



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Britain and the United States announced the establishment of a fund to compensate Holocaust victims and their families. The announcement came at the opening of an international conference on Nazi gold in London. The United States said it would deposit \$4 million into the fund as a down payment on a \$25 million contribution. Britain said it would contribute approximately \$1.7 million. [Page 3]

■ U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Paris on Friday and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat on Saturday in Geneva, according to a U.S. State Department spokesman.

■ Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat said a Palestinian state exists and that he hoped Jerusalem would be its capital. Arafat was responding to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks that if the Palestinians unilaterally declare an independent state, Israel would annex parts of the West Bank.

■ Diplomats from mostly Arab and Muslim countries submitted a resolution to the United Nations that would grant the Palestine Liberation Organization all the privileges of a member state except for the right to vote and run for office. The resolution sparked intense U.S. and Israeli efforts to lobby against it.

■ The Anti-Defamation League said that it would have a filtering system for Internet hate sites early next year. The national chairman of ADL, Howard Berkowitz, said the software would block specific Web site addresses.

■ Philanthropist George Soros announced his second-ever gift to a Jewish organization — \$1.3 million to the Jewish Fund for Justice, which funds anti-poverty, community building and immigrant programs. [Page 2]

■ Doctors for Maurice Papon said the former Vichy official should be well enough to appear in court later this week. The war crimes trial of Papon was suspended two weeks ago after he came down with double pneumonia.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Prominent Orthodox rabbi breaks silence on unity issues

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

SPRING GLEN, N.Y. (JTA) — As Israeli Orthodox political and religious leaders battle out the future of Jewish peoplehood with the Reform and Conservative movements, public input from leaders of American modern Orthodoxy has been patchy.

Leaders of the congregational branch of the movement that integrates Torah and modernity have occasionally spoken out against the liberal movements' positions.

But until now, Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, the fountainhead of modern Orthodox ideology and the training ground for many centrist Orthodox rabbis and educators, has been noticeably silent.

This silence was in marked contrast with his more vocal role a decade ago, when the "Who Is a Jew" debacle threatened Israel-Diaspora relations.

At that time, Lamm urged the Israeli government to put Jewish unity ahead of the desire of Orthodox political parties to exclude non-Orthodox converts from invoking a Jew's automatic citizenship in the State of Israel.

Now, after months of silence, Lamm has once again come out on the side of Jewish unity, urging his constituents to put compromise and cooperation with the non-Orthodox ahead of theological differences.

"We should vigorously support compromise produced by the Ne'eman Committee," Lamm said, referring to the Israeli government-appointed interdenominational committee charged with reaching a solution to the current conversion crisis.

The committee is seeking to avert Orthodox-sponsored legislation that would codify Orthodox control over religious life. While the Orthodox need to ensure the validity of all conversions to Judaism in Israel, Lamm said, "communal peace is also a principle of Judaism."

Lamm's remarks came during a speech and in a private interview during a convention of the World Council of Orthodox Leadership, which drew some 650 people to the Homowack Hotel in Glen Springs, N.Y., over the Thanksgiving weekend.

The council is a new umbrella organization representing the leaders of 21 modern Orthodox institutions.

The goal of the conference, an organizer said, was to articulate the principles of modern Orthodoxy and to develop a strategy to implement them.

Gathering comes during strife-filled times

The gathering came at a time of intra-Orthodox as well as interdenominational Jewish strife.

It is a time when, because of the influence of the right on centrist Orthodoxy, some are questioning what modern Orthodoxy really stands for.

Lamm told his listeners that they should value and encourage the efforts of non-Orthodox leaders to integrate traditional Jewish practices into the lives of their followers.

They should welcome the creation of Reform and Conservative day schools and not see them as a threat to their own, Lamm said. In many communities, Orthodox day schools, or Orthodox-oriented community day schools, have large numbers of students from non-Orthodox families.

The liberal movements should be appreciated and encouraged because they are doing something Jewish, even if it is not the way that Orthodox Jews would like them to, he said.

"What they are doing is something, and something is better than nothing," he said in his speech.

