



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 17

Thursday, January 27, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat may allow settlements

The Palestinian Authority is willing to grant Israel blocs of Jewish settlements in the West Bank as part of a final peace accord, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The paper said Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat unveiled the plan during talks last week in Washington with President Clinton. Palestinian officials denied the report but U.S. sources said it contained some truth. [Page 3]

Barak issues warning to Austria

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Israel would reconsider its relationship with Austria if a far-right leader's party becomes part of that country's next government.

Barak joined other world leaders, including Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson, in condemning the possible participation of Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in a government. Haider, whose party placed second in Austrian elections last fall, has praised some of Hitler's policies and members of the SS.

Shoah meeting opens in Sweden

Sweden's prime minister called on people around the world to learn from the Holocaust and preserve democratic values.

Goran Persson spoke Wednesday at the start of a three-day conference on Holocaust education that has brought more than 700 delegates from 46 countries to Stockholm.

On the eve of the conference, a relative of Raoul Wallenberg called for the truth behind the disappearance of the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II. Wallenberg's daughter-in-law, Nina Lagerman, made the plea in a Stockholm synagogue while receiving an award honoring Wallenberg from the World Jewish Congress.

Britain plans Holocaust Day

Jewish leaders in Britain warmly welcomed Prime Minister Tony Blair's announcement of an annual Holocaust Day to honor the memory of the Nazis' victims. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks applauded what he described as "a brave and significant idea."

Blair said Wednesday that starting next year the country would hold the commemoration on Jan. 27, the anniversary of the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz.

Conservative camps codify policy excluding non-halachic Jews

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — When applications to Ramah summer camps were mailed out this year, they contained something new along with the enrollment forms and fee schedules: a statement of religious qualification.

The statement says that any child who wants to attend one of the Conservative movement-owned Ramah camps must be Jewish according to Jewish law, or halachah, and it spells out precisely what that means.

Prompted by an influx of campers who are Jewish by the patrilineal descent standard of the Reform movement, the new statement — a directive of Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary — only puts in writing what has always been policy, according to Ramah officials.

Nonetheless, it has sparked surprise among some parents and points to the increasing complexities of intradenominational co-existence.

While the camps are officially Conservative and their participants are overwhelmingly affiliated with the movement, it does attract a small, but growing, percentage of other Jews.

There are seven overnight and four day camps in the Ramah system, which enrolls about 5,500 campers a year.

The Statement on Religious Qualifications says that all camp applicants must be "born to a Jewish woman who is herself natively Jewish or was halachically converted to Judaism prior to the birth of the applicant," and all male campers "are expected to have undergone brit milah."

Any campers born to a non-Jewish, unconverted woman — including children who were adopted — have to have been halachically converted, in a mikvah, or ritual immersion.

Boys of non-Jewish mothers must also have had a brit milah or hatafat dam, the ritual drawing of a drop of blood from the penis, if there was a medical circumcision.

These rules have always been part of Camp Ramah policy for both campers and staff because it is a Conservative institution under the religious and educational supervision of the JTS, said Rabbi Sheldon Dorph, national director of the Camp Ramah movement.

They were distributed now in written form because "we started to get feedback that some parents calling weren't sure" what the policy has been, Dorph said.

"I guess we had always assumed that people knew to go to Ramah you had to be halachically Jewish, but as the community changed we realized that we owed it to people to be clear," Dorph said.

Another requirement that has long been included on Ramah applications says that every Ramah applicant between third grade and Bar or Bat Mitzvah must be enrolled in a program of religious instruction.

Schorsch, the JTS chancellor, who required that the statement go out to camp applicants, said in an interview, "With the number of patrilineal Jews growing there are cases of ambiguity, and all we have done is to enunciate our long-standing policy more clearly."

"I can't deny that it's a standard that includes many and excludes some," Schorsch said, adding that he hopes that "the few impacted negatively would be stimulated to take the final step and make sure that their children are full-fledged members of the entire Jewish community, and not just members of a sector of it." Some parents were clearly

MIDEAST FOCUS

Attack linked to pace of talks

Israeli security officials linked Tuesday's rocket attack in southern Lebanon that killed an Israeli soldier to the lack of progress in Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

A day after the attack, Syria accused Israel of escalating fighting in the region. Staff Sgt. Zangwill, 24, of Jerusalem, was killed during a heavy day of fighting in the region.

Zangwill immigrated to Israel from Latvia, and efforts are under way to bring his mother, who lives in Germany, to the funeral.

