

IN THE NEWS

Annan boosts Abbas, remembers Arafat

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan vowed to help create a Palestinian state.

"The international community is determined to work with both sides to press for the implementation of the 'road map,'" Annan told reporters Monday after meeting Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, referring to the U.S.-led peace plan.

But he added: "I do not want to give the impression that it is going to be easy."

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told Annan on Sunday that Israel insists the Palestinian Authority crack down on terrorist groups as a precondition for statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Annan laid a wreath at the grave of Yasser Arafat and will attend Tuesday's unveiling of a new museum at Yad Vashem.

Israeli protestors block highway in Tel Aviv

Israelis opposing the Gaza withdrawal plan blocked traffic on one of Israel's main roads.

Monday night's rally on the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv brought rush-hour traffic to a halt.

Police arrested 18 of the protesters, some of whom burned tires as they chanted slogans against the plan to withdraw from Gaza, which is scheduled to begin in July.

Was it arson at Swiss synagogue?

Arson is suspected in fires at a synagogue and a Jewish-owned clothing store in Switzerland.

The fire at the synagogue in Lugano late Sunday night caused considerable damage, according to The Associated Press.

A fire later broke out at the nearby clothing store.

Police are investigating the fires, which the leader of the local Jewish community called an act of anti-Semitism.



WORLD REPORT

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Trading in souffles for shwarma: French Jews ponder move to Israel

By BRETT KLINE

PARIS (JTA) — Harry and Murielle Ouaknine are successful professionals in France, but they're thinking of giving up their life here to move to Israel.

"We always thought about moving to Israel, but the environment in France now has pushed us to find the courage to do it," Harry Ouaknine said last month at a fair here, held to encourage immigration to Israel.

Ouaknine, a shipping broker and the father of two children, was gathering information about high schools in Tel Aviv.

He wasn't alone. An increasing number of Jews in France are contemplating a move to Israel. Nearly 4,500 people showed up at Aliyah Day last month, a huge increase from the 1,000 it drew in other years, according to the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel in France, David Roche.

Now a new group has been formed to help French Jews make the move to Israel.

Launched last week at a posh dinner at the Maison France-Israel, the AMI association will partner with the Jewish Agency in smoothing the process of immigration.

AMI stands for Aliyah Meilleure Integration, or better aliyah integration — the word "Ami" means "my people" in Hebrew and "friend" in French. AMI is modeled on the group Nefesh B'Nefesh, which sees its mission as "revitalizing North American aliyah to Israel."

"We think of the Jewish Agency as the big ocean liner, and AMI is the little speedboat," said its director, Alex Moise. "They pay for the ticket to go to Israel, and we take care

of the taxi ride from the airport, a custom-designed ride, so to speak."

The group's initial budget, \$1.5 million, was donated by French Jewish philanthropist Pierre Besnainou. The amount is modest by American standards, but "it is a pretty good start," Moise said. "And of course we have plans for fund raising."

Two projects already are on tap. In one, AMI would help students get help from ongoing, privately funded financial aid programs — young French students studying in Israel can get grants, and French high-school seniors can get funding for trips to Israel at Chanukah.

The second project is new. AMI is setting up low-cost intensive Hebrew-language classes for families waiting for their departure date. It's funded by the Jewish Agency, AMI and other groups.

Future projects include establishing an employment referral center for Francophones in Israel and arranging charter flights for new immigrants.

At AMI's launch, a 45-page report on French tourism to Israel was released. It included some startling figures.

At least 100,000 French Jews came to Israel as tourists in 2004, almost one-fifth of the Jewish population of France. Most of the tourists define themselves as religiously observant, or "pratiquants," but that could include people who go to synagogue only on the holidays and eat kosher food.

The French Jewish community is believed to number about 600,000, though the number is highly debatable.

Seventy percent of them are Sephardi. Either they or their parents tend to come

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AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

■ *New group helps French Jews move to Israel; many are considering making aliyah*

Continued from page 1

from Algeria, Tunisia or Morocco. The rest are Ashkenazi, usually from Eastern Europe. The families of a small percentage of French Jews have been in France for many generations.

French Jewish tourists to Israel are 89 percent Sephardi and only 5 percent Ashkenazi, according to the report.

Of the 15- to 18-year-olds polled, three quarters say they do not see a future for themselves in France, and half have suffered from some form of anti-Semitism in the last five years.

"Here in France, the overall system has been very good for French people and for many immigrants, but some Magrebis have been unable to integrate," said Rebecca Cohen, 17, talking about non-Jews of North African heritage. "The result is violence against us. You can't imagine how many Jewish teenagers are talking about leaving for Israel."