"I'm very openly attacking the notion that we sometimes find in the Orthodox community that 'being a gay is better' " than being a non-Orthodox Jew, he said in an interview.

But it was apparent from one of Lamm's off-hand remarks during his speech that while tolerance may be a goal, it has its limits in practice.

Lamm mocked the president of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for calling himself a "rosh yeshiva," a term generally used by the heads of Orthodox schools.

Lamm also derided the Reform seminary for calling its part-time adult

education program a "kollel." In Orthodoxy, kollels are centers for adult men's advanced, full-time study.

"As soon as I finished saying that, I regretted it," Lamm said later.

If concerns over Jewish unity and pluralism were central at the conference, which was titled "Translating Vision Into Reality," so were intra-Orthodox tensions.

Haredi, or right-wing, Orthodoxy's influence on modern Orthodoxy has long been conceded by people in the centrist camp — and celebrated by those to their right.

Many of the conference's speakers focused on shoring up confidence in modern Orthodoxy and on reminding them about the central tenets of their movement.

"We live in two worlds, consciously. We see legitimacy and value in two worlds, in things like Zionism and feminism," said J.J. Schachter, rabbi of The Jewish Center, an Orthodox synagogue on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

"Our modernity has challenged our Orthodoxy. But Orthodoxy and modernity are not equal," he said. "We have to keep our priorities straight. Have we accepted that we have to submit ourselves, wholly, to a transcendent God, which requires a certain kind of behavior?"

Leaders of the groups sponsoring the conference passed resolutions endorsing the religious value of work outside the synagogue and Torah study hall — work that benefits the Jewish community and humankind.

Other resolutions committed them to a renewed focus on Zionist education and activity, and endorsed efforts to expand women's leadership roles within Orthodoxy, an issue that was a major theme at the conference.

Many speakers also unequivocally criticized the community's intimidation from the right.

"There is great danger when authoritarianism comes into play and there are attempts to quash discussion," said Rabbi Marc Angel, president of the Rabbinic Alumni of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, in his remarks.

"Some people are declared acceptable and some are declared unacceptable," said Angel, speaking of an ideological blacklisting that he said has become quite routine.

"Unless we defend people's rights" to speak freely, "the atmosphere gets worse," said Angel, a former president of the Rabbinical Council of America, the rabbinical organization for centrist Orthodoxy. "If the modern Orthodox community doesn't stand up, then who will? If we can't rise above petty sectarian differences, then who will?"

Even within modern Orthodoxy, the limits of inclusion and tolerance were visible. Edah, a group established last year to educate Orthodox rabbis about tolerance, was invited to participate and then disinvited after concern about the participation of Rabbi Saul Berman, a New York rabbi who runs the organization.

Edah was deemed "treif" last year by some rabbinic leaders at Yeshiva University because Berman and Rabbi Avi Weiss, another Edah leader, initiated a leadership training program for women that has been interpreted by some as being too close to rabbinical training. They are also resented because they are working outside the establishment, the organizer said. □

Soros gives major boost to Jewish Fund for Justice

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 2 (JTA) — Financier and philanthropist George Soros is boosting the bank balance of the Jewish Fund for Justice by \$1.3 million — his second-ever gift to a Jewish organization.

Soros, a Hungarian-born Jew who earned his fortune managing hedge funds, which are high-risk, high-yield investments, has distributed millions around the globe to support everything from pro-democracy work in former communist countries to groups lobbying for the decriminalization of marijuana.

Only recently has he given any money to a Jewish organization. His Open Society Institute's Emma Lazarus Fund gave \$1.3 million to the Council of Jewish Federations in August to fund naturalization programs for immigrants, primarily Jews from the former Soviet Union.

The gift to the Jewish Fund for Justice is by far the largest that the anti-poverty and community development grant-making group has ever received, said Marlene Provizer, the group's executive director.

Provizer called Soros' interest in the group "a natural fit" because of commitments both have to assisting refugees and immigrants, investing in youth and building community.

