

IN THE NEWS

Fence hearings over at The Hague

The International Court of Justice concluded its hearings on Israel's security barrier on Wednesday. Rallies by both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian groups marked the hearings, which Israel, the United States and the European Union boycotted. The court often takes months to issue its ruling, which is nonbinding.

'Passion' opens

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," the \$30 million epic about the death of Jesus, opened in more than 2,500 theaters on the Christian holy day of Ash Wednesday.

The national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, after seeing the movie Wednesday, said it aims to "blame the Jews" for the crucifixion. Contradicting historical accounts, the movie suggests "the Jews were vengeful and the Romans were forced into it," Foxman said.

Gibson insists the movie is not anti-Semitic.

In Israel, a fervently Orthodox legislator, Knesset member Eli Yishai, urged Israel to ban the film.

U.S. opposes Israeli bank raid in Ramallah

Israeli raids on Palestinian banks risk destabilizing the Palestinian banking system, the U.S. State Department said.

Israeli forces clashed with rock-throwers during a raid Wednesday on Palestinian banks in the West Bank. Israeli officials said the raid came in response to intelligence warnings that the banks were funding terrorism.

"We'd prefer to see Israeli coordination with Palestinian financial authorities in order to stem the flow of funds to terrorist groups," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

Medics said at least 18 Palestinians were injured as Israeli forces entered Ramallah to search its Cairo-Amman Bank and two Arab Bank branches.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

This time, new PR effort by Israel is aimed at reporters' ignorance

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — One year ago, Mark Bianu stood in a Haifa cemetery reserved for terror victims.

As a reporter for a local cable TV show, "News of the Day," Bianu, 29, already had covered three terrorist attacks. He remarked to a colleague at the rapidly growing cemetery, "Who knows — maybe tomorrow you or I could be buried under this mound," his mother, Florence, recalled in a recent telephone interview.

Last October, Bianu and his wife Naomi were having Shabbat lunch at Haifa's Maxim restaurant when a Palestinian woman from Jenin blew herself up nearby, killing the couple and 19 others.

Now Bianu and his wife are buried in that Haifa cemetery.

"I am trying to carry on his work," Florence Bianu said of her son. "People may be tired of looking at the news, but we are living here and we are suffering. To lose a son, the pain is almost impossible," she said.

Nowadays Bianu is part of a new effort to make the case for Israel's security barrier in painfully human terms, by telling stories of ordinary Israelis to Americans and media opinion leaders.

The move by the Israel Project, a nonprofit firm that advocates for Israel, joins several new campaigns to inform the U.S. media, and by extension public perceptions, about Israeli life behind the headlines.

Donna Rosenthal, an award-winning former Israel Radio and TV correspondent, said she wrote her new book, "The Israelis," an in-depth look at the many faces of Israeli

society during the Palestinian intifada, as a "bible for journalists." It is meant to be used as a kind of desk reference about the Jewish state.

While touring to promote "The Israelis," Rosenthal says she is "shocked" by how deep illiteracy about Israel runs among many U.S. broadcast journalists, including some Jews at major network and cable news stations.

"There is enormous curiosity" about Israel "and enormous ignorance" in the media, Rosenthal said.

The book updates the last similar nonfiction view from Israel's street, the 1986 "Heroes, Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men" by Zev Chafets, which offered rarely seen colorful slices of Israeli life.

Whether portraying Russians working in high-tech firms, gays in Tel Aviv or Christian Arabs who publish a "Cosmopolitan"-style magazine, Rosenthal said, "I am trying to smash stereotypes."

At the same time, Linda Scherzer, a former CNN correspondent in Israel, now is consulting for a new Internet venture to give newspaper editorial writers access to analysis and opinion pieces about Israel from some 400 news outlets worldwide.

Launched by Los Angeles TV producer Merv Adelson, Access Middle East, online at www.AccessMiddleEast.org, "has been a good way to advance the story" about Israel to editorial writers from Minneapolis to Sacramento to Wichita, Scherzer said.

Already the site is increasing its audience and influencing coverage, Scherzer said. Recent conference calls with Israel's Deputy Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, produced a

Continued on page 2

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

■ *New Israeli PR effort is aimed at reporters*

Continued from page 1

New York Times editorial, and a call with a human-rights lawyer led to pieces in the Dallas Morning News and the New York Sun, she said.

