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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Suspended HUC leader resigns

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, president of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, resigned after being suspended by the movement's rabbinic arm.

The suspension came after a Central Conference of American Rabbis' task force inquiry into "personal relationships" that he had prior to becoming president in 1996, according to the HUC.

Gilo attacked again

Palestinian gunmen opened fire on Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood, drawing return Israeli fire.

Battles also erupted Monday night near the West Bank cities of Jenin and Hebron.

In other violence, three Israeli motorists were wounded in West Bank shootings.

Two were shot by Palestinian gunmen, and one by Israeli troops who opened fire when the driver did not slow down at a checkpoint.

In response to one of the Palestinian shootings, the army uprooted 250 olive trees the gunmen used as cover.

In another development, Israeli police launched searches after unknown assailants stoned an ambulance on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway.

No one was hurt in Tuesday's incident.

Israeli Embassy worker wounded

An employee of the Israeli Embassy in Amman, Jordan, was lightly wounded when gunmen opened fire on his car.

The Foreign Ministry said Shlomo Ratzabi was wounded in the leg and taken to a local hospital.

The incident marks the second shooting attack on an Israeli diplomat in the Jordanian capital in less than a month.

At funeral, Hamas vows revenge

Hamas buried a militant leader Tuesday and threatened to carry out more terror attacks in Israel.

Awad Silmi, who died when the bomb he was preparing Monday in the Gaza Strip exploded prematurely, was in charge of a unit that planted roadside bombs, according to Hamas officials.

Israel was responsible for Silmi's death because it is responsible for all violence in the region, a Hamas leader said at the funeral.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish federations consider funding Israel's Arab population

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — North America's Jewish federations, long sources of funding for Israel and its Jewish citizens, are now considering devoting money to Israel's Arab sector.

In the half-century since Israel's founding, Jews around the world have raised billions of dollars for Israeli Jews.

Only in the past two decades have a handful of left-leaning Jewish groups, like the New Israel Fund and the Abraham Fund, sought to improve the status of the state's Arab citizens and Arab-Jewish relations.

Now, with Israeli leaders describing the discontent among Arab citizens as a potential threat to the country's future, mainstream Jewish groups such as the United Jewish Communities, the federation's umbrella organization, are discussing the possibility of raising funds to improve social and economic conditions for Israeli Arabs.

A delegation of UJC leaders is currently in Israel on a fact-finding mission to determine how best to address new Israeli needs, including programs for Israeli Arabs.

The discussions are preliminary. But the fact that mainstream Jewish leaders are openly discussing the possibility of investing in Israeli Arabs — particularly at a time when the prospects for peace between Israel and the larger Arab world are dim — is a significant, some say "revolutionary," shift for American Jewish federations.

The discussion comes as the Israeli government is preparing to implement a \$1 billion project addressing various educational and infrastructure needs for the Arab sector.

Announced shortly after Israeli Arabs rioted in solidarity with the Palestinians' uprising that erupted in late September, the program is described by many in Israel as a sort of "affirmative action" for Arabs.

Arabs comprise 18 percent of the Israeli population, but generally are poorer and less educated than their Jewish counterparts.

Many say they feel like second-class citizens. They say they face various forms of discrimination and that their villages and institutions historically have not received as much government funding as Jewish ones.

According to the Abraham Fund, government funding to Arab and Druse municipalities was less than one-half the funding per person given to Jewish locales in 1994, the latest figures available from the group.

For now, plans to fund Israeli Arab programs are still in the "embryo" stage, said Robert Schroyer, the UJC's national chair for campaign and financial resource development.

A number of mainstream Jewish leaders — including the chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel — have expressed discomfort with the concept, saying that funding for Israeli Arabs is the responsibility of the Israeli government, not world Jewry.

As part of a larger effort to respond to new Israeli needs, as a result of the current violence and dimmed prospects for peace, UJC leaders are currently "trying to find ways of improving the standard of living for Arab Israelis," Schroyer said.

Funding possibilities include "infrastructure, housing, social welfare programs and economic development," he said.

In the past two months, several Israeli officials have spoken to American Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli satellite launched

An Israeli observation satellite was launched Tuesday aboard a Russian rocket from Russia's Far East. From its position in space, the Eros-A1 satellite will be able to take pictures of objects as small as 6 feet, according to Russian and Israeli sources.

U.N. envoy calls for compromise

The United Nations' special envoy to the Middle East called on Israel and the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. The two sides should "make the painful compromises they have to" in order to achieve peace, Terje Roed Larsen said.

