

IN THE NEWS

Jewish official attends Bush's Katrina meeting

President Bush convened his "Compassionate Cabinet," a consortium of not-for-profit leaders that included an official of the United Jewish Communities.

Carol Smokler, the chairwoman of UJC's Emergency Committee, said Bush expressed a desire for a partnership with the nonprofit community during Tuesday's meeting.

Smokler was one of some 20 officials in the meeting, which lasted an hour and 15 minutes.

Bush discussed coordinating relief efforts in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath, addressing what steps might be taken beyond rescue and recovery, Smokler said.

Israeli troops kill Palestinian marcher

Israeli troops reportedly fired on Palestinian marchers approaching an evacuated Gaza Strip settlement, killing one.

According to Palestinian witnesses, two people were wounded in Tuesday's shooting outside Neveh Dekalim, which took place after some 200 youths threw stones at a tank guarding the settlement.

The army said it was checking the report.

Israel has kept an army garrison around Gaza's 21 settlements, which were evacuated last month and are to be formally handed over to the Palestinian Authority next week.

Bush to appear at Jewish events

President Bush is slated to speak at two Jewish events in Washington in the next two weeks.

Bush is scheduled to address a gala dinner marking the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in the United States on Sept. 14.

He also is slated to speak at a luncheon honoring the 20th anniversary of the Republican Jewish Coalition a week later.

WORLD REPORT

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Jewish groups pitch in to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Stepping up to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina, Jewish day schools opened their doors to evacuees, families welcomed strangers into their homes, Jewish rescue squads searched through the storm's wreckage and Jewish organizations raised millions of dollars for those whose lives were turned topsyturvy by the deadly storm.

Houston has quickly become a major haven for victims of the deadly storm who have been left, for the moment at least, without homes. The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston sprung quickly into action to aid the beleaguered evacuees, Jew and non-Jew alike.

"We have mobilized our community around all the areas that seem to be current and potential needs," said the federation's CEO, Lee Wunsch. "There's a lot of activity. People are very generous with their time. Our phones have not stopped ringing."

Some 15,000 Louisiana evacuees were being housed in the Astrodome, the city's well-known covered sports stadium, after conditions in the New Orleans Superdome grew unbearable. Houston is hosting tens of thousands of evacuees, including an estimated 5,000 Jews.

The federation has joined an interfaith coalition taking responsibility for feeding the Astrodome influx for the next 30 days, a service that the federal government is not providing, Wunsch told JTA. The effort will require 700 to 800 volunteers each day and is expected to cost between \$7 million and \$8 million.

"We're trying to raise the money to make a sizable contribution to that," he said. In the first 24 hours the fund was opened last week, the federation had raised about \$75,000 in online donations. Donations are coming in so quickly that by the beginning of this week, the federation had decided to hold off calculating the total until a quieter time.

The Baltimore-based Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation announced it would be donating \$1 million to help relieve survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Funds will be allocated as \$500,000 grants to both United Jewish Communities and Catholic Charities USA.

On Tuesday, UJC said it had raised nearly \$4 million, including the Weinberg Foundation grant. The UJC also said that the local federations directly affected by the hurricane were overwhelmed and had asked that those with questions or seeking to make donations contact the UJC directly.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Jews may be among those still trapped in water-inundated homes or missing in the Gulf region, said Rabbi Zalman Shmotkin, the Chabad-Lubavitch spokesman based in New York.

Chabad rescue teams, made up largely of New York-based medics and others with relevant expertise, have rescued 32 Jews from their houses over the last several days, he said. The teams are operating both on foot and in boats.

Some elderly Jews resisted leaving their homes, as did one woman who was reluctant to leave her pets behind to fend for themselves. The teams were able to convince some

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■ Jewish communities do what they can to help Hurricane Katrina victims

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victims to evacuate their homes; others stayed put.

The Hurricane Relief section of Chabad's Web site asks anyone who knows of people still missing or trapped to provide details through the site (www.chabad.org).

As of Tuesday, the official death toll in New Orleans was 71, and in Mississippi it was 161. But those figures were expected to climb into the thousands as flood waters begin to recede, revealing the true toll of those lost.

Hunger and fear of disease in affected areas engendered anger and disbelief as the federal government's handling of the crisis garnered sharp criticism. President Bush toured the battered region Monday, comforting victims and vowing to do what is necessary to aid them.

