



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bill to fight anti-Semitism flops

A U.N. bill condemning anti-Semitism was withdrawn because of a lack of support.

Ireland, which sponsored and circulated the resolution a few weeks ago, withdrew it Tuesday because it could not attain unanimous support before the U.N. General Assembly concludes on Dec. 16.

"In light of the contacts and the time available, it's unlikely that the various priorities and interested states could be accommodated simultaneously to reach an agreed outcome," said a spokesman for the Irish Mission to the United Nations.

The resolution had garnered 29 co-sponsors, including the 15 E.U. states and 10 countries slated to join the European Union.

The spokesman said Ireland would "reflect" on whether to introduce the bill next session, but praised its European support as an indication of "our total rejection of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism."

Anti-Semitism report exposed

European Jews released an unpublished report that found rising anti-Semitism among Muslims in Europe.

The Vienna-based European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, which commissioned the report, decided not to publish it, claiming the data was flawed.

However, critics said the Monitoring Center was not prepared to deal with the sensitive subject of anti-Semitism among Muslims. [Page 4]

Iran '11' go public

The families of 11 missing Iranian Jews are publicizing their plight and asking the United Nations for help. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Iranian American Jewish Federation submitted a letter Tuesday to the U.N. secretary-general, asking him to help discover the missing Jews' condition and whereabouts.

The Jews went missing nine years ago after trying illegally to leave Iran, which has strict emigration laws for Jews. Until now, their families preferred backroom dealings.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said they decided to go public because "there's been no movement all these years, so they really have nothing to lose."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

'Virtual' accord gaining real support ahead of backers' Washington visit

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For a peace agreement that even its framers admit is "virtual," the "Geneva accord" is getting plenty of real traction in Washington and among American Jews.

Leaders of the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements joined Muslim and Christian groups in an interfaith appeal on Tuesday urging the Bush administration to rededicate itself to Israeli-Palestinian peace, citing the Geneva proposal as one model.

The two lead negotiators of the unofficial peace proposal, Palestinian official Yasser Abed Rabbo and Israeli opposition figure Yossi Beilin, will hold back-to-back meetings Friday with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. deputy secretary of defense.

Considering that Wolfowitz and Powell usually are at odds on matters of foreign policy, the meetings are a sign of the administration's encouragement of the Geneva accord.

It's a trend that clearly has Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government worried.

Israeli officials were lobbying hard against the meetings. Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert questioned Powell's judgement, calling the meeting with Beilin and Abed Rabbo a "mistake."

In response, U.S. officials say they remain committed to the internationally-backed "road map" peace plan, which envisions an end to terrorism and a Palestinian state within three years.

Israeli officials say they were reassured by that message.

"Even though the Americans are encouraging Israelis and Palestinians to discuss and look for creative alternatives, the only policy that has been endorsed is the road map," Israeli Embassy spokesman Mark Regev said.

The road map is stalled however, and American Jewish officials say Israel's best chance at undercutting the Geneva proposal is if current efforts to revive the road map succeed.

"It's hard to complain about people talking about peace when there's not much else out there," said one American Jewish official who deals regularly with Israeli officials.

American sponsors of Beilin and Abed Rabbo's visit to Washington and New York this week said the duo's sudden popularity had come as a pleasant surprise.

Together with criticism of Sharon's policies from top Israeli security officials, support for the Geneva proposal "collectively sends a signal that simply muddying along with the bloody status quo is not acceptable," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now, which is organizing some of Beilin's Washington appearances.

Sharon complains that Beilin's team has no authority to negotiate in Israel's name and concedes far too much, including land swaps, the dismantlement of several heavily populated Jewish settlements and a division of Jerusalem.

Yet it is precisely those details that make the accord attractive to Bush administration officials frustrated by the reluctance of Sharon and the Palestinian Authority to commit to detailed solutions for the most controversial issues dividing the sides.

"We have welcomed efforts such as these, such as that embodied by the drafters

MIDEAST FOCUS

Bush, Mubarak discuss peace

President Bush discussed progress in Israeli-Palestinian talks with Egypt's president.

The U.S. president phoned Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday and updated him on U.S. envoy William Burns' talks in the region, as well as on contacts between the Israeli and Palestinian Authority Cabinets, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

Jewish extremists guilty

Two Israeli Jewish extremists pleaded guilty to weapons-related crimes as part of a plea bargain.