Yet all of these efforts face some serious challenges, and their proponents don't expect to change overnight the face of news coverage of Israel.

In part that's because TV news long has been governed not by any anti-Israel bias, as some press watchdog groups maintain, but by the "if it bleeds, it leads" newscast mentality, said Samuel Freedman, an author and professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

"If a network newscast gives something 45 seconds, that's a tremendous amount of time, which hardly allows for nuance," Freedman said.

Indeed, Rosenthal said, many TV producers told her they wonder where the controversy lies in her book.

Meanwhile, the mothers of suicide-bombing victims found that telling their

tales required a hard sell.

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, president of the Israel Project, said she attempted to contact more than 100 print and TV figures, but most turned them down.

"They were here five days, and 80 reporters couldn't find 10 minutes to meet with them?" Laszlo Mizrahi asked.

So last week, the Israel Project launched a media campaign with ads on CNN, Fox News and MSN-BC outlets in Washington featuring Bianu and other mothers of terror victims.

The ads hit the airwaves just before the International Court of Justice at The Hague convened its hearings on Israel's fence. The campaign aimed to reinforce what the Israel Project says is overall public support for the barrier.

A survey of 800 registered voters Jan. 21-22 by pollster Neil Newhouse found that 74 percent of Americans support the fence as a barrier to terrorists.

Yet few may be aware of a small fact that one of the mothers, Lea Zur, whose son Assaf, 17, was among 17 killed in a suicide bus bombing in Haifa, disclosed in a letter of regret to journalists who could not meet her.

Zur noted that the security barrier, which is a chain-link fence for most of its proposed 450-mile route, succeeded two months ago in blocking a suicide bomber from

reaching a local high school where her nephew is a student.

"We are trying to reach out to reporters before they write their stories," Laszlo Mizrahi said. ■



Prague looks westward to fund a new home for survivors

By **MAGNUS BENNET**

PRAGUE (JTA) — The road to Prague goes through New York — at least if you're a Czech Jew trying to build a new \$6 million senior residence for Czech Holocaust survivors and you're short on cash.

In the coming weeks, the chairman of Prague's Jewish community, Tomas

Jelinek, will be in New York to raise money for the Hagibor Senior Center, designed for the growing number of Czech survivors in need of specialized care.

Hagibor, being built by Jewish groups and Holocaust-survivor organizations, will replace a smaller facility in Prague that can't cope with the growing number of survivors needing assisted-living care.

"The survivors are getting older, their health is deteriorating and their need is great," Jelinek said. "Perhaps 50 percent of current survivors will need our assistance, as they do not have any family to support them either because of the Holocaust or because their families left during the time of communism." ■

The plan for the new facility — slated for completion in 2006 — has been several years in the making. It is being supported by the Terezin Initiative, an umbrella organization for Czech Holocaust survivors; the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; and the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities.

The planned facility will have 60 beds with round-the-clock health-support services and a day-care center. Once it opens, it will cost an estimated \$763,000 annually.

About 1,550 Holocaust survivors live in the Czech Republic, accounting for roughly half of the membership of the federation and about 1.5 percent of the world's remaining concentration-camp and ghetto survivors, Czech Jewish officials say.

Jelinek said demand for spots at senior homes have soared despite efforts to care for survivors through a second assisted-living facility in Prague and a home-care service launched in 2002.

For now, the plan for the new facility counts on raising a third of the cost from local community members, borrowing a third from banks and raising a third from donors abroad and organizations dedicated to helping survivors.

The project already has some support. Retired U.S. businessman Marcel Bollag said during a visit to Prague that he would make a "substantial" donation to Hagibor.

Jelinek will kick off the U.S. fund-raising campaign on March 7 at an exhibition at New York's Center for Jewish History featuring the work of the late Czech artist and Holocaust survivor Alfred Kantor. The kick-off will come a day before the 60th anniversary of the gassing of 3,800 Czechoslovak Jews at Auschwitz, the largest number to be killed in a single day. ■



Howard E. Friedman
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Paula Simmonds
Marketing and Development Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more 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. © JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Supreme Court ruling divides Jewish groups

By **MATTHEW E. BERGER**

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing states to deny scholarships to theology students drew praise from Jewish civil-liberties groups and outrage from Orthodox groups.

The 7-2 decision Wednesday ruled that it was constitutional for the state of Washington to deny Joshua Davey a state-sponsored college scholarship because he was majoring in pastoral studies.