At the same time, most adults polled say they have good lives in France.

"Jews have been very successful in France," Moise said. "But this year, there is a bad feeling."

"Frankly speaking, the anti-Semitism is coming almost entirely from the North African Muslim community," he said. "And Jews here have less and less confidence in France and in Europe. At least some of the Muslims here want to Islamize France. Jews have a capacity to adapt to this that other French people do not have."

People spoke frankly about their fears at Aliyah Day.

The Ouaknines live on a houseboat on the Seine River in Paris. The parents came to France from Morocco and Tunisia when they were children. They eat kosher food and go to synagogue every week. But they are beginning to worry about the future.

"Honestly, the anti-Semitic violence has not touched us directly, but it is scaring us enough to believe we have no future as Jews in Paris," said Murielle Ouaknine, who works in information technology. "We want to construct our futures in Israel, no longer in France."

Unofficial figures put the number of immigrants to Israel from France at about 2,500 in 2004.

France's chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, has even offered a blessing to Jews making aliyah. "Nobody is running away from France. People create their own spiritual conditions for going," Sitruk said.

A report from the French Interior Ministry in December said that racist violence, including anti-Semitism, had increased by more than 70 percent in 2004, with 194 reported acts and 711 threats, compared to 112 acts and 418 threats over the same period in 2003.

Last year, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sparked friction with France after he urged all French Jews to leave the

country immediately to avoid what he called "the wildest anti-Semitism."

But Roche said the French government has been doing a good job in the fight against anti-Semitic attacks.

French President Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy, France's former interior minister, "have taken strong positions, saying no violence will be tolerated," Roche said. "But still, the courts could be doing more. And frankly, many

people in France are simply not interested in the problem."

Cohen, who lives in a Paris suburb, was looking at information about high schools in Jerusalem. "I have Muslim Arab friends," she said, "but I have been called a dirty Jew by other Arabs in school more than once, more than twice."

"I was born here, but I am fed up. Whatever measures the French government takes, it is difficult to prosecute 15-year-olds, and the French people could not care less about this problem as long as it does not affect them directly."

Going to live in Israel, where the situation between Israelis and Palestinians is tense, does not scare her.

"The Palestinians need a state," she said. "They are hard-working people but are faced with a political problem." ■

**You can't imagine
how many Jewish
teenagers are talking
about leaving for Israel.**

Rebecca Cohen
French teenager

JTA
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French groups go after Web site

PARIS (JTA) — Eight French groups are trying to shut down an anti-Semitic French Web site.

The groups are asking a French court to order the site's American server, OLM.net, and French Internet providers France Telecom and Noos to shut down the site.

Stephane Lilti, a lawyer for two of the groups involved, SOS Racisme and the Union of French Jewish Students, said the site allows access to "2,000 years of anti-Jewish literature."

The groups hope the case will help put

into practice recent laws governing electronic information.

The judge can order the American server to shut down the site under the jurisdiction of the law governing crimes against humanity.

However, some suspect that the server will refuse to recognize the ruling of a French court.

The Web site features free access to 230 anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denial documents.

The site has been inactive for the last few days. ■

Israelis train psychologists helping Beslan victims

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Psychologists working with the victims of last year's school massacre in Russia have spent a week of training in Israel.

The program, which ended Sunday, featured training in such areas as trauma-debriefing techniques, relaxation methods and ways to include schools and communities in helping people overcome trauma.

The two groups also established phone and email hotlines to do follow-ups and to give the Russians an opportunity to turn to their colleagues in Israel should they need to do so. The training is the brainchild of World ORT and is co-sponsored by it, along with the Russian Jewish Congress.

"Unfortunately, we have an extensive experience in dealing with such cases," said Avi Ganon, the Moscow-based director of World ORT in Russia, Belarus and Central Asia. "Sixty of our ORT school students in Israel died in terrorist attacks in the last four years," he told journalists on Monday at a news conference in Moscow.

A leading Russian psychologist said that although Russia has skilled professionals who have worked in Beslan since the first day of the tragedy, the Israeli experience in dealing with the psychological aftermath of terrorist attacks could prove invaluable for the residents of

Beslan, where more than 350 people died in the September 2004 massacre.

"Israel is constantly dealing with the aftermath of terror," said Alexander Asmolov, a psychology professor with the Moscow State University and president of ORT Russia. "We have come to the situation when we need to learn from this experience."

One of the Beslan psychologists who was a member of the group that visited Israel agreed that the Israeli experience is relevant for Russia.

