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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Anti-Israel groups to be targeted

The United States will work to include Hamas and other anti-Israel groups as targets of the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism.

Members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations heard the news in a meeting with U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and 24 Republican senators.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference, said officials told the group that the U.S. government supports Israel unconditionally.

Sharon creating peace team

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he is forming a negotiating team for peace talks with the Palestinians.

After meeting Thursday with visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Sharon said a "unique opportunity" would open up once Palestinian violence ends.

"Once there is complete quiet and a complete end to terror, violence and incitement, we can go on to conducting peace negotiations, something I want very much," Sharon said at a news conference with Blair.

Blair was on a tour of the Middle East to bolster support for the anti-terror campaign in Afghanistan.

AIPAC to Bush: Don't meet Arafat

A U.S. Jewish group is urging President Bush to avoid meeting Yasser Arafat next week.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee made the request as both Bush and the Palestinian leader prepare to come to New York for the U.N. General Assembly.

While Bush has not publicly announced a meeting with Arafat, AIPAC is urging him to stand behind previous statements to the American Jewish community that he would not meet with Arafat until the Palestinians cease attacks against Israel.

Jury gets rabbi murder case

A U.S. jury began deliberating the case of a rabbi charged with murder. Rabbi Fred Neulander could face the death penalty if convicted of contracting the 1994 murder of his wife, Carol.

At the time, Neulander was the spiritual leader of Congregation M'Kor Shalom, one of the largest congregations in southern New Jersey.

Jewish relief efforts top \$8 million following Sept. 11 terrorist attacks

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish organizations have raised more than \$8 million for relief efforts stemming from the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Like the myriad of other charitable organizations raising money for victims of the terrorist attacks, they are proceeding cautiously in deciding how to allocate those funds.

More than \$1 billion has been raised for relief efforts in general, through a wide variety of organizations, campaigns and corporate gifts.

While some of the Jewish organizations are collecting more money for Sept. 11 relief than they have for other humanitarian disaster relief efforts, others are raising less or the same.

Some Jewish officials say that is because there are so many venues raising money.

"There's been such an outpouring from everywhere, whereas usually we're one of the few organizations collecting for international disasters," said Jessica Alexander, a spokeswoman for the American Jewish World Service, which has raised approximately \$350,000 for Sept. 11 relief efforts.

All Jewish groups interviewed said they are not taking out any money for overhead costs and that their funds will assist both Jews and non-Jews.

With the money has come concerns about its distribution. Those involved with the aid efforts worry that because it is such a decentralized and vast pool of money, some victims will go overlooked while others will receive duplicate help from multiple sources.

In addition, it is not yet clear what sort of government and insurance benefits many families of victims will receive.

"Other than making short-term emergency grants, we will pause and make certain that our funds are used for areas that have not been covered by the government or other philanthropic areas, and therefore are used for maximum relief effort both short term and longer term," said John Ruskay, executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of Greater New York.

The New York federation has raised more than \$3.2 million so far for a fund that will benefit terrorist victims in Israel as well as those affected by the domestic terrorist attacks. That fund was in the process of being created this summer—initially just for terrorist victims in Israel—and was expanded to include United States victims after the Sept. 11 attacks.

In addition, the federation expects to receive money through the North American federation system's United Jewish Communities and The New York Times, which is raising money for several New York social service agencies.

Those funds will be reserved for victims in the United States.

The AJWS says it hopes to give the majority of the money it raises to low-income families affected by the attacks, particularly people who have lost their jobs as a result.

"Because there's such an outpouring of money, we're really looking to meet the unmet needs of low-income people," Alexander said.

While much remains to be determined, the following actions have already been taken:

- The United Jewish Communities, the umbrella for Jewish federations in North America, has established an emergency fund that has already collected \$3.8 million. That includes monies raised by local federations around the country or allocated directly from federations.

Jewish agencies serving the families of terrorist victims are applying to the UJC

MIDEAST FOCUS

Two alleged bombers killed

Israel killed two Palestinians allegedly on their way to carry out a suicide bombing against an Israeli target. In an attack Thursday near the West Bank city of Tulkarm, Israeli helicopters fired at a taxi, killing the two. Israeli officials said the two were Hamas members planning a suicide bombing inside Israel.

Another Palestinian in the taxi was seriously injured and later apprehended by Israeli soldiers, an Israeli military official said. Israeli officials repeatedly had asked the Palestinian Authority to arrest the two, according to the office of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Freedom sought for 5 Israelis

Forty Israeli legislators are calling for the release and deportation of five Israelis arrested in New York after the Sept. 11 terror attacks. The five were detained for allegedly celebrating and acting suspiciously following the attack on the World Trade Center.