Yitzhak Pass, whose infant daughter was killed in 2001 by Palestinian terrorists, and his brother-in-law, Matityahu Shvu, will not face charges that they planned to use explosives found in their car for a terrorist attack.

Israeli officials believe the two were part of a cell of Jewish terrorists based in the West Bank settlement of Bat Ayin.

The plea bargain was announced Tuesday.

Palestinian firebomber dies

Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian who threw a firebomb at an Israeli car near Ramallah.

Another Palestinian was injured in Tuesday night's incident.

The man was the second Palestinian killed on Tuesday, and the sixth in the past two days.

'Protocols' on display in Egypt

An Arabic translation of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" is on display in Alexandria, Egypt.

The book on display in the Alexandria Library, recently renovated by UNESCO, is the first Arabic translation of the "Protocols," an anti-Semitic forgery that purports to be a text of how Jews want to rule the world, according to the Middle East Media Research Institute. It reportedly is displayed next to a Torah.

of this Geneva plan, to introduce issues, discuss issues and consider issues that have to be dealt with down the road," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

In a New York Times opinion article Monday, Beilin and Abed Rabbo said the accord is a "virtual" agreement for decision-makers to do with as they please.

An eagerness to get to the nitty-gritty is not new for the Bush administration, which already has voiced strong support for another freelance peace initiative, a petition promoted by Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, and Palestinian intellectual Sari Nusseibeh.

What is new is support for the plans from Israel's friends in Congress. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) are sponsoring a resolution applauding the Geneva accord and other initiatives and urging Bush to "embrace" them. A similar resolution is circulating in the House of Representatives.

More significant are the mainstream Jewish groups signing on to an initiative that Israel's government has described as naive at best and treasonous at worst.

The interfaith appeal, called "Walk the Road to Peace," calls on the United States to immediately "focus public attention and support on" proposed solutions, and cites the Geneva accord. Leaders of the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative movements have signed on.

Orthodox officials said they never were approached about joining the appeal. The Orthodox Union told JTA on Tuesday that it had not formulated a position on the Geneva proposal. The Religious Zionists of America, in a statement released Monday, said, "We condemn to the utmost possible the charade taking place in Geneva."

Signatories said the attraction of initiatives that might jump-start a peace process overrode their concerns about signing onto a plan with Muslim and Christian leaders with whom they often are at odds.

"It was important in a public way to show that there's across-the-board support for these measures, that we're willing to work together to put aside some very different perspectives, strained relationships, for a greater good," said Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said the Geneva accord does not appeal to him, but he signed on to the interfaith appeal because at least it represented a dialogue.

"Would have I preferred that" the Geneva accord "not be in there? Yes. But it's in there," Epstein said. "My reason for being in on this is that I believe dialogue is important."

Some American Jewish groups have strongly opposed the accord.

The Anti-Defamation League called the Geneva proposal a "highly political venture which may have a negative impact" on peace efforts. The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs called it a "total sham" that undermines Israeli democracy.

But the main pro-Israel lobbying group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, was decidedly mild in its note to activists on how to deal with the proposal.

"In a democracy like Israel, it is common for non-governmental and academic policy discussions to take place," an AIPAC letter said. Calling the accord "well-intentioned," it concluded that "only the elected governments can make decisions." □

Israeli official criticizes Powell

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A top Israeli official sharply criticized Colin Powell's planned meeting with the architects of the "Geneva accord."

Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Friday's planned meeting, between the U.S. secretary of state and Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, the principal Israeli and Palestinian architects of the unofficial peace proposal, is a mistake. The proposal, which was launched at a ceremony in Geneva on Monday, has been rejected by Israel's government. "I am certain of his friendship, but I would cast doubt on his judgement in this matter," Olmert said. "I think that he is not being useful to the process."

Beilin and Abed Rabbo also are to meet Friday with Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. deputy defense secretary. □



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JEWISH WORLD

U.S.: Syria overture not serious

Syria must crack down on Palestinian terrorist groups if it is serious about peace, a State Department spokesman said.

"We find it hard to understand how Syria can talk peace at a time when Syria continues to support groups that are violently opposed to the peace process, that are violently opposed to Palestinian government, to the building of a Palestinian state," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday.

Syrian President Bashar Assad told *The New York Times* in an interview published Monday that the United States should press to renew Israeli-Syrian talks.

He blamed Israel for the breakdown of earlier negotiations.