Israel: Peace would aid Russia

Russia will benefit if there is peace in the Middle East, said two Israeli Cabinet ministers who are visiting Moscow.

Peace with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians would create a "new economic market of more than 200 million people," said Trade and Industry Minister Ran Cohen, who is in Russia along with Interior Minister Natan Sharansky.

Campaign financing investigated

Backers of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak are bracing themselves for Thursday's scheduled release of a report on nonprofit groups that worked for Barak's election.

State Comptroller Eliezer Goldberg is due to decide whether to ask the attorney general to launch a police investigation of alleged campaign finance violations.

Corporal punishment banned

In a precedent-setting decision, Israel's Supreme Court barred parents from using corporal punishment, saying it serves no educational purpose and only damages children.

The court concluded that parents who strike their children could face abuse charges.

surprised by the new enclosure. "It's not an issue for me," said the Jewish-born mother of three children who have been attending Conservative camps for several summers, "but I wondered why it had been raised at this point and whether or not other parents found it difficult to deal with, either because children are adopted or the mother isn't Jewish."

"If someone is sending their child there, clearly they have a commitment to Jewish education," said this New York-area mother, who asked that her name not be used.

"It might just be a further way of alienating people" from connecting with Judaism, she said, adding that because a growing number of Ramah campers attend Jewish day schools during the school year, public school families like hers are beginning to feel somewhat excluded.

Some members of the camp system's governing body, the National Ramah Commission, were also shocked when they were first presented with the directive from Schorsch.

"The wording was very startling," said one of about 30 participants at the August meeting.

"No one understood where it came from," said this member, who asked not to be identified.

According to Dorph, Ramah's national office has not gotten much negative feedback over the issue.

He said he had received just one letter, from a halachically Jewish family whose children have attended Ramah.

They said "they felt it was restrictive. They just felt maybe we had to approach it a little differently than we did."

Jill Jarecki, the associate director of Camp Ramah HaDarom, in Clayton, Ga. said that while the Conservative standard of Jewishness "hasn't been expressed quite like this before," she saw a need for it.

"Today different people have different understandings of who's Jewish. We certainly welcome campers from Orthodox and Reform backgrounds. Given that, it was important for us to come out with a statement saying it's important that everyone is Jewish according to this definition."

Jarecki acknowledged that "it might possibly be a turnoff to people," but cited an example of the standard working the opposite way in her camp.

A couple of years ago, Jarecki said, it became known to the camp staff that a teen-age counselor who had grown up in a Reform home wasn't Jewish according to Jewish law.

This counselor, whom she declined to identify, wasn't "thrilled to hear it, but our rabbi explained the situation," Jarecki recalled.

The teen-ager was already very Jewishly knowledgeable and about a year ago, under the tutelage of the camp rabbi, was converted according to halachah.

But one camp director said that at this point he won't send out the religious qualifications statement.

"We're looking to the other Ramah camps to see what the response is, since obviously it's a sensitive issue," said Brian Greene, director of Camp Ramah in California.

"We want to carefully consider the implications of this policy."

Greene, though, has more ability than the other camp directors to refuse Schorsch's requirement because his camp is under the direction of the University of Judaism, the Conservative movement campus and rabbinical seminary in Los Angeles, rather than under JTS in New York.

Dorph estimated that about 90 percent of Ramah campers are from Conservative movement-affiliated families, roughly 7 percent from Orthodox backgrounds and the other 3 percent from Reform, Reconstructionist or unaffiliated families.

Those few campers who don't meet the Conservative movement criteria can still find a place to go for the summer — perhaps to Reform or religiously unaffiliated camps, Dorph said.

"The Jewish community is so variegated today," Dorph said, "that anybody who wants a really good Jewish camp, whether they're matrilineal or patrilineal, can find a good Jewish camp." □



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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JEWISH WORLD

HIAS calls for refugee protection

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society unanimously passed resolutions calling for the protection and humane treatment of asylum seekers entering the United States.

The resolutions called on Congress to consider passing the Refugee Protection Act of 1999 and restore "fairness, balance and justice in our asylum process."

Since the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was passed in 1996, HIAS has voiced concerns that asylum seekers are being turned away without getting a fair hearing.

Reform temple defaced again

A small synagogue near Los Angeles was defaced again with swastikas and hate messages. In the latest incident at Beth Knesset Bamidbar, the graffiti was scrawled on the entry, walls and doors.