The group raises money in the Jewish community and distributes it to community organizations across the United States. The fund was founded in 1984 and began making grants the following year. It has awarded \$4.3 million in grants to over 400 community-based groups.

Past grantees include The Interfaith Coalition for Immigrants' Rights in San Francisco; the Jewish Community Housing Development Corporation in Washington, D.C., and the Omaha Together One Community, a campaign to increase services to local youth.

Last year it distributed just over \$600,000, an amount it will be able to increase by more than half this year as a result of Soros' grant.

The bulk of the Soros gift — \$1 million — is a challenge grant to be allocated over three years. The fund has already raised about \$300,000 of the matching funds it needs, the group said in a statement.

Part of the money from Soros will be used by the group's fund for institutional development, to help it broaden its base of support, Provizer said. □

Australian Jews and Anglicans meet

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Representatives of Australia's Jewish community have held the first official interfaith dialogue with their counterparts from the Anglican Church.

Last week's daylong meeting here was aimed at finding common ground and at overcoming misunderstandings between the two faiths.

The first half of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of "The Jewish-Christian Tradition — a Myth?" and the second half was on "Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Aboriginal Reconciliation."

For the first 200 years of the European settlement of Australia, the Anglican Church was Australia's largest.

In recent years, Catholicism has narrowly overtaken Anglicanism as Australia's largest religious community.

Close to a quarter of the country's 18.3 million population belong to the Anglican Church.

Although this was the first dialogue with a Jewish delegation ever undertaken by the Anglican Church, the Jewish community has been involved in a similar dialogue with the Uniting Church in Australia for a number of years. Those discussions culminated earlier this year with a comprehensive policy in that church to enter into broader dialogue with the Jewish community.

The Catholic Church of Australia and the country's Lutheran Church adopted revised policies for teaching about, and dealing with, Jews and Judaism in 1992 and 1996, respectively. □

New fund for survivors hailed as 'historic step' to get justice

By Daniel Kurtzman

LONDON (JTA) — Jewish officials have hailed the creation of a new international fund to benefit Holocaust survivors as a "historic step forward" in the tortuous path to restitution and justice.

As some 240 delegates from 41 countries gathered here Tuesday at the opening of an unprecedented three-day conference on Nazi gold, Britain and the United States pledged millions to a fund the two countries created in recognition of debts owed to Holocaust victims whose gold was seized by the Nazis.

The United States said it would contribute an initial \$4 million to the fund as part of a \$25 million contribution over three years.

Stuart Eizenstat, who serves as U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs and is the Clinton administration's point man on the Nazi gold issue, said the creation of the fund "extends both a moral gesture and a material contribution to justice, however little and late, for Holocaust survivors."

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who organized the conference, said his country will donate \$1.7 million to the Nazi Persecution Relief Fund to try to "ensure that the unbearable tragedy of living through the Holocaust is not compounded by an old age marked by the fear and sadness of poverty."

The conference was convened under the auspices of the Tripartite Gold Commission, set up in 1946 by the United States, Britain and France to restore Nazi-looted gold to its rightful owners.

During the last 50 years, the commission distributed some 337 tons of looted gold — 98.6 percent of the amount in its pool — to 15 countries whose treasuries were plundered as the Nazis marched across Europe.

Only 5.6 tons of gold remains in the commission's pool, and the United States, Britain and France have asked countries with claims to the gold to voluntarily contribute their shares of the remaining bullion either to the international fund or to survivors in their own countries.

Jewish officials praise the initiative

Luxembourg and Argentina, which has no claims to the Tripartite gold, said Tuesday they were ready to pay into the fund.

Whatever the total of the new fund, Jewish officials said, it is the initiative rather than the final figures that count.

"If we are astonished that half a century after the Holocaust there is an international conference of 41 countries dealing with the issue of Holocaust-era assets, how much more astonishing is it that 52 years later they would initiate a multilateral fund to deal with this wrenching question of the Second World War?" said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

The World Jewish Restitution Organization has said that the allocations from the fund — which has taken the form of a bank account opened by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in Britain's name — be determined by the Jewish people.