In a visit to the area last week, Bush said relief efforts to that point were "not acceptable."

Jewish organizations in the hard-hit region and beyond pitched in to help those whose lives have been disrupted by Katrina.

Israeli universities are opening their doors to college students whose schools have been shut down by the storm. Tulane University in New Orleans announced that it will not hold classes for the fall semester. Loyola University is also closed though January and Dillard University is now examining its options for the immediate future. The two schools are also in New Orleans.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, MASA — the Gateway to Long-Term Israel Programs, and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life have forged a coalition of the five major Israeli universities with study-abroad programs to allow these students — Jews and non-Jews — to quickly continue their studies.

Meanwhile, Jewish day school networks across the United States and across the denominational spectrum are working to absorb Jewish students and their families, offering everything from free tuition and school supplies to employment opportunities for parents and living accommodations.

"Jewish day schools across the streams walk the walk and talk the talk," said Marc Kramer, executive director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network.

The UJC and local federations throughout the United States and Canada have also established funds to aid those in need. Numerous other Jewish organizations, both national and local, are also offering help — raising money, coordinating housing and looking into specific medical and religious needs of refugees in their communities.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has composed a special prayer for the victims.

"In the path of Katrina's destruction, let the good in humanity rise to the top of the flood," it reads, in part. "Give us strength to console those who have lost family, friends and neighbors. Give us the courage to provide hope to those who despair. Provide us with the guidance to heal those who ail, both in body and in spirit."

At Beth Am Israel, a Conservative congregation in Penn Valley, Pa., congregants are preparing backpacks chock full of school supplies for young Katrina evacuees who will shortly be enrolling in the Houston public school system.

Each school bag is being filled with

grade-appropriate supplies in accordance with Houston school guidelines — younger students may get crayons and markers, while older pupils will receive items like graph paper and protractors.

"In terms of rallying the community, it was really wonderful," said Gari Julius Weilbacher, who is coordinating the synagogue's effort. "It's giving people something to do besides writing really, really vital checks."

Weilbacher said that she expects more than 150 backpacks to come in. Some congregants are writing checks to pay for postage,

while others are donating boxes in which to pack the bags for shipment.

The Houston federation is now working feverishly to meet Jewish evacuees' needs.

A number of New Orleans families are now living with families in Houston, Wunsch said, and local day schools are allowing students from New Orleans to enroll for free. The Maimonides Society, a group for local Jewish doctors, has been mobilized to help those evacuees with medical concerns, and several local rabbis are coordinating an effort to ensure that their Jewish religious needs are met.

Synagogues in the Houston area are providing free Shabbat meals and are expected to open their doors to evacuee families both in the immediate future and during the High Holidays.

At Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston, members are making room in their homes for those with no place to go and have prepared welcome packages of toiletries, snacks and beverages. The synagogue was also arranging kosher meals for those who want them, and sent some 250 volunteers to the Astrodome this week.

The community response has been swift and overwhelming, say those involved in coordinating area relief efforts.

"I'm 150 e-mails behind," said Adam Bronstone, who fled New Orleans on Aug. 27 and has since been working at the Houston federation office and living with

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Gari Julius Weilbacher

Organizer of congregational effort for Katrina relief



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a friend. "There's one guy here answering four phones at a time."

The situation, Bronstone said, is "crazy, it's surreal, it's loving, its warm. It's the worst of times — but it's also the best of times."

Hurricane damage in the region was staggering. The full extent of damage to sites of Jewish concern remained uncertain. West Esplanade Avenue in Metairie, La., is home to about five Jewish institutions.

Rabbi Yossie Nemes, who rode out the storm at his home there with his family and four others seeking refuge, saw downed trees, power outages, some damage to roofs and between one-and-a-half to two feet of water.

Those with knowledge of New Orleans geography said that, based on news reports about damage to particular neighborhoods, they suspected that some other buildings, including a Jewish museum, were badly damaged or destroyed.

As Nemes, his wife, seven children and four house guests sat on the second floor of his home — winds howling outside, water rising on the bottom level, rain pelting the sturdy brick home's protective hurricane shutters — they prayed and played board games.

"We weren't worried for our lives," he recalled on Tuesday from Chabad's offices in New York, where he had arrived by car in the morning after three days in Memphis. "But it was very, very nerve-racking. We were hoping and praying for the storm to end."

