



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The former Swiss bank guard who saved Holocaust-era documents from the shredder is seeking permission to live in the United States. U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) is apparently trying to expedite visas for Christoph Meili and his family. [Page 1]

■ Israeli officials are considering plans to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. Israel's interior minister said Israel should consider annexing outlying communities such as Ma'aleh Adumim and Givat Ze'ev prior to final-status negotiations with the Palestinians. [Page 3]

■ Norwegian Foreign Minister Bjorn Tore Godal warned of bloodshed if Israeli-Palestinian talks were not resumed soon. Godal, whose country was involved in forging the Oslo accords, is visiting Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

■ Hezbollah gunmen attacked an Israeli army position in southern Lebanon. One Israeli soldier and three members of the allied South Lebanon Army were lightly wounded. Two Hezbollah fighters reportedly were killed.

■ Israel marked its 49th Independence Day celebrations with an air force show and naval display. President Ezer Weizman held a reception for decorated soldiers at his official residence in Jerusalem, as well as a reception for the diplomatic corps.

■ New York Mets pitcher Jason Isringhausen apologized for referring to the team's public relations director as a "Jew boy" during a conference call with reporters. The pitcher said he was joking, and Jay Horwitz said he was not offended by the remark.

■ The Orthodox rabbinical group that prompted fury last month by declaring that the Reform and Conservative movements were "not Judaism," is launching a campaign aimed at bringing Reform and Conservative Jews into Orthodoxy. Plans are to staff the offices of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada with volunteer rabbis to respond to inquiries from non-Orthodox Jews.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

For former Swiss security guard, life seems like a television movie

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Christoph Meili is looking for safe haven — and he hopes to find it in the United States.

Once assured that he can legally live and work here, the former Swiss bank security guard says he can — and will — reveal much more about the Swiss banks' disposition of Nazi gold than he already has.

Since early January, when the 29-year-old found sensitive Holocaust-era documents in the shredding room of the Union Bank of Switzerland, his life has seemed the stuff of a made-for-television movie.

But for Meili, his wife, Giuseppina, 26, and their two children, Miriam, 4, and David, 2, the script seems to oscillate between a waking dream and a waking nightmare.

Initially hailed as a hero by the Swiss media and Jews throughout the world, the devout Protestants say they now feel like a family without a country, condemned by more than half their fellow countrymen — according to a recent Swiss newspaper poll — for harming Switzerland's reputation.

The documents could have bearing on allegations that the bank was withholding from their rightful owners the assets of accounts opened by Holocaust victims.

Since early January, when Meili brought the documents to the attention of the Swiss Jewish community, which turned the material over to the police, the young family has found itself at the center of a hurricane of controversy.

Meili immediately lost his job at the bank and the bank's president suggested on national television that he had nefarious motives for doing so. The bank official did not specify what those motives might be.

The Swiss government currently is investigating whether to prosecute Meili for breaking Swiss banking secrecy laws, according to the police investigator in charge of the case.

In an interview at the offices of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the Meilis, with children in tow, said the experience has left them exhausted and without a place they can feel safe. They have received tens of threats, Meili said, pale and visibly worn down from a relentless round of visits to newspaper offices and television studios.

'Life will be pretty difficult'

Shortly before they left for the United States earlier this month, he said, a man showed up at their door in Baden and handed Giuseppina a note threatening to kidnap their children.

It was then that they knew they had to leave. "Swiss people think I did a bad thing," Christoph Meili said in the interview.

Some Swiss think he is disloyal to his country; others believe he is only after fame and fortune. "Many Swiss people don't love me and don't love the Jewish people," Meili said in his labored English. "When you help the Jewish people, you become a problem."

Even among Swiss Jews, there seems to be some doubt about whether Meili should stay in the United States. Werner Rom, the head of Zurich's Jewish community, said Meili was right about Swiss attitudes, but that he was not sure that his salvation rests in the United States.

"He will not be the star," Rom said. "Life will be pretty difficult."