"Our colleagues in Israel have accumulated a tremendous experience in rehabilitating those who survived in terrorist attacks," Igor Dulaev said.

Dulaev, a social psychologist, has worked in Beslan since September. He first arrived in Beslan because he wanted to help his friends whose children were among the hostages. His work has been entirely focused on this troubled community ever since.

A Russian senator representing North Ossetia, the autonomous republic where Beslan is located, said Beslan's citizens will

need professional counseling for a very long time. "It's very hard to live through such a tragedy, but the most difficult things occur after a while, when you already think it's all over," said Erik Bugulov, who is also a member of the Russian parliamentary commission charged with investigating the Beslan tragedy.

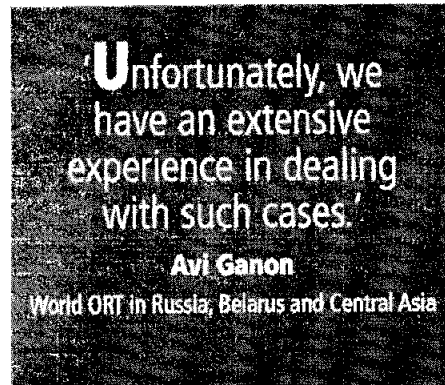
"And here we have come across a shortage of experts, of those people who could help to bring people to normal hu-

man existence."

Experts in Beslan said the culture in the Caucasus prevents people, especially men, from seeking professional psychological aid.

Inna Abaeva, another Beslan psychologist who was with the group in Israel, said she learned a lot by meeting some of the parents whose children were killed in Palestinian terrorist attacks.

"Our people are not living with that yet, they are still there, in the time of the tragedy. Time has to pass for them to learn how to live their life in the 'after time,'" said Abaeva. "That's what I saw in these parents in Israel. You have to teach the people how to live normal life after what happened." ■



ACROSS
THE FORMER
SOVIET UNION

Laughter as medicine: Israeli clowns help tsunami-struck kids

By GUY SHARETT

KHAO YAI, Thailand (JTA) — The international Jewish community has sent in the clowns to help teenagers traumatized by the tsunami. They seem to be helping.

"The clowns might not be able to give us physical help, but they help us to get out of the trauma because we are laughing a lot here. Sense of humor is important for us, especially now," says Darin Wahalak, 18, from Phang Nga in South Thailand, who spent a week in a camp with a group of Israeli clowns in Khao Yai.

Darin is one of 50 Buddhist and Muslim teenagers from Thailand's tsunami-ravaged Andaman coast who joined the camp recently organized by the Israeli embassy in Thailand, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a local nonprofit agency, the Population and Community Development Association.

"I feel that for these kids it's a huge change to be here in the mountains, where you do not see the effects of the tsunami and can laugh with clowns," says Shlomi Kofman, first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Thailand.

Many of the teenagers lost family, friends and homes in the devastating tidal wave on Dec. 26 that killed at least 165,000, according

to The Associated Press. "At first I was sad all the time. Now I am better," says Chusak Kokang, 18, of Krabi, who lost 10 of his good friends in Koh Phi Phi.

The clowns belong to a group called Dream Doctors, who work with children in hospitals in Israel — mainly kids who fight cancer and children who survived terror attacks.

"Actually we did not know exactly whom we would meet in Thailand," says Nimrod Eisenberg, or "Max," his clown name. "So we focused on preparations: We brought lots of red noses for the kids, tons of bubble liquid and balloons. These are all working tools we feel good with, and we have to work with things that make us happy, because this is how we can pass this joy to the kids."

"On the first day we decided the first encounter would be at lunch, and we would be the ones who would serve them the food," says "Prof. Chimichuri," aka clown Alex Gruber. "We thought that the kids would find it funny that clowns dressed up as chefs are the ones who serve them lunch, but they didn't laugh at all. At some stage I saw lots of flies around, and I asked every kid whether he wanted his rice with flies or without. They found it hilarious. Then I knew we found a way into their hearts, across the cultural and linguistic boundaries." ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Israel, PLO reps together

Israel's ambassador to Washington appeared in a public forum with the Palestine Liberation Organization representative to the United States.

Daniel Ayalon joined Hasan Abdel Rahman on Capitol Hill on Monday for an Americans for Peace Now forum.

The Egyptian and Jordanian ambassadors were there as well. "It symbolizes the changes of the times," Ayalon said.

Senate proposes benefits extension

A U.S. Senate committee approved language that would extend supplemental benefits for two years to elderly and disabled refugees, some of whom are Jewish.