After interrogation, officials determined that the five had no connection with the attacks, but were working illegally in the United States.

They are still being held in prison, seven weeks after they were arrested.

Israel may block Al Jazeera news

Israel may halt local news broadcasts of Qatar-based Al Jazeera TV.

Communications Minister Reuven Rivlin is investigating the possibility that Al Jazeera is involved in anti-Israel incitement, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Tourism slump costs jobs

Almost 2 percent of Israeli jobs have been lost because of the tourist slump. Israel's Tourism Ministry said tourism has dropped 50 percent in the first seven months of this year. Anxiety over flying, caused by the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States, has exacerbated the situation.

fund to help individuals with such things as counseling, and personal and medical expenses stemming from the terrorist attacks.

So far, approximately 30 individuals and families are being served through Jewish federation agencies outside New York, according to Barry Swartz, the UJC professional overseeing the emergency fund.

The fund is expected to assist victims affected by both the New York and Washington attacks.

- Among its first actions, UJA-Federation of Greater New York has made emergency grants to the Orthodox Union, to provide people to fill night shifts at Jewish funeral homes — and has guaranteed more than \$500,000 in loans that will be granted by the Hebrew Free Loan Society.

Many of the federation's agencies, such as the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services and the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, are offering direct services, such as crisis counseling, to people affected by the attacks. It is not yet clear how much aid they will get to fund this work.

- The Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations has raised more than \$700,000 so far, but is still expecting more money from numerous synagogue fund raisers. It has allocated a combined \$200,000 to the September 11 Fund of the United Way and New York Community Trust, and has not yet decided where the rest of its money will go.

- The AJWS has made grants to two groups that offered counseling shortly after the attacks in New York, as well as to a group that organized volunteers to provide meals for rescue works and help with the cleanup efforts.

- B'nai B'rith International has raised slightly more than \$100,000, but is unsure of the exact number because its mailroom has been closed for two weeks.

- The National Council of Young Israel, an umbrella group for approximately 100 Orthodox synagogues, is raising money to give to a variety of groups, including the American Red Cross, the UJC emergency fund, funds for families of New York police and firefighters and New York Jewish agencies that have offered assistance in response to the attacks. □

(JTA intern Amy Sara Clark contributed to this report.)

Anti-Semitic tract appears on site hosted by leading Italian newspaper

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — An Italian newspaper is being pressed to remove a notorious anti-Semitic tract from a Web site it hosts. The Simon Wiesenthal Center demanded this week that the Italian daily La Repubblica remove the text of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which was posted on one of the newspaper's online discussion forums.

The tract "appears in its entirety, without explanation and out of context, on your Web site forum entitled 'Missiles on Kabul,'" a Wiesenthal Center official wrote in a letter to La Repubblica's editor.

"We consider that La Repubblica bears responsibility for what is published under its name and logo. "This document is clearly in violation of the published rules of your Web site that stipulate the nonacceptability of offensive language inciting to hatred, which is the case of 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion' — a text that has been called 'a warrant for genocide.' "

The Protocols were first penned in the 1890s to expose a supposed Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. The tract, which has been translated into various languages and published around the world, has led directly to the killings of Jews.

The full Italian text of the Protocols was posted Oct. 9 by a member of the "Missiles on Kabul" forum who used the Web name "Zaratustra." The posting of the Protocols prompted a discussion that included outraged reaction from several other forum members.

"I didn't believe that in my country there was still someone able to propose obscene idiocy like the sadly celebrated Protocols, which by now even the worst high school student knows are a forgery," wrote another forum member who used the name Franca. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Islamic cleric: Israel hit WTC

A Washington-based Islamic cleric accused Israel of carrying out the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center. Speaking at a meeting organized by the New Black Panther Party on Wednesday, Imam Mohammed Asi of the Islamic Center of Washington said Israeli officials decided to launch the attack after the United States refused their request to put down the Palestinian intifada.

"If we're not going to be secure, neither are you," was the Israelis' thinking following the U.S. response, according to Asi.

The meeting was held at Washington's National Press Club and aired over the C-SPAN network. Asi also repeated the canard, widely circulated via an e-mail campaign and on Internet hate sites, that 4,000 Israelis did not go to work at their World Trade Center offices on Sept. 11 because they had been warned in advance of the attack.