Jewish groups focus on AIDS

Leaders of various streams of Judaism are pushing congregants to focus on AIDS prevention and treatment.

On World AIDS Day on Monday, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, called on President Bush and other world leaders to do more to fight AIDS, particularly in Africa.

On that continent, 18 million people have died from the disease.

Report: Balts fight anti-Semitism

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are focusing more on fighting anti-Semitism, a new report said.

The three Baltic countries also are promoting a more balanced approach toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as they prepare to join the European Union, according to a report on the former Soviet Union prepared by NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

The report says the Russian government is fighting anti-Semitism but grass-roots antipathy to Jews continues.

It also highlights the lack of religious freedom and problems with anti-Semitism in Belarus.

Bangladeshi editor arrested

A press freedom group is protesting the arrest of a Bangladeshi editor on charges of spying for Israel.

Reporters Without Borders said it is dismayed at the arrest of Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudury as he was set to leave the South Asian Muslim country for Israel on Nov. 29.

Choudury was to deliver a speech in Tel Aviv to a writers group on the role of the media in Muslim-Jewish dialogue.

Bangladesh and Israel do not have diplomatic relations.

Jews divided as U.S. Supreme Court hears case on funding study of religion

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A case before the U.S. Supreme Court on state scholarships for theology students could have a major impact on controversial school voucher programs.

The justices heard the case Tuesday of a Washington state man who was denied a state scholarship after he decided to seek a double major in pastoral studies. At issue was whether the state violated his free expression of religion by denying him the aid.

While the justices seemed almost evenly divided over whether Joshua Davey was discriminated against by the state, several focused on the case's ramifications for school vouchers, which the high court found constitutional last year.

The justices acknowledged that a ruling for Davey would set the precedent that religious instruction must be included in funding from states that give money to any private institution, as opposed to being an option for states.

"If we decide in your favor, we necessarily commit that a elementary school voucher program must include religious schools if it includes any private schools," said Justice Anthony Kennedy.

Justice Stephen Breyer said the implications of the case, *Locke v. Davey*, would be "breathtaking."

Theodore Olsen, the Bush administration's solicitor general, arguing in support of Davey before the Supreme Court, said it would not be a great leap to suggest that under the First Amendment clause that grants free exercise of religion, states would have to treat religious schools in the same manner as other private schools.

Jewish groups are divided on the case, as they are on most issues that affect the separation of church and state.

Several groups — including the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League — filed briefs against Davey's position, saying that Davey was not harmed from pursuing a religious education, only from receiving a state benefit.

Justice John Paul Stevens seemed to argue that point, suggesting that Davey's freedom to practice religion wasn't impaired, just lacking in a government subsidy.

In contrast, Orthodox groups — including the Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America — argued in a brief that students studying religion were being discriminated against.

Justice Antonin Scalia made that point. "It's treating religion differently from non-religion," he said. "Why is that not a violation of the principle of neutrality?"

Defining the line between what states should be allowed to fund and what they should not is at the center of the case.

The state of Washington contends that crafting a policy that denies the state's Promise Scholarship to students majoring in theology incorporates the state constitution's mandate that no public money go to religious instruction.

Davey lost his lawsuit in trial court, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit reversed the lower court's ruling, saying Davey's right to the free exercise of religion was violated.

"The legislation was attempting to identify an area of study that requires a great deal of religious instruction," Narda Pierce, the Washington state solicitor general, said.

But, as several of the justices noted, students were not denied the funds for taking theology classes, only for majoring in a theology program. One justice suggested that a student could take the exact same course load, and wait a year to declare his major, and still receive the aid.

Other justices questioned the line between the study of religion — popular in programs like Judaic studies — and the study of the promotion of a religious belief.

Justice David Souter suggested that the line should be drawn between the study of religion and an educational program "that says this belief is valid, and you ought to go out and persuade others of this belief."

A ruling is expected next summer. □

Defying E.U. ban, Jewish groups release report on anti-Semitism

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — In an act of defiance against the European Union, the main Jewish body in Europe has released an unpublished report that found rising anti-Semitism among Muslims in Europe.

Critics who want the study made public said the Vienna-based E.U. Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia was not prepared to deal with the sensitive subject of anti-Semitism among Muslims, who constitute Europe's largest minority. The E.U. department that commissioned the report said the data was too flawed to publish.