During the last few years, the Reform temple, which has 135 members, has been vandalized half a dozen times.

Pact sought on Kalejs extradition

Australia and Latvia are discussing an accord that could allow the quick extradition to Latvia of a suspected Nazi collaborator.

Reports of the negotiations concerning Konrad Kalejs, who is accused of participating in the murder of thousands of Jews in Latvia during World War II, came on the sidelines of an international Holocaust conference in Sweden.

Community high school planned

Jewish leaders in Baltimore recently announced plans to open a Reform-Conservative day high school.

The announcement comes amid a proliferation in the United States of non-Orthodox day high schools, whose enrollment has grown by more than 50 percent in the past decade. Among the communities with new or planned high schools are Boston, Atlanta, Cleveland, Chicago, South Florida, Detroit and Phoenix.

Wolf Prize in math awarded

A mathematician who has worked in the "theory of everything" and one whose works are the "germs of mathematical exposition and clarity" will share this year's Wolf Prize in mathematics.

Raoul Bott, who teaches at Harvard, works with the elementary atomic particles known as quarks and has contributed to the string theory, which attempts to explain the universe.

Jean-Pierre Serre, who teaches in France, works in several fields, including topology and algebraic geometry. Wolf prizes, named in honor of a former Cuban ambassador to Israel, are given in several fields each year.

Report: Arafat would allow West Bank Jewish settlements

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Palestinian Authority is willing to grant Israel blocs of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, an Israeli newspaper reported.

Citing Palestinian sources, Ha'aretz on Wednesday laid out the main principles of a final peace accord that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat presented to President Clinton last week in Washington.

In addition to Jewish settlements, the plan addressed the main issues of borders, Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees.

Israeli and Palestinian officials have already discussed many of the ideas during informal discussions, but this was the first time that the Palestinians made their proposals at such a high political level, the paper said.

During his visit to Washington, Arafat also reportedly called on U.S. officials to create a draft of a final Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. His request came after the United States created such a draft for the Israeli-Syrian talks.

After the report's publication, Palestinian officials denied its contents but U.S. sources said it contained some truth.

According to Ha'aretz, Arafat's proposals include:

- **Borders.** The Palestinian Authority is seeking an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, created roughly along the boundaries that existed prior to the 1967 Six-Day War.

At the same time, the Palestinians are willing to accept Israel's annexation of large blocs of Jewish settlements located near the 1967 border in exchange for other West Bank lands.

- **Jerusalem.** The plan provides for shared municipal administration of the city, which would be determined by the demographics of its various quarters.

- **Refugees.** Israel would recognize in principle the right of millions of Palestinian refugees to return, without necessarily backing its implementation.

An international mechanism would be created to provide compensation to those refugees who forgo their right to return.

- **Security.** The Palestinians would recognize Israel's security needs and accept an IDF presence in the territories. However, the territories themselves would be under Palestinian rule.

According to the paper, Arafat stressed to Clinton that the proposals depend upon Israel's flexibility in the negotiations.

The paper said Arafat asked Clinton to try to soften Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's positions.

Barak has promised to accelerate negotiations with the Palestinians in order to reach a final peace accord.

Officials from both sides have acknowledged that it seems unlikely they will meet a mid-February deadline for concluding an agreement on the broad principles of such an accord. □

Immigrant ship captain dies

NEW YORK (JTA) — The man believed to be the last surviving American captain of the ships that illegally brought Jewish immigrants to Palestine after World War II died at the age of 88.

Rudolf Patzert, who commanded the SS Paducah — also known as the Haganah Ship Geula — brought 1,385 Holocaust survivors to Haifa on Oct. 2, 1947.

He and his crew later accompanied them to Cyprus, where the prisoners were interned for a month before being allowed to go to Palestine.

The Paducah was one of 10 U.S. ships with American and Canadian volunteers that participated in illegal immigration, or Aliyah Bet, between 1946 and 1948.

These ships transported half of the illegal immigrants who arrived in Palestine after World War II. □

Alleged Nazi war criminal, who got British pension, dies

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A man who allegedly killed inmates at the Mauthausen concentration camp has died at the age of 78, just days after a British group called for an investigation into his wartime activities.

The Slovakian-born Alexander Schweidler, who was living in the English town of Milton Keynes, allegedly committed atrocities while a member of the SS Death's Head unit at Mauthausen in Austria, where more than 80,000 people perished.

