



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 188

Friday, October 23, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Summit may finally bear fruit

Hopes grew for a successful conclusion to the Middle East summit after Israel and the Palestinians received a U.S. draft of a peace plan that spells out how the Palestinians will implement a broad security agreement.

President Clinton returned to the summit, urging Israel and the Palestinians to "seize the opportunity" because "the hardest decisions, now, at last, are on the table."

### Israel arms exports rank high

Israel is one of the world's leading arms exporters, according to the annual survey of the London-based Institute for Strategic Studies. The report noted that Israeli arms sales exceeded \$1.5 billion dollars last year and represented about 3.3 percent of the world arms market.

### Court orders deportation

The U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals upheld a 1997 order to deport a 77-year-old retired foundry supervisor for covering up his past as a guard at Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

The order directed that Ferdinand Hammer, of Sterling Heights, Mich., be deported to his native Croatia.

In 1996, Hammer was stripped of his U.S. citizenship for concealing his Nazi past when he applied for citizenship in 1963.

### Settlers block roads

Jewish settlers opposed to an Israeli troop withdrawal blocked West Bank roads for a second straight day. Israeli police did not interfere at most of the dozen protest sites, rerouting Palestinian motorists instead. But police scuffled with protesters on two roads, and nine settlers were detained.

### New Lileikis trial date set

A Lithuanian judge ruled that the war crimes trial of a former Lithuanian security official will resume Nov. 5. The judge's announcement came after a team of doctors ruled recently that Aleksandras Lileikis, 92, was fit to stand trial. The trial of Lileikis, who was head of the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police in Vilnius during the war, has been postponed several times this year.

## Award to Jewish-born cardinal raises ecumenical controversy

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — A group that promotes Christian-Jewish relations has honored the archbishop of Paris for his contribution to ecumenical understanding.

But as far as at least one major Jewish group is concerned, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger is a living example of ecumenism gone too far.

The Anti-Defamation League boycotted Tuesday's event, which was sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, because Lustiger was born a Jew and converted to Catholicism at age 14.

Lustiger apparently does not think that his baptism constituted a break with his Jewish identity.

Neither did Pope John Paul II when, earlier this month, he elevated Edith Stein, another Jew who converted to Catholicism, to sainthood and described her as "an eminent daughter of Israel and a faithful daughter of the church."

A few months ago Lustiger described himself, in a private meeting with Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, the director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, as "fulfilled Jew."

Told that using such a term would offend Jews presenting him with the center's Nostra Aetate Award, the cardinal pledged not to use it. The award is named for the 1960s Catholic document that recognized for the first time the legitimacy of Judaism and ushered in a new era of interfaith dialogue.

Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, who has served both as the chief rabbi of France and the grand rabbi of Europe, was also honored with the award.

For some Jewish leaders, using polite language does not change the reality of the cardinal's syncretic view of his faith.

"I respect his decision of conscience and faith" to convert to Christianity, said Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director.

"It would be fine to have him speak at a conference or colloquium," he said, "but it's inappropriate for a Jewish organization to honor him."

While the center is run by a rabbi and supported substantially by Jewish contributors, it is not technically a Jewish organization. It is housed on the campus of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., a Catholic institution.

Then known by his birth name, Aron Lustiger had just become Bar Mitzvah as the Nazi era took hold and he and his sister were sent by their mother to live with a Catholic family in Orleans, France, for safety.

His mother perished in Auschwitz.

The young man, whose upbringing was devoid of all but the most minimal Jewish practice, became enamored of the family who gave him haven and saved his life, said Ehrenkranz. Soon after that, at age 14, Aron was baptized and became Jean-Marie.

"I don't fault him for converting as a young man who had nothing," Ehrenkranz said.

"It's a problem with a lot of young Jewish people today searching for something and nobody's ever given them any Jewish spirituality or content, so they turn to Buddhism and other religions."

Fourteen years after converting, Lustiger was ordained a Catholic priest and began working as a chaplain at the Sorbonne in Paris.

In 1979 he was appointed the bishop of Orleans and just two years later, archbishop of Paris. He was named cardinal in 1983. He has made a valuable contribution to

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israeli arrested for stabbings

Israeli police arrested a Jewish man suspected of carrying out seven stabbings on Arabs in the Jerusalem area during the past year and a half. The suspect, Yonatan Ziondovich, denied any link to the stabbings, the last of which resulted in the victim's death.

### Gerry Adams to meet Arafat

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams accepted Yasser Arafat's invitation to visit the Palestinian self-rule areas. Adams spoke by telephone from Canada with the Palestinian leader, who was near Washington for the Middle East peace summit. The two discussed the "centrality of self-determination and democracy in securing a lasting peace settlement," Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army's political wing, said in a statement.

