

IN THE NEWS

U.S. abstains from U.N. vote on Israel

The United States abstained from a U.N. Security Council resolution blasting Israel.

With 14 votes and one abstention, the 15-member U.N. Security Council condemned Israel for the demolition of Palestinian homes in the Rafah refugee camp, in the southern Gaza Strip.

"While we are clearly concerned about Israel's operations in Gaza, including the demolition of homes of innocent Palestinians and the death of Palestinian civilians, we could not vote in favor of this resolution because we do not believe it addresses sufficiently the context of the recent events in Gaza," said James Cunningham, the U.S. deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, pointing to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza by Palestinian terrorists.

Bush urges Israeli restraint in Gaza Strip

President Bush urged restraint after Israeli forces killed a number of Palestinian protesters early Wednesday.

Bush asked the Israeli government to "respect innocent life" and explain its military response. "I continue to urge restraint. It is essential that people respect innocent life in order for us to achieve peace," Bush said.

The White House had issued a similar plea earlier through spokesman Scott McClellan.

Jews meet Annan

U.S. Jews met with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

At the hourlong meeting Tuesday, representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations voiced concern to Annan about the double standard applied to Israel at the United Nations, and the rise of Islamic and European anti-Semitism.

They said Annan distanced himself from recent anti-Israel comments made by his special adviser for Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi.

WORLD REPORT

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Ruling on 'idolatrous' wig hair creates frenzy in Orthodox world

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — When word reached a fervently Orthodox enclave in Beit Shemesh, Israel, that wigs made from Indian hair may not be kosher because of the hair's heathen origins, pandemonium erupted.

Women replaced their \$2,000 wigs with \$5 kerchiefs, simple snoods and synthetic-hair substitutes as they waited to hear the final word on a religious ruling that has created chaos in the Orthodox world, where many married women cover their hair as a sign of modesty in conformance with Jewish law.

"There are humongous things going on here," said a fervently Orthodox woman who lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh. "I know a girl who just spent \$2,000 on a sheitel and was told it was no good," she said, using the Yiddish word for wig.

The controversy reached a fervor last week when Rabbi Shalom Elyashiv, one of Israel's pre-eminent authorities on Jewish law, or halachah, instituted a ban on wigs made from Indian hair.

The ban came out of concern that the hair's original owners had used their hair for idolatrous Hindu religious ceremonies.

The hair is bought after Hindu women, who never before have cut their hair, shave their heads at the Tirupati temple in India as a sign of religious reverence.

Jewish rabbinic authorities are divided over whether the hair itself is used in idolatrous worship or whether the haircut is what is ceremonially significant — and whether the hair is then forbidden according to Jew-

ish law, which bars use of idolatrous objects.

Many anxious women also were uncertain whether their wigs contained Indian hair or were made of "kosher" hair from Europe or elsewhere in Asia.

"On the one hand it's comical, but on the other hand it's a serious issue," said Chaim Waxman, a sociologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

"We're not used to thinking in terms of idolatry, because for 2,000 years monotheism prevailed in the Western world, where Jews lived," Waxman said. But "if in fact Hinduism is idolatry, and if in fact the cutting of the hair is part of the ritual, then theoretically it could be a problem."

This is the recall story of the Orthodox community, observed Jeremy Stern, a fervently Orthodox Jew who lives in Israel. Just as the recall of Firestone tires in 2000 caused anxiety in the general public due to safety concerns, this episode is causing fervently Orthodox Jews to act out of religious concern.

When some Jews in Israel and Brooklyn started burning their wigs — believing they were following the religious injunction to destroy idolatrous religious objects — it added fuel to the fire.

Wig makers hastened to find religious authorities to compile lists of wigs whose provenance was not under suspicion, and they posted them on the Internet.

"In general, the mass hysteria has a lot to do with the communications today, with all the faxes and the e-mails. In the old days, a thing like this would take such a long time," Stern said. "The Internet has really made

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Wiggling out over 'idolatrous' hair, from Brooklyn to Bnei Brak

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everything a global shtetl."

Meanwhile, Orthodox Jews from Brooklyn to Bnei Brak are debating the intricacies of Hindu worship at a temple halfway around the world.

"The haircut is part of the avodah, not the hair," said Elliott Brill, a fervently Orthodox New Yorker, referring to the religious service at the Indian temple. "They don't cut their hair their whole lives until they get to the temple."

Rabbi Nochem Kaplan, director of the Central Committee of Chabad Rabbis of America, said his group appointed a six-person rabbinical task force to look into the matter.