Extremists threaten army chief

The Israel Defense Force is providing its chief of staff with a bulletproof car amid warnings of possible attempts on his life. The head of the Shin Bet domestic security service told a legislative committee last week that Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz has been threatened by both Israeli and Palestinian extremists.

Armed settlers patrol road

Jewish settlers are conducting armed patrols along a bypass road linking the Etzion settlement bloc to Jerusalem. Israel Radio quoted settlers as saying that patrols on what is known as the tunnel road, where Palestinians have frequently shot at and stoned Israeli cars and buses, are abiding by the law.

Syrian detained at border

Israeli security forces on Tuesday detained a Syrian man near a village along the northern border. Israel Radio said the Syrian gave conflicting reports of how he entered Israel, alternately saying he came to look for work and that he got lost while walking from Lebanon to Syria.

In other developments, Israeli troops operating in the West Bank detained three Palestinians suspected of involvement in recent attacks on Israelis.



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leaders about the need to invest in the Arab sector.

In an October speech to UJA-Federation of Greater New York donors, Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg called tensions in the Israeli Arab community a "civic volcano within Israeli society."

"The unity of the Israeli people is no less important than the unity of the Jewish people," said Burg, a past chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency.

Burg's sentiment was echoed in recent meetings between federation officials and Knesset members, according to John Ruskay, executive vice president of the New York federation.

"From right to left," Israeli leaders "all indicated how serious they consider this issue for the future of Israel," Ruskay said.

At a session during the UJC's General Assembly last month, Israel's minister for Israeli society and world Jewish communities spoke of this need.

"We need your help with this," Rabbi Michael Melchior said.

Some suggest that helping Israeli Arabs is a cause that might resonate with American Jews.

"It's clearly not a fringe issue if the Israeli government is putting it on the table," said Gary Tobin, president of the San Francisco-based Institute for Jewish and Community Research, which has studied Jewish philanthropic trends.

"There are primary values of democracy and equality among citizens," he said, issues that "are precious to American Jews as Americans."

It "would not be much of a leap for them to help support the same issues in the State of Israel," Tobin said.

But others say many Jews fear the Arab community is a "fifth column" that could collaborate with the Palestinians to destroy the Jewish state.

Stephen Hoffman, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, said it might be more appropriate for private foundations and the Israeli government, rather than federations, to invest in Israeli Arabs.

"I'm less focused on the controversy than I am on what's our mission: the general development of Israel or the Jewish development of Israel?" Hoffman said.

"Do we run Jewish campaigns for the development of the Arab sector in Israel?" he asked. "That debate needs to be aired before we jump in."

Steven Nasatir, president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, said he does not envision federations investing large amounts in Arab projects.

"There may be areas where Jewish communities abroad could be helpful, that's a possibility, but I think the major responsibility is" the Israeli government's, he said.

"American Jews' primary concern is Jews," Nasatir said.

Although "personally I think more needs to be done" for Israeli Arabs, he said, "I don't think that's a major thrust of the federations."

However, Stephen Solender, president and CEO of the UJC, said the federations should not let the potential controversy stand in the way of getting involved.

Although he is concerned that supporting the Arab sector could alienate donors, "sometimes you have to lead and try to bring those people along with you."

Rather than investing in projects specifically for Arabs, some federation leaders seem more comfortable with the idea of joint Jewish-Arab projects that strengthen ties between the two communities.

Sallai Meridor, chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency, said Arab infrastructure is "mainly the responsibility of the State of Israel," but "there's clearly a need" for more coexistence projects.

Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, said his community already supports various Jewish-Arab efforts — including a hospice for Jews and Arabs — in the Central Galilee, its sister region through the Partnership 2000 program.

Several Israeli Arab riots occurred in the region.

Aronson said his federation is interested in funding additional Jewish-Arab projects, but not ones that are simply about dialogue.

Instead, he would like to see "result-oriented" projects that bring Jews and Arabs together to address shared needs like health care. □

(JTA staff writer Michael J. Jordan contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Plan targets intermarriage

In what it calls a major attempt to combat intermarriage, the Conservative movement is spending \$250,000 to double membership in youth groups, increase outreach on college campuses and enroll more students at its Jerusalem yeshiva.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism announced the new initiative at a board meeting Monday.

Birthright follow-ups planned

Two major Jewish organizations are creating follow-up programs for Birthright Israel, which sends young Jewish adults on free 10-day trips to Israel.

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life has received \$900,000 for programs that engage college students who are Birthright alumni.

The U.S. federation system's Renaissance and Renewal Pillar plans to distribute \$200,000 in grants for community efforts that integrate 20-something Birthright participants into Jewish life.