Meili said he initially felt spurred to save the documents a few months after watching the film, "Schindler's List."

He had also heard a story of Holocaust-era heroism in his own family. According to his mother, his grandfather had hidden Jews under a bridge at the Swiss-German border and provided them with a steam generator, so they had heat and electricity and were able to hide safely there for many weeks, Meili said. He didn't know how many persecuted Jews his grandfather was able to aid, he said, but it was something he never forgot.

Since his arrival in the United States, Meili said, he has had between 20 and 30 job offers, including one from Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress and chairman of Seagram Company Ltd.

But Meili cannot accept any offer, since he and his family do not yet

have permission to stay in the United States after their tourist visas expire. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), whose efforts, along with those of the World Jewish Congress led to international inquiries into Switzerland's wartime role, is trying to expedite the process of obtaining a visa for the family, said Meili and the two men escorting him around town.

Accompanying him during his stay are a New York attorney, Edward Fagan, and Rabbi Ronald Gray, who heads the U.S. fund-raising effort for Boys Town Jerusalem, a school for disadvantaged boys in Israel's capital.

Boys Town will honor Meili in the fall, Gray said, because Meili "did the right thing because he knew it was the right thing to do."

Gray said he hopes soon to take the family to visit his students in Israel, where he can serve as an inspiration.

The family is being housed in a New York-area apartment provided by an anonymous Jewish benefactor. Other donors are supplying them with food, clothing and social services including language instruction for the couple, Gray said.

With his wife and children at his side at a May 6 hearing of the Senate Banking Committee, Meili testified about some of the documents he had saved.

D'Amato's praise for Meili continued a few days later, when on the Senate floor, he said, "Here is a young man who acted as a righteous person and instead of being treated as a hero for standing up and doing what is right, he had been treated like a criminal."

When testifying before the U.S. Senate last week, Meili beseeched the American legislators to "please protect me in the United States and Switzerland." □

(JTA correspondent Fredy Rom in Zurich contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli scholar's appointment to Swiss body filled with irony

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — There lurks an almost unbearable irony in the appointment of Saul Friedlander to an international commission of nine eminent historians to probe, evaluate and ultimately judge Switzerland's role and conduct during World War II.

Nearly 55 years ago, on Sept. 29, 1942, Friedlander's Czech-born parents tried to cross into Switzerland from Vichy France. They were intercepted by Swiss border guards, who handed them over to French police.

The French passed the couple on to the Germans, who shipped Jan and Elli Friedlander to Auschwitz, where both perished. Just before the Friedlanders embarked on their ill-fated attempt, they found a hiding place for their 10-year-old son in a French monastery, where he was raised as a Catholic.

Ironically, if young Saul had accompanied his parents, the family would have been saved. Of the 12 Jews who participated in the attempted border crossing, the Swiss admitted only those with children.

"It shows how implacably horrendous the whole situation was," said Friedlander, sitting in his office at the University of California, Los Angeles. "What you thought was the best, turned out to be the worst."

Friedlander recalled the horrors of the past when he received a phone call last December from Switzerland's special envoy, Ambassador Thomas Borer, asking him to serve on the Independent Commission of Experts chaired by Francois Bergier. Friedlander was assured that the commission, appointed by the Swiss government, would have complete access to all of Switzerland's documents on foreign policy, economic and financial dealings, and

treatment of refugees during the Nazi era, as well as the wartime archives of the international Red Cross.

Facing accusations of aid to Nazi Germany and refusal by Swiss banks to pay out accounts established by Holocaust victims, Switzerland was anxious to announce the formation of the commission as quickly as possible.

Friedlander, who was given two hours to decide whether to serve, based his acceptance on two considerations. "The Swiss knew what had happened to my parents, that I had written about Switzerland's role in the war and that I was an Israeli citizen," he said. "Given all that, I took the Swiss offer as a sign that their intentions were really serious."

"As a Jew, as a human being and as a historian, I felt a deep commitment to make sure that the task would be carried through seriously."