### Palestinian militants detained

Palestinian police detained some 50 members of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups. The police made them sign pledges to refrain from terrorist activity and attacks on Palestinian officials. The action was taken in the cities of Hebron and Nablus.

### Burial policy may change

The Israeli army may allow families of fallen soldiers to hold military funerals without the presence of a rabbi. The army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, said the army brass was considering changing the regulations regarding military burials, which currently require a religious component.

### Syrian statement criticized

Jordan's prime minister criticized a recent statement by Syria regarding Jordan's role in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Syria's defense minister recently said that Jordan hampered Arab efforts in the war, in which Syria and Egypt, with the help of other countries in the Middle East, fought Israel.

Jewish-Catholic dialogue, say those involved in interreligious affairs, for reasons that seem at least partly rooted in his Jewish lineage.

A close associate of the pope, he is considered to have been instrumental in getting the Carmelite nuns to finally vacate their convent on the edges of the Auschwitz death camp in 1993. He was also centrally involved in a document issued last year by the French Bishops Conference titled "The Declaration of Repentance."

In it, the Catholic church leaders of France took responsibility for "failing to lend their aid" to the Jews under Nazi persecution. "We beg God's pardon and we call upon the Jewish people to hear our words of repentance," they wrote.

"Lustiger has had enormous impact on his fellow cardinals," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

"He brings his own former Jewish experience, which is something very unique, to it. He made a choice and that was his to make. I consider him a Roman Catholic cardinal who was formerly a Jew, and who occupies an extremely important position," said Rudin, who attended the awards ceremony.

Still, Lustiger has confronted opposition before from the Jewish community.

When he visited Israel a couple of years ago, Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau condemned him as a "traitor to his people."

But Lustiger clearly remains devoted to what he considers both parts of his identity.

In his speech accepting the award Tuesday, he called on Catholics in France and New York to go to church on Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom Hashoah, "in the spirit of penance and as an act of faith in the Lord of the living and the dead." □

## FBI team collecting evidence in terror murders of Americans

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An FBI delegation has visited Israel to gather evidence with an eye toward extraditing Palestinians suspected of murdering American citizens to the United States.

The seven-member delegation began its trip this week by meeting with Israeli police and Justice Ministry officials.

In the last five years, Palestinian terrorists have killed 11 American citizens. The Palestinian Authority is holding at least nine suspects connected with these attacks, according to Israel officials.

After Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat refused Israeli requests for extradition, Jewish groups and some victims' family members began calling on the United States to prosecute the terrorists.

U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have promised to examine the possibility of such an arrangement, which is complicated by the lack of an extradition agreement between the Palestinian self-rule government and the United States. An FBI team first traveled to Israel in March to begin collecting evidence from the terrorist attacks.

The 1996 anti-terrorism act permits the prosecution on American soil of suspects who allegedly killed U.S. citizens abroad. In May the House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution calling on President Clinton to address the matter.

Responding to this issue, 62 members of Congress sent a letter to Reno, asking her to investigate, indict and convict those who killed American citizens in terrorist attacks.

Morton Klein, executive director of the Zionist Organization of America, who has led the campaign for extradition, said he was worried that "this is simply just a show to appease those of us who are deeply concerned about this issue."

Klein said the FBI mission might show some movement but it is still "a far cry from what the Clinton administration should be doing."

An arrangement to try the suspects in the United States could clear up a major sticking point in the Middle East peace talks under way near Washington. Arafat has refused to turn over Palestinians to the Israeli justice system. An American trial could clear the way for justice to be served without direct Israeli involvement. FBI officials in Washington refused to comment, citing the ongoing investigation. □



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*  
Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*  
Lisa Hostein, *Editor (on leave)*  
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*  
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

## JEWISH WORLD

### New memorial proposal made

A German Jewish leader said he supported a plan to use a video history created by Steven Spielberg's Shoah foundation as the centerpiece of proposed national Holocaust memorial.

Andreas Nachama's comments came soon after the idea was broached by incoming Cultural Affairs Minister Michael Naumann as a way to end the long-standing controversy over the monument.

### D'Amato knocks his rival

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) called his Democratic rival for New York's Senate seat a "putzhead." D'Amato made the remark about Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), who is Jewish, during a breakfast Wednesday with Jewish leaders.

Schumer, who polls show is locked in a dead heat with D'Amato, called it a "cheap slur against me."

In a letter to Schumer, D'Amato acknowledged using the word, which he said meant "fool," and charged that Schumer was trying to "twist that into a religious slur."

