter there.

The United Nations condemned Israel at the time, saying that it was aware that refugees were housed at the base.

The claim was denied by Israeli officials, who said that IDF artillery units were responding to a Hezbollah Katyusha rocket attack that had been launched from a location near the base. □

Sarajevo Jewish aid organization awarded international peace prize*By Ruth E. Gruber*

VATICAN CITY (JTA) — During his brief visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo over the weekend, Pope John Paul II granted a cash award to the Sarajevo Jewish community's social aid organization La Benevolencija.

In a ceremony Sunday, he presented the Pope John XXIII International Peace Prize to four Sarajevo-based religious humanitarian organizations — La Benevolencija, the Roman Catholic Caritas, the Muslim Merhamet and the Serbian Orthodox Dobrotvor. Each group received \$50,000.

"I willingly accepted the invitation to award [this] prize to four humanitarian organizations which have particularly distinguished themselves by their active work of relief and assistance during the difficult years of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the Republic of Croatia," the pope said when presenting the awards.

"In a situation often marked by grave tensions and difficulties, they provided concrete signs of hope by their presence and their generous and courageous activity, and thus helped to lay the foundation for a future of reconciliation and of genuine solidarity between different peoples and cultures in this beloved region," he said.

Throughout the 1992 to 1995 Bosnian civil war, including when Sarajevo was under a state of siege, La Benevolencija served as a key conduit of aid to Jews and non-Jews alike.

During what was the bloodiest war in Europe since World War II, more than 200,000 people were killed or disappeared, and tens of thousands more were wounded. In Sarajevo alone, more than 8,000 people were killed, 769 of them children, according to the Bosnian Health Ministry.

Supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Britain's World Jewish Relief, individual Jewish communities in other countries and other organizations, La Benevolencija ran a clinic, pharmacies, a post office and soup kitchen throughout the conflict.

La Benevolencija also distributed free medicines, food, clothing and other necessities.

For La Benevolencija, the award was the latest in a series of international recognitions. The organization also has been named "Newsmaker of the Year 5756" by the London-based weekly Jewish Chronicle and received the Carl von Ossietzky medal from the International League for Human Rights in Berlin.

La Benevolencija's president, Jakob Finci, received The Pentland Young Jewish Care award for 1995 in London, and was named "Righteous Among the Righteous" by the Italian city of Rimini.

The pope flew to Sarajevo on Saturday and returned to the Vatican on Sunday after celebrating an outdoor Mass in which he called for peace and reconciliation. He also met separately with representatives of Jewish and other religious communities in Sarajevo.

The Pope John XXIII International Peace Prize was established by Pope John XXIII in 1963. □

Plans for Holocaust memorial in Berlin remain at an impasse*By Daniel Dagan*

BERLIN (JTA) — For the third time since January, some 100 people gathered to discuss the Holocaust memorial planned for Berlin.

And, for the third time since January, the politicians, scholars, government officials and others failed to reach a consensus.

The money for the project is in place, but plans for the memorial appear to remain at an impasse.

No agreement was reached last Friday on the exact location for the monument, whether it should be dedicated to just the Jewish victims of Nazi terror or even what it should look like.

A design initially adopted by the organizers called for putting a huge, black concrete plate on the site, on which all known names of the Jewish victims of the Nazis would be engraved.

But the idea of the plate, which critics said could be as big as a soccer field, was dropped after protests by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and others, who called the project "megalomania."

Earlier this year, the organizers said the memorial should be chosen from the other nine proposals that won awards in a design competition. One proposal calls for building a bus station at the memorial site, with tickets sold and services offered to take visitors to the various concentration and death camps in Europe.

Others have called for a new design competition.

"Let's give the whole thing a new chance," Vienna architect Gustav Peichl said at last Friday's meeting. "We have to admit that the proposals put forward at the first competition failed to produce the desired results."

A group of 21 Berlin architects and historians proposed creating temporary memorials because no agreement could be reached on a permanent one, but an awkward silence followed the suggestion.

Lea Rosh, the journalist who launched the idea of a central memorial, said, "Let's stop debating and start with the work right away." □

High Court blocks release of Israeli air force embezzler*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has blocked the early release of a former Air Force general who was convicted of embezzling \$12 million when he was overseeing military procurements from the United States.

Ruling on petitions against the early release of Rami Dotan, the court ordered the military parole board to give the army prosecutor a chance to weigh in on the matter before releasing Dotan.

A furor erupted last month in Israel over the parole board's decision to free Dotan next week.

Dotan, who was sentenced to 13 years in prison, has served more than six years.

According to his conviction, Dotan reported higher purchase prices than the actual costs, and pocketed the differences. Some of the purchases were made with funds provided by U.S. military assistance to Israel.

Dotan pleaded guilty in 1991 to 12 counts including fraud, taking bribes and breach of public trust in connection to the arms purchases from the United States.

He was convicted, sentenced to prison and demoted to the rank of private. He also promised to pay back \$10 million he embezzled from the Defense Ministry.

In its decision last month to free Dotan, the military parole board cited two minor strokes Dotan had suffered and said that he was chronically ill.

The decision prompted angry responses in political and defense circles. Security officials voiced concern that after his release, Dotan would approach American officials and argue that Israel was behind his actions.

Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein last week expressed his opposition to Dotan's early release.

In a written statement to the parole board, Rubinstein said the board had not sufficiently considered the gravity of Dotan's crime and that his relative light sentence had already taken his health into account. □