Friedlander was also reassured by the reputations of his fellow commission members — five Swiss, one American, one Briton and one Pole. The American is Sybil Milton, until recently chief historian at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington.

Even in that distinguished company, Friedlander is perhaps uniquely qualified for the job at hand.

'Our work will be done thoroughly'

Acknowledged as one of the world's leading Holocaust scholars, Friedlander splits the academic year between UCLA and Tel Aviv University. He has written nine widely translated books, including "When Memory Comes," a moving account of his childhood in his native Prague and as a hidden child in France.

Just published by HarperCollins is the first volume of his "Nazi Germany and the Jews," covering the period of 1933-1939. The book, already translated into French, German and Hebrew, has won early acceptance as the new standard on the subject.

Two months ago, Friedlander attended the first meeting of the Commission of Experts in Bern, and came away with the sense that "our work will be done thoroughly and totally."

Given the mountains of hitherto-secret documents and statistics and the international ramifications of Switzerland's wartime role, the job facing the commission can be fairly described as monumental. Some 30 to 40 researchers will comb archives in Switzerland, Germany, Russia, the United States and Israel.

"I expect the commission's work to take five to six years," said Friedlander.

In one project, the commission will probe the records of a Swiss government agency that daily monitored the flow of gold into and out of Switzerland during World War II. These records are expected to yield information on the precise amount of Nazi gold, looted from occupied countries and Holocaust victims, that was channeled into Swiss banks.

Based on both his personal and scholarly background, Friedlander plans to pay special attention to Switzerland's wartime policy regarding Jewish refugees seeking asylum.

The commission will issue interim reports on its findings. It is also expected that the investigations will shed new light on the assistance given to the Nazi war machine by such "neutral" nations as Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Argentina.

Such future research will give further impetus to a historical phenomenon: That as the Nazi era and the Holocaust recede in time, the world's attention is not ebbing but increasing.

"With the passage of time, we are slowly grasping the vastness of the amplitude and ramifications of the Hitler period," Friedlander said. □

Israel refutes U.N. charges of using torture on prisoners

By Fredy Rom

GENEVA (JTA) — Israel is rejecting the conclusions of a United Nations committee that it uses torture against suspected terrorists.

The Geneva-based U.N. Committee against Torture last Friday called on Israel to "cease immediately" the use of such techniques as sleep deprivation and violent shaking, saying this constituted torture and broke international law.

Israel immediately lashed out at the 10-member committee, saying it was being singled out, that the findings were based on the "hearsay evidence" of non-governmental organizations, and that Israel was employing only commonly used anti-terrorism methods.

"It is absolutely not the case that Israel uses torture or any methods tantamount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in interrogating suspected terrorists," the Israeli ambassador in Geneva, Yosef Lamdan, said in a statement. "Israel has nothing to hide on this issue."

David Bar-Illan, spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said in Jerusalem that Israel only used "methods that are employed throughout the world in the war against terrorism, and to single out Israel is hypocritical."

But the U.N. committee said the 1987 Convention against Torture, which Israel signed along with 101 other countries, maintained that the threat of an imminent act of terrorism did not justify the use of cruel investigative techniques. It told Israel to submit another report on its interrogation methods by Sept. 1.

The committee listed seven interrogation methods that "appear to be applied systematically" and said Israel had neither confirmed nor denied reports of their use.

The methods were reported by Amnesty International and other human-rights groups, which had interviewed people interrogated by Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service.

The methods Israel was charged with using included: painful restraints, hooding, playing loud music for prolonged periods, sleep deprivation, death threats, violent shaking, and using cold air to chill detainees.

Peter Burns, a Canadian professor who is the committee's investigator in Israel, was quoted as saying, "Individually and in combination, the methods constitute torture." □

Israeli officials devising plan to expand capital's boundaries

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials are secretly considering plans to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem.

Disclosure of the plans came after Interior Minister Eli Suissa, a member of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, said Israel should consider annexing outlying communities such as Ma'aleh Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, Betar and the Etzion settlement bloc, making them part of a Greater Jerusalem municipality.