"Some serious questions were raised and they need to be dealt with in a serious way," he said. "Somebody from India is coming here. There have been numerous calls and correspondence from India. It's fact finding more than anything else."

For many people, a lot of money is at stake.

Human hair wigs can be expensive — custom-made ones sell for more than \$2,000, and even low-end synthetic wigs can cost several hundred dollars — and wig making is big business in the fervently Orthodox community. Aside from wig manufacturers, there are wig importers, weavers, cleaners and sellers.

But the controversy is about more than just money.

Aside from the obvious religious issues involved, anti-wig forces in the fervently Orthodox community are using the brou-

haha to bolster a century-old argument against the use of wigs.

"This issue touches upon a debate at the heart of haredi life," said Menachem Friedman, a sociologist at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, using the Hebrew word for fervently Orthodox.

The uproar owes much to the origins of Jewish wig-wearing in the late 19th century, he said.

Up until then, only a few upper-class, observant Jewish women wore wigs, while other women covered their hair with hats, kerchiefs or shawls.

But a rise in the standard of living, coupled with technological advances that made wig manufacturing more feasible and affordable, resulted in an upsurge in wig wearing among Orthodox women.

The new ubiquity of wigs presented Orthodox rabbis with a dilemma.

"The goal is that the women will be modest. And how do you do it? With head coverings," Friedman said. "But when the woman is more erotic wearing a particular kind of head covering, that presents a problem."

Many rabbis sought to ban the wigs, but that would have meant hurting a lucrative Jewish business and declaring that the women who had worn wigs for generations — including the rabbis' own ancestors — had sinned.

Most rabbinic authorities therefore did not oppose them.

"They don't want to delegitimize the previous generations, and this is a significant Jewish business," Friedman said.

But the controversy over the Indian-hair wigs has breathed new life into the anti-wig crusaders.

Rabbinic proponents of wig wearing have stayed quiet largely because they recognize the problem inherent in advocating head-coverings that make women more, rather than less, attractive, Friedman said.

"A lot of people are anti-sheitel, and they're definitely pushing it along," said Brill, whose company, Lacey Costume Wig, manufactured wigs for Orthodox women until 15 years ago, when his busi-

ness shifted to wigs for the stage. "They consider sheitels bourgeois and not a real head-covering."

Brill said women have phoned him in tears over the controversy.

In Cleveland, a fervently Orthodox school closed for a day because the female teachers didn't know what to wear over their hair, Waxman said.

One fervently Orthodox woman in Ramat Beit Shemesh said she felt embarrassed wearing her wig in public — even though it's made from European hair — because people looked at her as if she were a heretic.

"People you would never have seen walk

out of their house with anything but a wig are now wearing snoods, tichels," she said, using a Yiddish word for kerchief. "It's almost comical."

Freeda Kugel, who lives in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, runs a company that manufactures European-hair wigs. Freeda Wigs employs 200 people and produces 600-700 wigs per month, mostly for customers in the United States.

Though many wig wearers say Caucasian hair is the best quality, followed by Indian and then Korean hair, Kugel said she always wanted to work with Indian hair.

"The Indian hair is nice and it's cheaper, and I could not get hold of this hair. Now, thank God that I didn't go into it," she told JTA.

Despite the uproar, Orthodox community members say most people are taking a more reasoned wait-and-see approach.

"The guidance that we are giving is that currently those women who have determined that their wig comes from India should not wear it pending a definitive ruling from Israel," said Rabbi Basil Herring, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America, an Orthodox rabbis group, explaining that Elyashiv's ruling was a tentative one. "At the same time, they should not destroy them."

"Wear a synthetic wig for a couple of weeks, or a wig from Europe," Chabad's Kaplan advised. "It's not that big of a deal."

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Menachem Friedman
Bar-Ilan University sociologist

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At AIPAC parley, Bush makes case for Iraq war

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush knew what he was doing when he took his case for staying the course in Iraq to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

No audience appreciates the president more for sticking to his guns in the Middle East than pro-Israel Washington lobbyists.

Bush received 23 standing ovations Tuesday in his speech to AIPAC, in which he defended his Iraq policy and reiterated his administration's strong support of Israel. That support won him thunderous ovations throughout the speech, with a smattering of attendees holding up four fingers and shouting, "Four more years!"

While AIPAC's membership is traditionally Democratic, many AIPAC voters have said they will back Bush in November because of his stance on Israel.