Schweidler's death came after the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust agreed to ask British Home Secretary Jack Straw to call on the police to reopen the files of several suspects and take steps to strip them of their British citizenship.

According to Lord Greville Janner, honorary secretary of the bipartisan Parliamentary War Crimes group and president of the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust, Britain risks becoming a "retirement home" for alleged war criminals who live without fear of prosecution.

The Parliamentary War Crimes Group was set up to lobby for the introduction of legislation, which was passed in 1990 at the insistence of then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The legislation — which provoked a constitutional crisis after it was rejected by Britain's unelected House of Lords — permits British courts to try suspects for war crimes committed in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe even though the suspects were not British citizens, their victims were not British and their alleged offenses were not perpetrated on British soil.

Legislative action was prompted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which presented the British government with a list of 17 war crimes suspects then living in Britain. Many war criminals are believed to have found refuge in postwar, labor-starved Britain, which permitted almost unrestricted immigration of able-bodied men from Europe, including, it is believed, many Eastern European Nazi collaborators and German SS members.

One successful prosecution was brought under the law before the group disbanded three years ago. The group's resuscitation is seen as an attempt to test the British government's political will to act against war crimes suspects.

The revelation of Schweidler's quiet retirement on a full state pension followed the discovery earlier this month that suspected Latvian death squad member Konrad Kalejs, who is said to have been involved in killing some 30,000 Jews, was living in peaceful seclusion in an English village. Kalejs, who had previously been deported from the United States and Canada, fled Britain earlier this month for Australia, where he was granted citizenship shortly after the end of World War II.

But last week, the British government was plunged into fresh embarrassment when Schweidler was traced to a council estate.

British police say they questioned him about specific allegations in 1996. Further inquiries were made in Austria, but officials decided there was insufficient evidence to offer a realistic chance of a conviction.

Schweidler was informed in 1997 that no further action would be taken against him.

Schweidler, who served at Mauthausen from January 1942

until its liberation by American troops in May 1945, arrived in Britain in 1948.

He was naturalized as a British citizen in 1964 and the following year he emigrated to the United States, where he worked his way up from cleaner to computer programmer.

Schweidler was identified as a Mauthausen guard during a routine U.S. immigration screening and was deported to Britain in 1994.

During the course of its investigations, the U.S. Office of Special Investigations discovered a wartime report, apparently signed by Schweidler, in which he described how he had killed two prisoners as they tried to escape from Mauthausen in April 1942.

Schweidler denied the killing and claimed that he was ordered to sign the document by a senior officer. Nevertheless, he consented to being deported from the United States. □

Russian Jews worry that Law of Return will change

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jews in the former Soviet Union are concerned about possible changes in the law guaranteeing Jews, their spouses, children and grandchildren automatic citizenship in Israel.

In Israel, proposals for a change in the Law of Return that could affect non-Jewish spouses and their offspring have been floated in recent months amid reports that more than half of all recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union are not Jewish, according to Jewish law.

"If we start changing the Law of Return, we will" destroy emigration from the former Soviet Union, said Leonid Dreyer, a university lecturer from Moscow.

Nearly 1 million people, one-sixth of Israel's total population, came from the former Soviet Union in the past decade, providing the largest source of immigration to Israel.

Some 67,000 Jews from the region immigrated to Israel in 1999, up from 46,000 in 1998, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel. Emigration from Russia alone rose 130 percent, from 14,000 to 32,000. A Russian Zionist organization, launched at a December conference of the umbrella Va'ad Federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Russia, vigorously condemned "attempts to modify the Law of Return, which can cause serious problems to the process of repatriation of Russian Jews" and called on the Israeli government and the Knesset to maintain the status quo.

In November, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told his Cabinet he opposes any changes in the law, but not all Russian immigrants to the Jewish state agree.

"It would be OK to modify the law by cutting off the grandchildren of the Jews and leaving the rest as it is," said Sergey Lugovskoy, who has lived for 12 years in the West Bank town of Kiryat Arba near Hebron. But across the former Soviet Union, sentiment is strongly in favor of keeping the law as it is.

"I don't think the Law of Return should be 'toughened,'" said Salmaz Yusifova, who heads the Baku, Azerbaijan, branch of the Jewish women's organization Chava. She said there are many Jews in her region who want to leave "but can't prove their Jewishness, because of lost documents" or because of "parents wrongly registered as non-Jews. They shouldn't be left out." □