The ruling may have major implications for the crafting of school voucher programs and other church-state issues.

Jewish groups had filed briefs supporting both sides in *Locke v. Davey*.

Those supporting Washington had argued that denying the student the aid does not restrict free expression of religion and maintains the separation of church and state.

Orthodox groups had argued that the state was discriminating against students studying religion.

The Orthodox Union called the decision a "frontal assault" on the U.S. Constitution.

Supporters of the separation of church and state were concerned that a ruling for Davey would have set the standard that religious institutions must be funded in the same manner as non-religious entities.

"The court said it would have been constitutional to extend the aid to Davey and it also said it didn't have to," said Marc Stern, a lawyer for the American Jewish Congress. "That's going to drop everything into the hands of the legislatures."

The ruling is not likely to affect whether state and local municipalities create voucher programs, because the high court already has said they are constitutional.

However, Wednesday's ruling could affect the crafting of such programs because it clarifies that religious teachings need not be included in government funding of education.

The issue also could affect faith-based initiatives, which deal with whether government funds can be allocated to religious institutions.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote in the majority opinion that Wash-

ington was not forcing students to choose between their religious beliefs and receiving a government benefit.

And it was not discriminating against the study of religion, only denying a benefit for the pursuit of training for religious professions.

"Training someone to lead a congregation is an essentially religious endeavor," Rehnquist wrote. "Indeed, majoring in devotional theology is akin to a religious calling as well as an academic pursuit."

Rehnquist also said that denial of the scholarship was not a heavy burden for Davey.

"It imposes neither criminal nor civil sanctions on any type of religious service or rite," the opinion read. "It does not deny to ministers the right to participate in the political affairs of the community."

Justices John Paul Stevens, Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy, David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer joined Rehnquist.

Justice Antonin Scalia, in a dissent joined by Justice Clarence Thomas, argued that withholding a benefit to some individuals solely on the basis of religion was a violation of the Free Exercise Clause.

"The First Amendment, after all, guarantees free exercise of religion, and when the state enacts a financial penalty of almost \$3,000 for religious exercise — whether by tax or by forfeiture of an otherwise available benefit — only religious practice is anything but free," he wrote.

Davey was denied a taxpayer-funded Promise Scholarship after he opted for a double major in pastoral studies and business administration.

The state argued that the policy was in keeping with its constitutional mandate that no public money go to religious instruction.

The scholarship did not forbid Davey from taking the same course load, only from declaring his major to be pastoral studies.

Davey lost his lawsuit in U.S. District

Court, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit reversed the lower court's ruling, saying it violated Davey's right to the free exercise of religion.

Orthodox groups expressed anger at the high court's ruling.

"Today is a sad day for America's 'first freedom' of religious liberty," said Nathan Diament, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs.

"Our nation's highest court has approved state action which denies a person a government benefit solely upon the basis that the person is engaged in what the court acknowledges is constitutionally protect-

ed religious exercise."

Briefs filed by the Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America suggested that liberties of those studying theology were being compromised.

David Zwiebel, Agudath's executive vice president for government and public affairs, said there was a silver lining in that the court went out of its way to soften the impact of the case.

Rehnquist noted in his opinion that Washington's scholarship "goes a long way toward including religion in its benefits."

It allows money to be used for religious-studies classes and at predominantly religious schools.

Orthodox officials believe this statement suggests the court is open to government funding of religious schools and programs as long as it is not theology.

The Jewish groups supporting Washington included the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League.

Leaders of these organizations suggested that the ruling prevented a major defeat for church-state separation but does not represent a regression from recent rulings allowing religious schools to receive vouchers and other federal aid.

"The court has really adopted an unremarkable perspective that simply to say a religious activity may be funded is not to say it must fund all programs," said Richard Foltin, legislative director of the AJCommittee.

'Today is a sad day for America's first freedom of religious liberty.'

Nathan Diament
Orthodox Union

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Court rules against theology student

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that rejecting a theology student from a state-sponsored scholarship was constitutional.

In a 7-2 decision released Wednesday, the high court said that in the case of *Locke v. Davey*, Washington state's program "does not require students to choose between their religious beliefs and receiving a government benefit."

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said that "the state has merely chosen not to fund a distinct category of instruction."