The Supplemental Security Income extension passed last week in the Senate Finance Committee, as part of the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act.

The aid provides a basic monthly income to people 65 or over, the disabled and the blind.

Refugees are supposed to be cut from its rolls if they have not become naturalized citizens within seven years.

But many elderly and disabled refugees have been unable to meet the language requirement, and others have been unable to manipulate the bureaucracy to gain citizenship in time.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which praised the Senate's action, estimates that 20,000 people will lose their benefits by 2010, and 8,000 of those are refugees from the former Soviet Union.

Bush liaison faces tough crowd

The White House's liaison to the Jewish community said Palestinian reforms are a "direct result" of the Bush administration's policy toward Yasser Arafat.

Speaking in Washington on Monday to a gathering of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, Noam Neusner said the Bush administration's decision to isolate the late Palestinian Authority president allowed for moderate leadership to emerge after his death.

But Neusner faced tough questions from participants about the president's policies on stem cells, gay rights and tax reform.

MIDDLE EAST

Law of Return change proposed

An Israeli legislator proposed amending Israel's Law of Return to help Ethiopian immigrants.

Avraham Poraz, a former Israeli interior minister, wants to extend the law, which grants automatic citizenship to applicants who had at least one Jewish great-grandparent, the Jerusalem Post reported.

The law now applies to those who have at least one Jewish grandparent.

Israel has pledged to bring the remaining approximately 18,000 Falash Mura, Ethiopian Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity, to Israel by 2007.

Applying the Law of Return to these immigrants would help them receive the same benefits as other Jewish immigrants.

Looking out for informants

Israel called on the Palestinian Authority to grant amnesty to Palestinians who acted as informants for Israel.

On Monday, Israel's deputy defense minister, Ya'acov Edri, criticized the death sentence imposed by the Palestinian Authority on 15 of its citizens suspected of helping Israeli security forces.

"This is unacceptable, especially at a time when we are releasing jailed terrorists," Edri told Ma'ariv.

He vowed to ask Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to hold up the release of 400 prisoners, meant as a goodwill gesture to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, until the lives of the 15 suspected collaborators are spared.

Arabs ask the general

Israel's military intelligence chief chatted online with the Arab world. ArabYNET, the Arabic-language Internet edition of the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, opened a chat room Monday where readers could correspond with Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash.

Queries came from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and dealt mostly with Israel's relations with the Palestinians.

But when one correspondent identifying himself as a member of the Lebanese opposition asked for Israeli help in ousting Syrian troops, Farkash kept a safe distance.

"Israel has no role to play in what is happening in Lebanon, Syria and Hezbollah," he wrote.

WORLD

Peace lecture in Italy canceled

A lecture at the University of Bologna by a Palestinian and an Israeli peace activist was canceled.

Samar Sahhar, a Palestinian Christian, and Rome-born Israeli Angelica Calo were to have spoken Wednesday on dialogue and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

The university said it was forced to cancel the meeting for fear of protests similar to those launched by leftist students against Israel's ambassador to Italy when he spoke at the University of Florence last month.

In October, leftist students also tried to prevent an Israeli diplomat from speaking at the University of Pisa.

Sahhar and Calo are on a speaking tour of several Italian cities.

The Martin Buber Jews for Peace group, one of the sponsors of the tour, said the two women planned to speak in all the other scheduled venues.

"As you see, those who want peace inspire fear, and in this way another type of violence is used to shut people up," the women were quoted as saying.

Argentine bishop under pressure

A key Jewish group in Argentina demanded that the Vatican remove a bishop accused of holding "anti-Semitic and racist positions."

The call by the DAIA umbrella group came after the national newspaper Pagina 12 reported last week that Bishop Antonio Baseotto had said in 1986 that Jews go into "big businesses with lots of ability and lack of moral principles," adding, "It doesn't matter the way they enrich themselves. If pornography is a good business, they sell pornography. If it's drugs, they sell drugs."

DAIA officials wrote to the Vatican that the views disgust "the Jewish community and all men and women who believe in equal rights," and that they reflect poorly on the Catholic Church.

Mexican park named for Ben-Gurion

A park in Mexico was named after Israel's first prime minister.

Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, attended Sunday's inauguration of David Ben-Gurion Park in Pachuca, which is 60 miles north of Mexico City, The Associated Press reported.

At the ceremony, Mexico's foreign secretary told the 2,000 people in attendance that the park demonstrated the Mexican government's commitment to fight anti-Semitism and racism.

The local government and the Mexican Jewish community financed the park.