Eizenstat, meanwhile, told the conference that the United States had decided to make the contribution "because of our own actions and inactions after the war and because of the urgent needs of those Holocaust survivors who have received little or no compensation in the intervening years."

The creation of the fund comes amid revelations that the United States, seven years after World War II

ended, melted down personal effects belonging to Hitler's victims and turned them over to the Tripartite commission for distribution to European countries.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York was planning to release long-secret documents at the conference showing that the United States created 40 gold bars out of gold plates, buttons, coins and pipe-smoking ornaments recovered after the war.

For decades, the Tripartite commission has insisted that the gold it returned to Europe was composed entirely of monetary gold — ingots stolen by the Nazis from central banks.

A Swiss study released this week, meanwhile, concluded that the Nazis stripped \$146 million worth of gold from Holocaust victims and other individuals, accounting for one-sixth of all the gold Germany acquired during the war.

That \$146 billion is worth about \$1.3 billion at today's prices.

The disclosure is certain to buttress Jewish claims that more money is owed to Holocaust survivors as compensation.

And given Switzerland's fervent trade in Nazi gold, pressure is likely to intensify on the Alpine nation to make additional contributions, specifically into the new international fund.

Switzerland, for its part, swiftly ruled out the possibility of contributing to the fund.

"There is no need" because "we have our own fund," said Special Ambassador Thomas Borer, Switzerland's leading troubleshooter for all issues related to its wartime past.

He was referring to the Holocaust Memorial Fund established earlier this year to aid needy survivors.

Attention to moral debt to survivors

Nevertheless, Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, said this week that Switzerland needs to pay a "nine- or 10-figure sum" to Holocaust survivors in order to bring closure to the whole range of material claims related to its questionable wartime activities.

"Switzerland was the initial recipient of 85 percent of all the gold Germany shipped to foreign locations from March 1938 to June 1945," Bronfman said at the conference.

"It therefore still owes between \$2 billion to \$3 billion if it is to conform with a 1943 Allied declaration that all looted gold handled by the neutrals must be returned after the war," Bronfman said at the conference.

Switzerland rejected the proposal outright.

"We fail to understand these most recent commands of Mr. Bronfman," Borer said Tuesday at a news conference.

"We think such extreme, all-inclusive financial demands obviously lack any objective basis and contradict our desire to satisfy all justified claims."

Although much attention was focused on financial compensation at the opening of the conference, the moral debt owed Holocaust survivors was on the minds of many of the Jewish delegates.

"We are not here taking merely about gold or items of art or securities or other material assets," Bronfman said. "This is about justice and the quest not only for material restitution but moral restitution as well."

In his speech, Bronfman called for the creation of a permanent commission to continue the examination of looted assets. "As we approach the end of this century, there is a palpable yearning to assure future generations that we have faced the past honestly so that we may have an honorable future." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

More questions than answers follow Israeli Cabinet decision*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli government's vaguely worded decision this week on further moves in the West Bank did more than confuse the world.

It also served to quell a brief flurry of hope at home on the political left — and fear on the right — that the peace process may soon move forward.

The ministers endorsed in principle the idea that Israeli troops would cede another swath of West Bank land to the Palestinians as part of the long-stalled Oslo process.

But they hedged the decision with a lengthy list of conditions that rendered it, in the view of most observers, effectively dead.

"Tell me who voted for it, and I'll tell you what it means," said Knesset member Yossi Sarid, head of the dovish Meretz Party. Sixteen of the 18 ministers in the Israeli Cabinet supported Sunday's decision; the two National Religious Party ministers abstained.

Sarid noted that when the Cabinet voted in January to relinquish most of Hebron, that decision — including a reaffirmation of Israel's commitment to carry out three further redeployments in the West Bank — passed by a much narrower majority, 11-7.

Sunday's decision marked the sudden end to intense hard-line pressure against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, marked by demonstrations outside his home in Jerusalem and by angry meetings between West Bank settlers and their Knesset allies.