Poll: Jews feel more tied to Israel

A new survey indicates that American Jews feel a stronger attachment to Israel than they did before Sept. 11. The survey of 606 U.S. Jewish adults conducted by the Forward newspaper also shows that almost half say they are "more in touch" with their Jewish identity since the terror attacks on the United States.

The survey, which has a 6 percent margin of error, found that American Jews are evenly divided over whether to support the Bush administration's "effort to include Arab states" in its anti-terrorism coalition.

According to the poll, the proportion of American Jews who believe Israel should be "less conciliatory" toward the Palestinians has dropped from 34 percent in January to 21 percent this week. In addition, 44 percent agree that the Sept. 11 attacks resulted in part from "America's support for Israel."

Russian neo-Nazis riot

Hundreds of Russian skinheads rioted in a Moscow market. At least one person was killed by the skinheads, who were brandishing iron bars.

Russia's Interfax news agency identified the rioters as members of Russian National Unity, the country's largest neo-Nazi group.

B'nai B'rith meets in Berlin

German support for Israel is "a cornerstone of German foreign policy," Germany's foreign minister said. "Israel is not alone and will not be alone," Joschka Fischer told a gathering of some 300 B'nai B'rith delegates.

The delegates, representing 27 countries, gathered this week in Berlin for a five-day conference.

New push on for prayer amendment, but initiative is given little chance

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A U.S. congressman hopes to change the Constitution to allow school prayer — but it's unclear if enough colleagues will support him.

Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.), who failed in a similar attempt in 1998, circulated a letter to fellow lawmakers last week asking whether they would co-sponsor a constitutional amendment protecting students' right to pray in school.

Jewish groups, which generally oppose the idea of school prayer, don't expect Istook's proposal to get far. Yet with Americans increasingly invoking religion in the public sphere and holding public prayer services since the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington, heightened public sensitivity may give the proposed amendment some grass-roots backing.

Istook gained a fair amount of support when he introduced similar legislation in 1998, but Jewish groups mounted a large campaign against him. The 150 or so co-sponsors he garnered for that amendment fell short of the two-thirds of both houses of Congress needed to change the Constitution.

Opponents of the suggested amendment argue that the recent prominence of religion in public life has caused few problems, so there is no need to change the law.

"The times suggest that current law is working," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. "To jump and say, 'Therefore we need an amendment,' just doesn't make sense."

However, Rep. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), who supports the "Istook amendment," said he senses a lot of support among his constituents.

A constitutional amendment "is not a radical idea at all," he told JTA. DeMint, who is sponsoring legislation that he says will help schools enforce current law regarding school prayer, says an amendment makes sense in light of the events of Sept. 11.

The American Civil Liberties Union is threatening schools, and schools are fearful of lawsuits, DeMint said. To go back to restricting public prayer is "absurd in light of what's going on now," he said.

Most Jewish groups are prepared to work hard against the amendment, but don't expect the legislation to succeed, especially in the Senate, which is controlled by Democrats. The feeling on Capitol Hill since the Sept. 11 attacks has been to shy away from controversial legislation to focus on anti-terrorism laws and other high priority issues that enjoy a large consensus.

The war on terrorism has made people want to protect the American way of life, said Eric Schmeltzer, press secretary for Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), and a school prayer amendment would go against that.

"We want to protect civil liberties now more than ever," he said.

Istook's proposed amendment calls for the "people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, and traditions on public property, including schools." It also says the United States "shall not compose school prayers, nor require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity."

Already this year, three other congressional proposals have been raised to amend the Constitution to allow for some kind of school prayer.

Istook's current proposal differs from his previous efforts by removing parts related to funding for religious groups, and focuses more narrowly on school prayer. The language is vague, which could help gather support but might also invite legal challenges.

Jewish groups are not alone in opposing Istook's ideas. The emphasis on school prayer is troubling, and an amendment to protect school prayer is unnecessary, according to Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a group that monitors religious liberties.

"The idea that prayer has been banned in public schools is a myth," Lynn said. "Students already have the right to read their chosen sacred texts in their free time, organize after-school religious clubs and say prayers before meals or at any other time they seek spiritual guidance."

Istook plans to introduce his current proposal in the next few weeks, according to his office. □

In shadow of Durban and Sept. 11, WJC sets agenda for new century

By Toby Axelrod

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fears of global terrorism and anti-Semitism shot to the top of the agenda of this year's international gathering of World Jewish Congress leaders, as the organization worked to reshape itself in light of recent events.

The physical security of Jewish communities worldwide takes top priority, followed by the traditional theme of preserving Jewish spiritual continuity.