Senior political officials involved in planning the greater metropolitan area view it as an important move prior to the final-status negotiations with the Palestinians, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported this week.

In a reflection of the political sensitivity of the move, Suissa responded to an inquiry about the plans by saying it was "better not to discuss it."

In an April 16 speech, Suissa said Israel should consider incorporating the areas outside of the city's municipal boundaries. He said he saw no reason for places

such as Ma'aleh Adumim or Givat Ze'ev to be separate municipal areas.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert also refused to comment on the Ha'aretz report.

The team drawing up the plans does not have the mandate to take legal steps toward expanding Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, a matter that requires Knesset action.

A source involved in the plan said Israel should not be idle where Jerusalem is concerned, given Palestinian aspirations to assume control over parts of the city. □

Israeli soldier's murderers explain actions in interview

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three members of a terrorist cell that abducted an Israeli soldier last summer said they kidnapped Sharon Edri in an effort to pressure Israel to release Hamas prisoners.

They said they murdered Edri only after he resisted them.

The terrorists, who are in Palestinian Authority jails, discussed the kidnapping and murder during an interview with the Arab-language newspaper Al-Quds.

Months after he was reported missing, Edri's body was found earlier this year buried in a West Bank village where members of the cell lived.

The terrorist cell, from the village of Tsurif near the West Bank town of Hebron, is believed responsible for a number of terrorist attacks during the past two years that killed 11 Israelis. Their attacks included the March 21 suicide bombing at Cafe Apropos in Tel Aviv that killed 3 Israelis and wounded 47 others.

The cell members said the Tel Aviv bombing came in response to Israel's decision, several days earlier, to start construction of a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

The cell members denied that Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat had given the "green light" for the attack — a charge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made at the time. They said they had only followed instructions from the Hamas leadership, adding that they did not need Arafat's approval.

Two other members of the cell are being held by Israel. □

Netanyahu, Hussein resolve dispute over water allocation

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jordan and Israel have agreed to resolve a bitter dispute over water allocation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's King Hussein worked out a solution last week during a meeting in the Jordanian port city of Aqaba.

Jordan's information minister, Samir Mutawae, said that under the arrangement, Israel would help to bring an extra 1.7 billion cubic feet of water a year into Jordan.

The water would be provided in two stages — the first half to be provided immediately, and the second half after three years.

He said the second stage would take effect only after storage facilities were completed.

Technical experts from both sides are to work jointly on projects to increase the kingdom's storage capacity.

The 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty called for the Jewish state to provide the Hashemite Kingdom with more than 5 billion cubic feet annually through a desalination project and a dam project. Financing of the two projects must still be finalized. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Writing enables child survivors to confront tragic experiences

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Chana Cohen Aronoff was 3 years old when, during the darkest days of the Holocaust, her parents entrusted her to the care of a Christian family.

Fifty-two years after the end of World War II, Aronoff is still trying to come to terms with her experiences as a child Holocaust survivor.

Seated in the offices of Amcha, the Israeli organization for psychological and social assistance to Holocaust survivors, Aronoff, now 57, explains how she is starting to explore the raw, unhealed parts of her childhood.

"I was in hiding from age 3 to 6, and during that time I lived with four different families," explains Aronoff, who moved to Israel decades ago.

"I stayed with the last family for two-and-a half years, and when my parents returned, I didn't want to go with them."

Shaking her head at the recollection, she says, "In order to protect myself, to reassure myself that I wouldn't have to leave this safe, good family, I imagined that my parents had eaten poisoned strawberries and died.

"When they returned after the war, I screamed and screamed. I didn't want to leave the family I had come to think of as mine."

It was not until she enrolled in an Amcha diary-writing workshop for child survivors last year that Aronoff began to examine her past.

"Writing about my experiences in a supportive setting allowed me to think about how traumatic my childhood really was. I was filled with guilt and insecurity. For most of my life, people, including adult survivors, didn't recognize the emotional toll the Holocaust took on children in hiding."