During the same breakfast, D'Amato also referred to Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), another Jewish member of Congress, as Jerry "Waddler" in an apparent reference to the congressman's weight. The senator then waddled around in a circle.

### Schoolchildren visit Auschwitz

More than 300 Italian schoolchildren traveled to the former Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.

The trip, which was led by the mayor of Rome and included a number of Italian Holocaust survivors, was part of events marking the 60th anniversary of the imposition of fascist anti-Semitic laws in Italy.

### Rabbis join environmental group

Rabbis and other religious leaders are joining with scientists, educators, economists and others to create a working forum for addressing world-wide environmental issues.

The new group, announced at the United Nations, is developing out of the Harvard University Project on Religion and Ecology, and will likely be based there.

Leaders from the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Touro College are involved in the project.

### Houston leader gets post

A leader from the Houston Jewish community recently took office as the U.S. ambassador to the Bahamas.

Arthur "Butch" Schechter, a maritime attorney, resigned from the United States Holocaust Memorial Council to take the embassy post.

## Budget deal allows eased entry for Jewish refugees during 1999

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The budget deal struck this month will allow Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union to continue entering the United States under eased criteria during the upcoming year.

During the past decade, the Lautenberg Amendment has afforded Jews and other religious minorities special consideration for refugee status in the United States in recognition of their history of persecution. Named for its sponsor, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), the measure was first enacted in 1989 in response to growing concerns about the potential for an anti-Semitic backlash in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise.

This year, as in years past, Congress agreed to a one-year extension of the law. Instead of requiring historically oppressed groups to prove a well-founded fear of persecution, as is the case with other refugees, the amendment only requires them to assert a credible fear of persecution and show a credible basis for concern about the possibility of persecution.

Jewish immigrant advocates, led by the Council of Jewish Federations and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, hailed Congress' action, which they said helps keep the former Soviet Union refugee resettlement program alive as it winds down.

There was other good news for Jewish immigrants in the budget deal. The Clinton administration and Congress agreed to provide roughly the same number of refugee slots for Jews and others residing in Europe, 48,000, as it provided in the last fiscal year. HIAS resettled 8,600 refugees from the former Soviet Union last year and said the new allotment should be sufficient to accommodate the additional 5,000 to 7,000 Jewish refugees expected to arrive in the coming year.

Jewish officials said the steady drop-off in the tide of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union over the last few years is a sign of the refugee program's success.

"The program is family reunification, and as the pool of refugees that are eligible under the family reunification guidelines shrinks, you'll have less arrivals," said Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of HIAS.

Jewish immigrant advocates also claimed a victory in the ongoing skirmish over restructuring the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The beleaguered agency has been overwhelmed by a backlog of some 2 million people waiting to become citizens, including tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants.

Republican lawmakers dropped all proposals for a dramatic overhaul, including splitting the INS into several agencies and stripping the agency of its enforcement powers. Instead, lawmakers granted the INS long-sought permission to shift \$171 million from other accounts to help reduce the backlog — a move that Jewish officials have been advocating. On the down side for immigrants, to help meet costs, INS application fees for citizenship are set to increase on Jan. 1 from \$90 to \$225 — an amount that could prove prohibitive to some Jews seeking citizenship.

And funding of social-service block grants took a big hit with a decrease of \$399 million, which means less money will be available in the coming year for Jewish federation social services agencies.

"All in all, we came out of this budget kind of even," said Diana Aviv, director of CJP's Washington office.

On a separate front, Congress agreed to restructure Israel's foreign aid in accordance with Israel's commitment to reduce its dependence on U.S. aid. This year's package totals \$2.94 billion, including \$1.86 billion in military financing and \$1.08 billion in economic support funds.

Economic aid to Israel was cut by \$120 million this year, marking the beginning of a phasing-out process that will see economic aid cut by \$120 million annually over the next 10 years. Half of the savings each year will be earmarked for military assistance in recognition of Israel's security needs.

At the end of the 10-year period, Israel is slated to receive a total of \$2.4 billion in aid, all of it in military assistance. □

## Film by Italian comic finds beauty in concentration camp

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — The creation of the new Holocaust comedy "Life Is Beautiful" began with an impromptu monologue from its Italian star and director, Roberto Benigni.

Benigni was sitting with his co-writer in a Rome restaurant when he brainstormed a speech about a father convincing a son that their lives in a concentration camp are a game.

It was then that he realized, paradoxically, that a concentration camp was the best place to prove the beauty of life, Benigni explains. If beauty, such as the love and protectiveness a father feels for a son, could be found in the worst of all places, then it could be found everywhere.