Things grew more tense, he said, when some of the city's levees broke. At that point, Nemes had no idea how his neighborhood would fare. In the end, the power went out and his house took in about two feet of water — but everyone got out safely.

"All the appliances and furniture are damaged," he said. "It's dirty, bacteria-filled water. There's extensive damage, but I don't believe it'll be condemned."

In addition to those who landed in Houston, Jews also ended up in Birmingham, Ala.; Nashville; Atlanta; Austin, Texas; Dallas; cities in Florida; and elsewhere.

Many also fled to Memphis. The Orthodox Union dispatched Rabbi Chaim Neiditch on a fact-finding mission to Tennessee.

"They're living Jewish lives as best as they can," said Neiditch, the director of the southern region of the O.U.'s National Conference of Synagogue Youth. They are attending prayer services and eating kosher food, he said, but there is a real fear that the community, stretched to its limits by the influx of evacuees, will run out of kosher food.

"There is a sense of despair and worse — every single possession is lost, jobs gone. They are separated from family and friends. They have no means of communicating with each other," he said. "It is beyond comprehension what is going on." ■

Jewish groups collecting for Hurricane Katrina victims

By JTA STAFF

NEW YORK (JTA) — Following is a partial list of organizations accepting donations for victims of Hurricane Katrina and for hurricane relief.

- Contributions through the **United Jewish Communities** can be made online at www.ujc.org or by mail at United Jewish Communities, P.O. Box 30, Old Chelsea Station, New York, N.Y., 10113, attention: Hurricane Katrina. Mark the memo section of checks with "Katrina." Individual local federations are also collecting funds.

- Contributions to the **American Jewish Committee's Hurricane Katrina Fund** can be made at www.ajc.org.

- Contributions through **B'nai B'rith** should be made payable to the B'nai B'rith Disaster Relief Fund and sent to: B'nai B'rith International, 2020 K St., N.W., Seventh Floor, Washington, D.C., 20006; or online by going to www.bnaibrith.org and clicking on the link for disaster relief.

- Contributions through **Chabad-Lubavitch** can be made online at www.chabadneworleans.com, or by mail at Disaster Relief Fund, 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11213.

- Contributions through **Mazon** can be made at www.mazon.org or by calling (310) 442-0020.

- Contributions through the **Orthodox Union** in conjunction with the **Rabbinical Council of America** and **Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future** can be made at <https://www.ou.org/forms/5765/katrina65.asp> or by sending check, payable to Orthodox Union and marked "Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund," to Orthodox Union, 11 Broadway, 14th Floor,

New York, N.Y., 10004. Write "Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund" on both the check and the envelope.

- Contributions through **The Shefa Fund/The Jewish Fund For Justice** can be made by visiting www.shefafund.org. Additional information about the JFJ/Shefa Hurricane Katrina Relief and Redevelopment Project will soon be available on The Shefa Fund website and at www.jfjustice.org.

- Contributions through the **Union for Reform Judaism** can be made at www.urj.org/give. Information on the Disaster Relief Fund can be found at www.urj.org/relief. The union has also created a hurricane relief line (212-452-6526) and e-mail address (hurricanerelief@urj.org) for those who wish to ask specific questions.

- Contributions through the **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism** can be made online at http://www.uscj.org/Hurricane_ReliefYou_6553.html, or by mail at USCJ Hurricane Disaster Relief Fund, 121 Congressional Lane, Suite 210, Rockville, Md., 20852. Checks should be made payable to "USCJ"; mark the memo section with USCJ Hurricane Disaster Relief Fund.

- **The Jewish Education Service of North America** has catalogued the names of both Gulf Coast Jewish students in need of schools and day schools that have space for pupils evacuated from the region. JESNA is stressing that parents who have already passed along information on their children to local agencies need not contact them; that information has been funneled to JESNA already. Parents who have not yet contacted anyone and who are searching for day schools can e-mail JESNA's president and COO, Donald Sylvan, at dsylvan@jesna.org ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Arab leaders deny visit reports

Jordan's King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak denied reports that they plan to visit Israel.

Abdullah, who Israeli sources had said would come to Israel this week for talks with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, announced Monday that no such visit had been arranged, but that he hoped to see Sharon at next week's opening of the United Nations General Assembly.

Meanwhile, Mubarak's spokesman said the Egyptian president had no imminent plans to come to Israel, despite a briefing by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on Monday in which he said Mubarak was expected for November talks at Sharon's ranch.