Both themes are replacing Holocaust restitution as a top priority for the WJC, which during the past decade has helped fashion international agreements for the return of stolen assets to survivors or their heirs.

Now WJC leaders and members, gathered here this week for the group's 11th annual plenary assembly, are pledging funds for both urgent, short-term security measures for Jewish communities and for the long-term struggle to ensure Jewish continuity.

To meet the former goal, a fund has been established for security doors, new locks, video surveillance and help for 40 small Jewish communities around the world.

Toward the latter goal, the WJC leadership is suggesting that billions of dollars in unclaimed Holocaust restitution money be used to support Jewish education worldwide. A statement to that effect was expected Thursday.

"We are here to build a bridge to the future, with hope," said Evelyn Sommer, chairperson of the North American assembly, during opening ceremonies Tuesday. "All of us understand — we the pessimists and we the optimists — that securing the Jewish future is the only work we have to carry out. And failure is not an option."

In his speech to the assembly, WJC President Edgar Bronfman said, "We have two tasks for the future" — to fight "the enemy within, and the enemy without."

The first is "the unbelievable lack of Jewish literacy by Jews over most of the world," Bronfman said.

The second is Islamic terrorism — which aims, Bronfman said, to create one vast Islamic state. "Terrorists have a dream, and it is our nightmare."

The terror attacks on America "affected every aspect of political and social life, Jewish and non-Jewish," said Elan Steinberg, the WJC's executive director.

For Jewish communities, "the menace of terrorism has been particularly acute since the Al-Aksa Intifada began" in September 2000.

"More synagogues have been burned in this period than at any other time since Kristallnacht," Steinberg told JTA.

Some 800 members from 70 countries are attending the assembly, which concluded Thursday.

The program included meetings with top Israeli leaders, including Knesset members, as well as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

Steinberg told JTA that attendance was down slightly from the 1,000 that normally attend, yet he wasn't bothered.

"Honestly, it is an extraordinary achievement to have 800 in these times," he said. "We are delighted."

Participants had an opportunity to share their concerns as well

as to report their achievements. Next to fears of terrorism and concerns for Israel's safety, they expressed hopes for the future of Diaspora Jewry — hopes that added a note of brightness to an otherwise gloomy atmosphere.

In particular, they came for a sense of community, for comfort in numbers — and to network.

Ferenc Olti and David Moskovitz of Hungary were hoping to promote the creation of a Jewish institute for higher education in Budapest with European Union support.

Their dream is to attract European Jewish students in medicine, law, business and other professions, while providing grounding in Jewish teachings related to their professions.

"The world addressed the issue of monetary restitution for the Holocaust, but cultural restitution has not been addressed," said Moskovitz, president of the Endowment for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

Olti, a Hungarian Jewish leader, said there is a "new wave of political anti-Semitism in the country, formally and informally supported by the government."

Recently, when a right-wing Hungarian legislator said "Jews should be separated from the life of the nation, no legal actions were taken," Olti said. "The Jewish community tried, and we were refused."

Members of the European Jewish Congress said they plan to institute a European Jewish Lobby to more effectively represent Jewish concerns to the European Union.

Several participants spoke about the increasing anti-Jewish prejudice in media and government.

"Statements have come out of the government attacking Israel as an 'apartheid' state," said Yehuda Kay, director of the board of the South Africa Jewish Congress. "It leaves us feeling very uneasy."

Ezra Moses, secretary of the Sha'ar Hashamaim synagogue in Thane, India, said he is hearing anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments in India because of America's current alliance with Pakistan in the U.S.-led war against terror mastermind Osama bin Laden.

"It has not had an impact on the Jewish community, but we are fearing it may have an impact in days to come, if a Jihad comes to India," Moses said.

Still, the main concern of the 5,000-member Indian Jewish community is education, said Moses, who hopes to find support for a Jewish school in Thane.

The impact of anti-Semitism is concrete in France, where a recent arson attack on a Jewish school in Marseilles has left the community reeling.

Roger Cukierman, chairman of the French Jewish organization CRIF, said it was not known if the attackers were right-wing extremists or sympathizers with Osama Bin Laden.

"But it worries us," he said.

"And the way the French press is treating Israeli politics is a disaster for us, because in the eyes of the public, Israel and Jews are the same thing."

Alexander Vishnevetsky and Rimme Golovina of the Uzbekistan Jewish Community Center in Tashkent said they were proud their country supports America's fight against terrorism.

But they reported that an Islamic extremist group in Uzbekistan recently "distributed flyers saying that the president of Uzbekistan is Jewish, which of course is not true," Vishnevetsky said. □