"This story is so simple," Benigni said in a recent interview with JTA.

Well, actually, it's not. "Life Is Beautiful," which opens Friday in New York, Los Angeles and Israel, is complex.

The movie is divided into two sections: In its first, madcap part, Guido (Benigni) magically and manically woos a beautiful teacher, Dora — played by Benigni's real-life wife, Nicoletta Braschi — stealing her away from an Italian fascist official.

The two marry and have a child, Giosue, played by Giorgio Cantarini.

In the second, serious half of the movie, the family is sent off to a death camp, and it is there that Guido constructs the ruse that life in the camp is a game that he and Giosue must win. Guido concocts the scheme to ensure that his son follow the camp's rules in order to give him the best chance of staying alive.

The poetic and ambitious tragicomedy, as one might imagine, walks several tightropes. One is weaving together the narrative thread, making sure that the comedy of the first half blends with the film's darker second half. But most of Benigni's balancing act has to do with the delicate subject matter of the Holocaust.

Few movies have attempted to combine humor and Nazism. After learning about the horrors of the concentration camps, Charlie Chaplin, one of Benigni's idols, wrote in his autobiography that he regretted his 1940 parody of Nazism, "The Great Dictator." In Mel Brooks' 1967 "The Producers," Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder played two Jews who put on a Broadway musical called "Springtime for Hitler."

But, as has been noted, only the Italian film "Seven Beauties" attempted, as Benigni does, to bring humor to the death camp itself.

Benigni, whose acting style is reminiscent of a slightly toned-down Robin Williams and is best known to American audiences for his roles in Jim Jarmusch's "Down by Law" and "Night on Earth," is well aware of his film's possible pitfalls.

Wearing a brown suede coat and square black glasses in a recent interview, Benigni is quick to emphasize the uniqueness of the Holocaust, calling it the "platonic idea of evil in our minds." A Catholic whose father spent time in a German labor camp during the war, Benigni also said that after he read a book by Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, "I was not the same man I was the day before."

Concerned about the Jewish aspects of the film, Benigni sent the script to Marcello Pezzetti of the Center for the Documentation of Contemporary Judaism in Milan. Pezzetti also served as a consultant on the film.

Some have objected, with some justification, to the film's depiction of life in the camps. Parents and children did not live together in the camps, as Guido and Giosue do. And some of the stunts Guido pulls off at the camp would have been impossible in real life.

For his part, Benigni defends his film as a "fable," not a documentary, and to his credit, "Life Is Beautiful" doesn't shy away from the issue of gas chambers or other difficult and painful issues.

While "Life Is Beautiful" had already played to sellout audiences in Italy and won the grand jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival in May, Benigni admits that he was worried about the Israeli reaction to the film when it was shown at the Jerusalem Cinematheque's annual film festival.

Benigni says he was "touched" by the audience's response. During the first, humorous part of the film, the audience laughed twice as hard as European audiences had — laughing as if they were "naked, vulnerable," he said. During the second half of the film, the audience was silent, a silence that continued for about 90 seconds after the film ended before most of the crowd broke into loud, rhythmic applause.

Of course, some attendees at the Jerusalem screening criticized Benigni for bringing laughter into a death camp and downplaying the Holocaust, according to press reports. But some survivors have defended the film, saying that humor existed even at Auschwitz.

Jewish groups have, on the whole, applauded "Life Is Beautiful." Benigni's co-star Braschi said that when the film was screened for Milan's Jewish community, the crowd cried a "weep that made them feel better, not a weep that made them feel sorrow."

In Italy, where the Holocaust has become a hot topic in recent years, children loved it, voting it their favorite film of the year and showering Benigni with letters about how they identified with both Guido and Giosue.

"Comedians are considered to be on a low level. I think the opposite," said Benigni. "Sometimes only clowns can reach the summit of tragedy." □

## Israelis barred from Jericho casino

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The recently opened gambling casino in Jericho could face a major shortage of customers if Israel's attorney general has his way.

Elyakim Rubinstein determined this week that Israelis, the casino's prime source of customers, should be barred from gambling there.

In his decision, he cited a regulation that authorizes local courts to try Israeli citizens for offenses committed in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Gambling is illegal in Israel.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said he was surprised by the attorney general's position, but that police would enforce it if called upon to do so.

Kahalani said he believed that allowing Israelis to gamble in Jericho provided an opportunity for communication and bonding with the Palestinian people.

Dov Weisglass, the lawyer representing the Austrian state-run firm that built and operates the casino, said Israelis already gamble in Turkey, the Red Sea resort of Taba as well as at illegal gambling houses within Israel. □