The case focused on a theology student who was denied the Promise Scholarship because the state said the aid would violate church-state separation.

Jews were divided on the issue, which is expected to have implications for the school voucher issue.

Nazi-looted art case begins

Arguments began Wednesday at the U.S. Supreme Court in a case of Nazi-looted art.

Maria Altmann is suing for the right to bring a lawsuit in a U.S. court against the Austrian government to seek the return of looted paintings. She says the paintings were stolen from her family during the Nazi era.

An attorney for Austria said Altmann's aunt intended for the government-owned Austrian Gallery to have the paintings and that any conflict should be settled in Austrian courts.

Collaborator stripped of citizenship

The United States government stripped a former Nazi collaborator of his citizenship.

In making its ruling Wednesday, U.S. District Court Judge Carol Jackson ruled that Adam Friedrich had persecuted individuals when he served as an armed guard in the SS Death's Head Guard battalion and the Gross-Rosen concentration camp during World War II.

Friedrich, 82, who has been living in St. Louis, failed to disclose his wartime actions when he immigrated to the United States in 1955.

Accused arsonist must stand trial

A man accused of setting religious institutions aflame must stand trial, a U.S. judge ruled.

Between late April and early May 2003, Farshid Tehrani allegedly committed arson at two synagogues, a church, a Bahai center and a Jewish education center in California. Tehrani, who is Jewish, also is accused of setting fire to a rabbi's home.

Ring that bell?

A group of employees is suing the Salvation Army, accusing the group of religious discrimination.

The 18 current and former employees, who include Jews, Christians and nonreligious individuals, say they were pressed to sign forms stating their church attendance and their ministers' names and agree to the Salvation Army's mission "to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ." When they objected, some say they were harassed and eventually had to resign. The Salvation Army is a religious organization but is known for its charitable works.

Canada pressed on Palestinian aid

B'nai Brith Canada asked the Canadian government to probe whether aid to the Palestinians is being diverted for terrorism. The group's request was sparked by renewed allegations that the

Palestinian Authority has used funding from international donors to purchase weapons for terrorist groups and to pay for anti-Semitic propaganda. While Canada does not fund the Palestinian Authority directly, a significant amount of Canadian aid is directed to Palestinian-aid programs and UNWRA-operated facilities.

N.Y. synagogue burns

A synagogue and community center in upstate New York was destroyed by fire.

Monday's fire destroyed the Torah scroll at Congregation B'nai Torah Jewish Community Center in Greenwood Lake. An electrical problem is believed to have caused the fire.

MIDDLE EAST

Plea bargain with Tannenbaum?

Israeli officials are trying to reach a plea bargain with released captive Elhanan Tannenbaum.

Under a reported proposal, Tannenbaum — who was just released by Hezbollah in a prisoner swap — would be released from Israeli detention in exchange for agreeing to plead guilty to three counts: use of a forged passport, contact with a foreign agent and entry to an enemy country.

Tannenbaum also would give full disclosure to Israeli officials of his contacts with Hezbollah. After Tannenbaum refused to cooperate with his Israeli interrogators, some Israeli politicians said the agreement to swap some 430 Arab prisoners for Tannenbaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers was one of the worst mistakes in the country's history.

Vanunu travel limited

Nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu will not be allowed to leave Israel after his release from prison.

Security sources said Wednesday that Vanunu, who will be released in April after serving an 18-year sentence for divulging details about his work at Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor, will not be issued a passport and may be monitored by the Shin Bet to limit his contact with the public.

Making the desert bloom

Israel and Jordan agreed to participate in a joint environmental studies center. The center will be built along the desert border between the two countries, south of the Dead Sea. A private group known as Bridging the Rift, along with Cornell and Stanford Universities, will develop the center.

WORLD

Britain blasted on arms sales to Israel

Three groups blasted the British government for selling weapons components to Israel.

Amnesty International, Oxfam and the arms-control charity IANSA said Britain should tighten export controls to forbid the sale of parts to "known human-rights abusers," lumping Israel together with such nations as Zimbabwe, Colombia and Indonesia.

British lawmakers against hate

More than a dozen British lawmakers signed a motion condemning anti-Semitism. The motion also demanded that the police and courts prosecute anti-Jewish hate crimes. Put forward by Liberal Democrat Patsy Calton, the motion comes in response to a report last week showing a 7 percent rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the U.K. in 2003 from the previous year.