Child survivors a distinct group

This year, as Israel's Holocaust institutions focus on child victims of the Holocaust, child survivors have begun to share their experiences with a country that is finally willing — or perhaps finally able — to listen.

"It is unfortunate, but hardly surprising, that it has taken almost 50 years for Israelis to recognize child survivors as a distinct group with distinct problems," says Johanna Gottesfeld, an Amcha psychotherapist who says that during the first decades of statehood, Israeli society encouraged survivors to bury their past, not confront it.

Child survivors must contend with a host of emotional issues, says Gottesfeld.

"Many were torn from their parents and suffer from separation anxiety and feelings of abandonment to this day," she says.

"Sometimes their parents never returned. In other cases, the parents who returned were emotionally damaged. We see these fears being transmitted to the second generation," the children of survivors.

Elana Brukker, a 59-year-old child survivor from Holland, believes that if there is one trait shared by child survivors, "it is the feeling that we must be good and strong. As a child who was hidden with 12 different families, I knew instinctively that I had to be a good, brave little girl."

Brukker, recalls that "the first time I went to a survivors' meeting, I didn't open my mouth, but I could relate to what the others were saying. There was this box of tissues in the middle of the room, and everyone used it.

"One day I just opened up and cried. Oh how I cried. It felt so good to open up, but even now, I'm afraid to reveal too much for fear of breaking down."

The fear of breaking down emotionally, of getting too close to the pain, is especially acute around Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was marked in Israel on May 5, says Gottesfeld.

"This day brings back a lot of memories, and survivors are afraid of being flooded. The commemoration is important, but it also brings back the past, which is invariably very painful."

Regardless of whether they were youngsters or adults during the Holocaust, Gottesfeld stresses that the aging process intensifies the memories.

"Many survivors channeled everything into their work as a way to escape the past, and when they retire, the memories flood back. They also tend to have small families, and many are totally alone."

Given the growing emotional and physical needs of the aging survivor population, the Israeli government's recent decision to stop funding Amcha and at least one other survivors' organization has whipped up a great deal of controversy at a time when the government is pursuing stolen Jewish assets in Switzerland and elsewhere.

Funding of survivors support group cut

Founded in 1987, Amcha began to receive funding from the Health Ministry in 1992.

In 1995, government funding accounted for 12 percent of the group's budget. It dropped to 7 percent in 1996, and this year the subsidy of about \$180,000 was eliminated.

While a Health Ministry statement defended the decision on financial grounds, and noted that numerous ministry funded organizations had suffered the same fate, Amcha's executive director, John Lemberger, termed the cuts "reprehensible."

"If anything, the government should be contributing 25 percent of our budget" because it has received billions in Holocaust reparations, says Lemberger. "It is inconceivable that Israel would turn its back on Holocaust survivors."

Lemberger says that Amcha has not cut services to survivors and the second generation because the group receives a steady stream of contributions, including a recent grant from the Swiss government. Although Holocaust experts concur that services to survivors must continue, some question whether the government's responsibility extends to children of survivors.

"We have an obligation to support survivors, and the government must find the means to do it, but there is a question in Israel as to who should pay for assistance to the second generation," says Avner Shalev, chairman of the directorate at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial.

"These people were born in Israel and are part of Israeli society."

Lemberger, whose group spends approximately half of its resources on second-generation programs, counters that "we work on a sliding scale. Survivors who can pay do pay, and the second generation pay at a higher rate than survivors."

For Chana Aronoff, a cut in services would be regrettable. "My writing, which started at Amcha, has helped me and my entire family to heal," she says.

Thanks to the diary workshop, she says, "I've begun to show my writing to my parents to read. It's opened up a lot of discussion."

As for the Christian family that gave her a home more than 50 years ago, Aronoff says they still keep in touch. "Every few weeks I send what I've written to my stepsister," the daughter of the family that "adopted" her, and she writes things from her perspective.

"After so many years of secrets, it feels good to have some perspective." □