Suspected Hamas funder nabbed

Israel suspects a Palestinian businessman of funneling foreign funds to Hamas terrorists.

The Shin Bet said Tuesday that it arrested the Gaza Strip man in July as he returned from a business trip to the United Arab Emirates.

The suspect told interrogators that he transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars to Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. A trial date has not been set.

Israelis meet Tunisians

Israeli and Tunisian officials are meeting in Tunis in a sign of improved relations between Israel and the Muslim world.

The officials reportedly are discussing Israel's attendance at a world summit on information and technology, slated to take place in Tunisia in November.

Diplomatic contacts between Israel and some Arab and Muslim nations have intensified since Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip last month.

Explosives kill five Palestinians

Five Palestinians died in the Gaza Strip when explosives went off in a home.

Palestinian officials described Monday's incident as a "work accident," a term used when a bomb being prepared by terrorists goes off prematurely.

Terrorist's driver jailed

An Israeli Arab who drove a Palestinian suicide bomber to her target received a 10-year prison sentence. Haifa District Court jailed the man Monday after convicting him in connection with the 2003 attack on a restaurant in the coastal city.

The court decided against a heavier penalty because of the defendant's claim that he did not know the intentions of his passenger, a female member of Islamic Jihad, when he drove her into Israel from the West Bank.

Twenty-one Israelis were killed in the attack.

Minister urges settlement expansion

An Israeli Cabinet minister said West Bank settlement blocs should be built up in defiance of U.S. pressure.

"I'll say this clearly: We are a sovereign nation. The great United States is our friend, but there are times when we have to say, even to the United States, that we will act in accordance with our interests," Education Minister Limor Livnat told Israel Radio on Tuesday.

"We should demand of the Americans that they do not pressure us on this matter."

The U.S.-led "road map" peace plan calls on Israel to halt all settlement expansion, but President Bush has said the Jewish state can expect to hold on to West Bank settlement blocs under any peace deal with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu's lead shrinks

Benjamin Netanyahu's lead over Ariel Sharon for the head of the Likud Party has diminished.

A Ha'aretz survey of Likud voters published Tuesday showed that Netanyahu, who quit as finance minister to protest Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, now enjoys 44 percent support to the prime minister's 33 percent.

A similar poll last month put Netanyahu almost 17 percentage points ahead of Sharon.

A Likud primary is expected by February, and Netanyahu has vowed to topple Sharon.

But political analysts say Sharon's popularity in Likud, many of whose members oppose ceding land to the Palestinians, could be buoyed if the Gaza hand-over does not result in increased terrorism.

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Injured student treated in Israel

A yeshiva student beaten in Ukraine was flown to Israel for treatment.

The man beaten last week in Kiev is being treated at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv, according to Ha'aretz.

He reportedly is in serious condition.

Terrorist assails Spielberg

A Palestinian terrorist assailed Steven Spielberg for not consulting him for a film on the Munich Olympics massacre.

Mohammad Daoud, who masterminded the abduction and killing of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Games, said Tuesday that the Hollywood director had not contacted him about the upcoming film.

"If someone really wanted to tell the truth about what happened he should talk to the people involved, people who know the truth," Daoud told Reuters in an interview from his Middle East hideout.

Spielberg has said his film, which chronicles the massacre and Israel's hunt for the terrorists responsible, will be fair to all parties.

Veterans of Israel's Mossad spy agency also have said they were not consulted on the project, which appears to draw mainly on a controversial 1984 expose titled "Vengeance."

Danish day school marks 200 years

A Jewish day school in Copenhagen celebrated its bicentennial.

Queen Margrethe II attended the Sept. 1 celebration at the Caroline School.

The school has an almost-unbroken record of teaching since its start in 1805, closing only between October 1943 and August 1945, during the Nazi occupation.

NORTH AMERICA

Canadians learn about water in Israel

Officials from the Canadian province of Alberta went on a mission to Israel to learn about Israeli water conservation techniques.

The delegation went in preparation for a possible water crisis in the western Canadian province over the next decade.

The provincial representatives, including Lyle Oberg, Alberta's minister of infrastructure and transportation, visited Israel as the first stage in a recent agreement with the Jewish National Fund of Canada.

The Albertans also are gaining instruction in hothouse farming, growing crops with less water and recycling and storage techniques for minimal loss and evaporation.