Insurers could face new cases

A New York lawyer who helps represent Holocaust survivors asked a federal judge to allow attorneys to restart cases against German insurers.

Burt Neuborne said the cases should be restarted if the firms fail to let an independent panel decide if they still owe money on unpaid Holocaust-era insurance policies.

Ukraine school to reopen doors

A Jewish school in Ukraine that first opened its doors in 1910 is being rededicated on Friday.

Midreshet Yerushalayim in Kiev, one of a growing number of schools operated by the Conservative movement in the former Soviet Union, was converted into a public school by the Communists in 1927.

Czech extremists may be banned

Czech officials may outlaw the far-right Patriotic Republican Party as part of a new drive against political parties thought to have neo-Nazi agendas.

Earlier this year, the Czech government stripped another far-right party, the National Alliance, of its official registration.

Program aids Warsaw survivors

The social welfare system of the Warsaw Jewish community inaugurated a program called "Zaydele," or "Adopt-a-Grandparent."

Funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the program seeks to recruit volunteers among younger members of the Jewish community to spend a few hours each week with an elderly Holocaust survivor.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Donations flow to charities after recent Israeli Arab violence

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The recent spasm of violence among Israeli Arabs was not entirely unexpected, say those whose work focuses on Arab-Jewish coexistence.

Groups like Givat Haviva, the Abraham Fund and the New Israel Fund long had known that unrest was simmering among Israeli Arabs, who felt their plight was neglected by the government.

Since the state's creation 52 years ago, observers say, the Israeli Arab question has been relegated to the back burner of Israeli politics. More existential issues have dominated the landscape.

If there is any silver lining to the Israeli Arab riots that accompanied the first few days of the Palestinians' uprising that began in late September, some analysts suggest, it's that the hot-button issue of Jewish-Arab relations within Israel will have to be confronted head-on.

Even if Israel and the Palestinian Authority return to the negotiating table, the stark fact will remain that some Israeli citizens took up arms against the state and, in response, security forces killed citizens they had sworn to protect.

"In some ways, the genie is out of the bottle, and there'll be no way to stuff it back in," said Staci Light, director of development for The Abraham Fund, which is devoted to Arab-Jewish coexistence projects in Israel.

"If we want a Jewish state, and want it to be a democratic state, we need to pay attention to the minority," Light said.

"We, as Jews who lived as a minority for 2,000 years, need to be more sensitive to their needs.

This, she said, should not come at the expense of Israel's identity as a Jewish state, or the security of the Jewish state.

Light's sentiment of "no alternative" is echoed by leaders of the New Israel Fund and Givat Haviva, two institutions that promote democracy and civil rights in the Jewish state.

But it's been a tougher sell to some of their supporters.

NIF, for example, supports hundreds of Israeli Arab nongovernmental organizations.

Some NIF members express concern that the Israeli Arabs "crossed a red line by resorting to violence," said Norman Rosenberg, the group's executive director.

"They feel Israel is again under siege, and the focus at this time should be on the Jewish community, not on the rights of Arabs."

A recent NIF program in New York about the situation of Israel's Arabs drew over 50 people.

But not all were sympathetic to the Israeli Arab speaker.

One man in the audience accused the Israeli Arabs of being disloyal to Israel, and others in the audience suggested that the speaker, an employee in group's Haifa office, had been too "one-sided" in his complaints about discrimination.

Projects for Israeli Arabs have been "probably the most controversial" aspect of the NIF's work," said Norman Rosenberg, the group's executive director.

The NIF also funds civil rights projects, including those relating to religious pluralism and women's rights.

While "one or two significant donors" have indicated they intend to cut or halt their support to the group, Rosenberg said, they have been far outweighed by increased donations from established sources and a surge in first-time donations.

NIF will contribute an extra \$1 million to \$2 million next year to the Israeli Arab projects it supports in Israel, more than double the usual sum.

The Abraham Fund reports a similar increase in donations.

On one recent day the fund received a \$25,000 first-time gift from a private family foundation, then a \$5 check from an indigent Jewish grandmother in Brooklyn, Light said. □

Twenty-two years later, Skokie again a dirty word

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — For many American Jews, the word “Skokie” stirs up memories of the 1978 First Amendment case that upheld a neo-Nazi group’s right to hold a rally in that Illinois community, home to numerous Holocaust survivors.

The episode even spawned a movie, starring Danny Kaye.

So it may be precisely to capitalize on Skokie’s symbolism that the Ku Klux Klan plans to demonstrate Dec. 16, on Shabbat, in the Chicago suburb some of KKK members describe as “Jewtown.”

The KKK event, announced by the Mercer, Wis., chapter, will be held on the steps of the Cook County Courthouse.