Gesher Knesset member Michael Kleiner, who heads the Land of Israel group, a coalition of hard-line Knesset members, had gone so far as to threaten that he and his colleagues would join forces with the opposition to bring the government down if it persisted in its plan to offer further territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

In the end, Kleiner's group welcomed Sunday's decision, and all of its members dutifully supported the government Monday in a failed no-confidence motion introduced by Meretz.

Most Israeli political pundits believe that the move merely deferred a showdown in the Cabinet. A four-man subcommittee — including Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, Foreign Minister David Levy and National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon — has been charged with preparing a detailed proposal for the redeployment for discussion by the Cabinet.

U.S. officials reserving judgment

Palestinians reacted with cold skepticism to the move. The Egyptians, briefed early in the week by Netanyahu's aides, also voiced criticism.

But the United States, which had been pressing Israel for a "credible and significant" redeployment, is preferring to reserve judgment, waiting to see what specifics ensue.

U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday that Israel's decision was "a step in the right direction." The decision began with a ringing reaffirmation of the government's desire to "advance the negotiations with the Palestinians."

But its practical provisions make it clear that what is envisaged is one modest pullback — instead of the three prescribed in the Oslo accords. This redeployment, moreover, is to take place only after the Cabinet has put forward a plan for a permanent-status solution.

Specifically, the Cabinet must delineate, among other issues, "the vital security areas, the settlement areas, vital interests such as water, historic and Jewish sites."

In addition, any redeployment is contingent on the Palestinians fulfilling their commitments under the Hebron agreement. These are not specified, but government officials said they referred to Palestinian pledges to amend their national covenant — which calls for the destruction of Israel — and to extradite terrorists and fight against terror.

Given the composition of Netanyahu's coalition, it is more than likely that permanent-status terms emerging from the Cabinet would elicit a hostile rejection from the opposition, which would probably kill the proposed redeployment altogether.

For their part, the Palestinians say that by offering a single redeployment, and explicitly ruling out other later ones, the Israeli government is effectively giving notice that Oslo is no longer binding.

Under the terms of the 1995 Interim Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel was to carry out three redeployments by next year. Earlier this year, Israel offered a first redeployment that would have transferred 2 percent of rural West Bank areas to Palestinian self-rule, but it was rejected as too little and never carried out.

U.S. policy-makers do not accept Israel's position on the single redeployment, but the decision in Washington this week clearly was not to exacerbate already high tensions with Israel as long as the prime minister's peace initiative, however attenuated, is still the subject of political debate inside the country.

Political pundits here suggest that Netanyahu, seriously weakened inside his Likud Party by recent infighting, will be loath to alienate his hard-liners by siding with Cabinet moderates like Levy and Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani when it comes to concrete decisions on redeployment.

These pundits say, moreover, that given the character of the prime minister's initiative, he will not be able to count on Labor Party votes to see him through a Knesset debate if the hard-liners bridle at his plan. This is true, they say, despite Labor leader Ehud Barak's recent intimation that his party would not try to bring down the government if it made real progress toward peace.

'Can't hide our heads in the sand'

It is in this context that an apparent "comeback" appearance Monday by Sharon on Israel Television pricked the ears of seasoned analysts. Close to his 70th birthday but looking fit and feeling, as he attested, "well and strong," Sharon did not balk at the possibility that he might in the future challenge Netanyahu for the leadership of the Likud and for the premiership.

Sharon is recently back from a trip to the United States that included talks with President Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger — talks held at a time when the White House had shut Netanyahu out.

Asked if he had grown more moderate, Sharon responded tellingly that both he and the Israeli public had "changed" over recent years and that the peace process had created new realities that required new responses.

Indeed, he said, Israel must accept the establishment of a Palestinian state.

"We can't hide our heads in the sand," he told Israel's Channel 2, adding that in the aftermath of the Oslo accords, "a Palestinian state is coming into existence."

According to media reports, Sharon is working out a final-status plan that includes a buffer strip along the Jordan Valley border, as well as a 6.2 mile band along the boundary between the West Bank and Israel proper.

Above all, Sharon repeatedly stressed, what was needed was credibility and decisiveness — the very qualities that critics at home and abroad say Netanyahu lacks. □