"We cannot accept that a study be confiscated on the grounds that it could create tensions," Serge Cwajgenbaum, secretary general of the European Jewish Congress, told JTA in a telephone interview, explaining the decision by EJC President Coby Benatoff to release the report without E.U. permission.

The furor that emerged last week around the E.U. decision to withhold the report reflects increasing concern among European Jewish groups for their safety.

The controversy also raises questions about the transparency of an organization that is meant to fight discrimination against all minorities in Europe.

The report was prepared last year for the Monitoring Center, but it was not released after its completion in February, and the Monitoring Center disclosed recently that it was preparing a new report to replace the first one.

Those who released the report into the public arena insist they are not trying to spread fear.

"Most of the Muslims in Europe, and particularly in France, are not anti-Semitic," said Francois Zimeray, a French member of the E.U. Parliament. "They are looking for integration for themselves and they are looking for peace in the Middle East."

But, he said, "this study shows how deep the link is in Europe between criticism of Israel and anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. It also shows how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict fuels anti-Semitism and how this conflict is used by some to organize the revival of old European Christian anti-Semitic myths."

Cwajgenbaum said other attempts to address the problem of growing anti-Semitism had failed.

"We have approached governments on a national level and on a European level," he said. "And in spite of good will and good intentions, the result is that Jews are still being threatened, which means that more has to be done. And this is one of the reasons why," he said, the EJC "decided to circulate this document."

The report, *Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in the European Union*, prepared by Berlin's Center for Research on Anti-Semitism for the Monitoring Center, has been withheld for the past 10 months.

The Monitoring Center insists it withheld the report on the basis of quality. It is preparing a fuller report to be released in early 2004.

But critics suspect the real reason for withholding the report is political. The research team that prepared the report, Juliane Wetzel and Werner Bergmann, have said as much.

Finished just before the war in Iraq began last spring, the report found an increase in anti-Semitic crimes committed by

Europeans of Arab or Muslim background, as well as by some left-wing extremists and anti-globalization activists.

The European Jewish Congress would not say how it obtained a copy of the report, which it released Monday in English on the official Web site of the French Jewish community, www.crif.org. It was expected to be available on the Web sites of Jewish organizations in all 15 E.U. member countries.

The World Jewish Congress joined in the effort almost immediately.

"We are e-mailing it to virtually anyone we know," Elan Steinberg, the WJC's executive vice president, said in an interview. "We think the suppression of this study was an act of intellectual dishonesty and moral treachery, and if the E.U. won't release its own poll, we will do it for them."

The report not only focuses on sources of anti-Semitism, but "also urges the governments of Europe to act," Zimeray said. "This is why it is not acceptable to know that this report has been kept secret for so long."

The release of the report came two days after Zimeray, who is Jewish, disseminated excerpts via e-mail.

Zimeray would not go into detail about how he got the report, but he said it did not come from the Berlin institute that prepared it.

He also said he had urged the Monitoring Center to release the study before taking measures into his own hands.

Zimeray said he intends to follow up with the Monitoring Center.

"I want to know why this report was sleeping in their offices since February 2003," he said. "I want to know why transparency hasn't been the policy of this institute. And I want written answers to these questions."

Neither the institute nor the Monitoring Center could be reached for comment Monday.

The 105-page report found an "increasing number of anti-Semitic attacks, committed frequently by young Arabs/Muslims and by far-right extremists" in most E.U. member countries.

The increase in attacks "was accompanied by a sharp criticism of Israeli politics across the entire political spectrum, a criticism that in some cases employed anti-Semitic stereotypes," the report states.

In another section, the report says that "observers point to an 'increasingly blatantly anti-Semitic Arab and Muslim media,' including audio tapes and sermons, in which the call is not only made to join the struggle against Israel but also against Jews across the world. Although leading Muslim organizations express their opposition to this propaganda, observers assume that its calling for the use of violence may exert a certain influence on readers and listeners."

Bergmann and Wetzel were warned that their report might be seen as making negative generalizations about Muslims in Europe. But the report cites several examples of Muslim-Jewish cooperation and Muslim condemnation of anti-Semitic acts, and also notes that Muslims often are victims of prejudice themselves.

"Of course we have some Muslim activists who are very anti-Semitic," Zimeray said, "but the majority are looking for peace, and that is a good reason to have hope."

Cwajgenbaum said the EJC is planning to organize discussions among Jews, Christians and Muslims in early 2004, preferably in Turkey. □