As the courthouse is county property, a local Skokie permit is not necessary. Thirty to 40 Klansmen and other white supremacists from the region are expected to attend.

Outraged, Chicago Jewry is reacting.

“History has shown us that evil and hateful words, if unchecked, all too often lead to evil deeds and hate crimes,” said Richard Hirschhaut, Midwest regional director for the Anti-Defamation League.

“We have to raise our voices against those who would divide our community and attempt to sow fear,” Hirschhaut said. “Even the most pathetic sociopath who spews a message of bigotry and hate ought not be dismissed as unimportant, lest their message reach and potentially influence others.”

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and Skokie Jews have thrown their support behind a “Peace and Harmony” rally that the Skokie Commission on Human Relations has scheduled for the following day.

Hirschhaut said he succeeded in dissuading the Evanston Ecumenical Action Council, comprised mostly of Christian denominations, from confronting the Klan.

Instead, the council agreed to join the Sunday rally.

The ADL also is endorsing another reprise of “Operation Lemonade,” a four-year-old project that, like a walk-a-thon, raises money based on each minute a hate group demonstrates and donates it to organizations that work toward neutralizing such groups.

There are only 2,000 to 2,500 card-carrying KKK members in the entire United States, said Hirschhaut, who has a 1-inch-thick file on the Mercer, Wis., chapter leader, Michael McQueeney.

Skokie — now home to large communities of Asians, Latinos and blacks — is still scarred by a shooting spree in the region 17 months ago. A follower of the white-supremacist World Church of the Creator gunned down the African American basketball coach of Northwestern University and a South Korean college student, and injured nine Orthodox Jews on their way to synagogue.

The coach, Ricky Byrdson, and two of the Jewish victims were Skokie residents.

Holding a post-KKK counter-rally is an “approach that makes a lot of sense to us,” said Michael Kotzin, executive director of the Jewish federation.

“The circulation of hate, no matter how small and marginal, is a legitimate concern and there’s going to be a reaction from the Jewish community — and from the friends of the Jewish community.”

But not all Jews are satisfied with peaceful responses.

The Jewish Defense League, founded by the late militant Rabbi Meir Kahane, says it intends to block the rally, “peacefully if possible, but forcibly if we must,” the group’s local leader told the Chicago Sun-Times.

On its Web site, the JDL vows to “uphold the dignity and honor of our silent and undefended six million dead,” and calls on “all Jews, regardless of there [sic] personal politics, to put aside all of their differences, which are dwarfed by this outrage, and act together to prevent this event from occurring.”

“We will not respect any law that would allow such a flagrant and boorish abuse of our cherished freedoms,” the group declares on its site. □

Israel, Jewish groups urge Vatican to cancel Haider meeting

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Protests are mounting over a meeting expected to take place later this month between Pope John Paul II and an Austrian politician who has praised Hitler and members of the Nazi SS.

Israel issued a statement last week warning against the consequences of a meeting between Jorg Haider and the pope, and its ambassador to the Holy See personally expressed Israel’s concerns to the Vatican’s foreign minister.

A leading Jewish interfaith group, the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, also urged the pope to cancel the meeting. In addition, Italian Jewish and leftist groups were discussing possible protest measures.

“Haider is a politician who is ostracized by the enlightened world,” said the Nov. 30 statement issued by Israel’s Foreign Ministry. “Granting honor to a man of this kind is liable to send a wrong and inappropriate message, unintentionally.”

Such a meeting, it said, “would cause considerable disappointment and displeasure to the government of Israel.”

Haider, the dominant force and former leader of Austria’s right-wing Freedom Party, is expected to meet the pope on Dec. 16, when he formally presents this year’s Christmas tree to the Vatican.

The tree, which is displayed in St. Peter’s Square throughout the holiday season, comes this year from Austria’s Carinthia region, where Haider is governor. The gift was arranged in 1997, before Haider took office.

The son of Nazi sympathizers, Haider has long been reviled for his xenophobic positions. Years ago, Haider praised Hitler’s employment policies and members of the Nazi SS. He has repeatedly apologized for the remarks.

When the Freedom Party entered Austria’s coalition government earlier this year, the European Union imposed unprecedented diplomatic sanctions on Austria. Israel withdrew its ambassador from Vienna. The E.U. sanctions have since been lifted.

Still, Jewish and other observers fear that a papal meeting with Haider could send a dangerous message to far-right forces in Europe at a time when reports of nationalist, xenophobic and neo-Nazi activity are on the rise. The pope, they say, could be interpreted as granting legitimacy not just to Haider, but to the rightist ideology he is perceived as representing. □