Bush spent much of his speech defending an Iraq policy buffeted by casualties and scandal. He said he remained committed to defeating insurgents in Iraq and transferring power there to a U.S.-friendly government.

"We will not be intimidated by thugs and assassins," Bush said. "We will win this essential, important victory in the war on terror."

Bush has faced much criticism for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the failure there to find weapons of mass destruction, which he cited as the primary justification for war, and the violence that has continued to plague Iraq since the end of large-scale hostilities last year.

Among many supporters of Israel, however, the war is seen largely as a positive, with the ouster of Saddam Hussein considered a boon to Israel's security.

Bush justified the military action in front of the friendly audience.

"Freedom-loving people did not seek this conflict," he said. "It has come to us by the choices of violent men, hateful men."

Bush linked the Iraq invasion with the war on terrorism and stability in the Middle East, suggesting that U.S. resolve in Iraq could effect change in Syria and Iran.

"This advance of freedom will bring greater security to America and to the world," he said. "These are historic times. It's a historic opportunity."

He sounded a similar message when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Bush alluded to the escalating violence in the Gaza Strip, where attacks claimed the lives of 13 Israeli soldiers last week and hundreds of Palestinians have been made homeless by Israeli house demolitions.

"The unfolding violence in the Gaza Strip is troubling and underscores the need for all parties to seize every opportunity for peace," he said.

Bush reiterated his view that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's promised withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank was a "bold" opportunity for progress, and called on all parties to renounce violence, fight terrorism and embrace democracy.

"Our vision is a Middle East where borders are crossed for purposes of trade and commerce, not crossed for the purposes of murder and war," Bush said. "This vision is within our grasp if we have the faith and the courage and the resolve to achieve it."

He also committed to working with Europe to fight international anti-Semitism and praised AIPAC members for their contribution to the war against terrorism.

"In a dangerous new century, your work is more vital than ever," he said. "I thank you for doing your part in the cause of freedom."

The adulation was overwhelming for a chief executive whom many in the room did not vote for three years ago. Early in his remarks, when Bush could not complete a sentence above the crowd's roar, he smiled and said, "I'm just getting warmed up."

Even before Bush entered the room, attendees pumped their hands in applause. Trying to introduce Bush, Amy Friedkin,

AIPAC's outgoing president, was halted after almost every sentence by ovations.

Friedkin said Bush had "walked the walk" by standing up for Israel, working to protect it from terrorism and isolating Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat when others had embraced him.

Bush's presence at the event was noteworthy: In the past, the administration has been careful not to aggravate Arab perceptions of pro-Israel clout in Washington, and this was only Bush's second speech to a Jewish audience since taking office in January 2001.

But the administration and Bush's reelection campaign have emphasized his record on Israel in recent months, hoping to galvanize Jewish support in several key states with large Jewish populations, such as Florida, Pennsylvania and Arizona.

Vice President Dick Cheney traveled to South Palm Beach, Fla. last Friday and sent a very similar message to the local Jewish federation there, with American and Israeli flags as his backdrop as well.

Bush's speech received rave reviews from AIPAC members, many of whom said he touched on all their issues of concern.

"There are people in this audience who plan to vote for him and people who don't," said Adam Goldfarb of New York City. "But the spirit of AIPAC is to welcome leaders of both sides of the aisle who support Israel."

Few seemed to mind that Bush used the forum to justify his Iraq policy. "I think this audience, more than most, is more likely to be supportive of the war in Iraq," said Moe Freedman of Oak Park, Mich. ■

'The unfolding violence in the Gaza Strip is troubling and underscores the need for all parties to seize every opportunity for peace.'

President Bush

Official: Israel 'most pure democracy'

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A top State Department official said the Bush administration's support for the Jewish state is not related to upcoming elections in the United States.

"The affection of the president for Israel and for that democracy has nothing to do with elections," Richard Armitage, a deputy secretary of state, testified Tuesday

to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "It has to do with his view of Israel as one of the great democracies of the world, perhaps the most pure democracy."

Armitage had been asked by Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.) whether "paralysis" on Israeli-Palestinian issues was related to "a certain base you got to be careful of" in the upcoming elections. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

U.N. to discuss anti-Semitism

The United Nations will hold its first-ever seminar on anti-Semitism next month.

The June 21 seminar at U.N. headquarters in New York follows a recent seminar on the topic in Berlin, sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel has been invited as the keynote speaker, and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and World Jewish Congress president Edgar Bronfman also will participate, according to Elan Steinberg, the World Jewish Congress' executive vice president.

This will be the first of a series of seminars on the topic of "Un-learning Intolerance."

Given the resistance of the Arab and Muslim states to efforts to pass a stand-alone U.N. resolution condemning anti-Semitism, Steinberg said, "I do not preclude the possibility that there will be rough patches in the seminar."

Still, he added, "We have to recognize that in a place like the United Nations, where so many debates have been permeated with anti-Semitism, it's an unprecedented breakthrough."

Minister: Ties to Israel make Germany target

Islamic terrorists could target Germany because they think it is allied with Israel, Germany's interior minister said.

Otto Schily's comments came this week as the country released statistics showing that Islamic extremism is Germany's greatest domestic security threat.

Budapest forum draws record numbers

Record numbers of participants are converging on Budapest for the third General Assembly of European Jewry.

The event begins Thursday. Organizers said more than 1,000 people from more than 40 countries have registered for the four-day event, organized by the European Council of Jewish Communities and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The conference will conclude with a document proposing a development strategy for European Jewry.

Ukrainian Jews can't get along

Nearly 2,000 delegates gathered for a congress of Ukrainian Jewry that highlighted rifts in the community.

This week's gathering in Kiev, billed by organizers as the founding congress of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, failed to attract leaders of some key Jewish groups working in Ukraine — particularly Chabad, whose rabbis have leadership roles in most local communities in Ukraine.

There has been a long-standing competition for power between Chabad and Vadim Rabinovich, a wealthy leader in the community. Some delegates to the congress said the group was a means for Rabinovich to increase his power.

Soccer star scores for terror victims

A Brazilian soccer idol donated autographed soccer balls to Israeli children who are victims of terrorism.

Ronaldinho Gaucho, forward of Spanish team Barcelona, agreed to autograph a number of balls and send them to the One Family Fund for children victimized by terrorism.

The fund is an Israeli program that provides financial and emotional assistance to victims of terror.

Ronaldinho dedicated each ball to a specific child, inscribing messages of hope and get-well wishes.

Christians in Germany to study Israel

Fundamentalist Christians in Germany are founding an Institute for Israel studies.

Beginning in September 2004, the Institute for Israelology will disseminate information about Israel from a fundamentalist standpoint. It is to be based at the Free Theological Academy in the city of Giessen.

According to Christians for Israel, the institute's goals are to propagate information about Israel, the common roots of Christians and Jews, and the causes of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. It also will promote interfaith reconciliation.

Czech synagogue desecrated

Czech police are investigating the desecration of a synagogue. Officials said unknown perpetrators carved fascist symbols and inscriptions in the shul in the town of Krnov after breaking into the property earlier this month.

The case is the latest in a series of anti-Semitic incidents in recent months.

Last November, the wall of a Protestant church in the town of Ostrava was spray-painted with the words "Jews to the Gas Chambers." That incident followed the desecration of a Jewish memorial, also in Ostrava, which was defaced with Nazi symbols.

MIDDLE EAST

Jerusalem Day celebrated

Israelis marched in their capital to celebrate Jerusalem Day. Roads in central Jerusalem were shut down on Wednesday as thousands marched in parades marking 37 years since Jerusalem's reunification in the 1967 Six-Day War. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon led dignitaries assembled for annual ceremonies at Ammunition Hill, which saw some of the fiercest fighting in the 1967 war.

Israeli is judo champ

An Israeli won a championship in judo, burnishing his credentials for the upcoming Olympic games.

Arik Ze'evi defended his European Championship in the under-100-kilogram division on Sunday with a victory over former gold medalist Antal Kovacs, of Hungary. Ze'evi finished fifth at the 2000 Olympics.

NORTH AMERICA

Sisterhood is powerful

One Hadassah board member gave her kidney to another.

At a board meeting of the women's Zionist organization in January, Hadassah President June Walker announced that Belle Simon was in desperate need of a kidney. Katie Edelstein, 55, president of Hadassah's Pacific Northwest Region, offered hers.

A successful surgery took place May 11 at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York.

"How many times in life do you have an opportunity to make an impact on someone else's life like this?" Edelstein said, thrilled for the opportunity to be a living donor.

Simon, 66, had expected to wait five years for a donor transplant.

Bone-marrow registries, unite!

A registry for Jewish bone-marrow donations is teaming up with a national bone-marrow program.

The partnership between the Gift of Life registry and the National Marrow Donor Program allows the latter to access the Gift of Life's database.