

## IN THE NEWS

## Palestinians boycott Gaza Strip ceremony

Israel held a ceremony Sunday marking its official withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

But a ceremony scheduled for earlier Sunday was canceled after the Palestinian Authority boycotted the event.

The boycott came after the Israeli Cabinet reversed a decision and voted 14-2 not to raze about two dozen synagogues in Gaza.

## Rabbi, shelter gone from La. temple

A synagogue in Louisiana is shutting down its shelter for victims of Hurricane Katrina and has put its rabbi on administrative leave, JTA has learned.

Rabbi Barry Weinstein was asked to take paid leave from Congregation B'nai Israel in Baton Rouge for an unspecified period.

Synagogue officials say the decision about the rabbi was related to a private matter.

But some of the rabbi's supporters charged that a few influential members of the community who are opposed to using the synagogue as a shelter had pressured the temple's officers to act.

## Report: Britain may change Holocaust day

Britain may reportedly change its Holocaust remembrance day to a broader event commemorating other genocides.

The Sunday Times of London reported that advisers to Prime Minister Tony Blair were recommending that the day be replaced by a day that would include recognition of Muslim deaths in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Chechnya and Bosnia so that Muslim extremists couldn't exploit an impression that Jewish lives are considered more valuable than Muslim lives.

Jewish leaders are opposing the move to change Holocaust Memorial Day, which has been marked on Jan. 27 in Britain since 2001.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Israeli offer of expert assistance turned down in days after Katrina

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States turned down offers of expert assistance from Israel and other nations in the crucial first days after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, JTA has learned.

Instead, the United States solicited material assistance from Israel that was probably superfluous by the time the shipment arrived on the evening of Sept. 8.

The reasons behind the decisions are unclear. Experts have offered a number of explanations, including the bureaucratic difficulties involved in absorbing thousands of foreign first-responder personnel; the belief that the existing first-responder infrastructure in Louisiana and Mississippi was well equipped to handle the crisis; and the potential political fallout from asking foreign nations to help the world's greatest power save lives on its own turf.

Such a request would have been "a tremendous admission of failure," said one official of a nongovernmental organization involved in current rescue efforts, who asked not to be identified because of his relationship with U.S. government officials.

The death toll from the storm and subsequent flooding could run anywhere from hundreds of people to 10,000. In addition, hundreds of thousands have been rendered homeless.

Critics have excoriated federal, state and local officials for their alleged failure to attend quickly to a disaster that left tens of thousands of people stranded, exposed to disease and at risk of drowning for days. Democrats

and some Republicans, as well as a welter of newspaper editorials, have especially targeted President Bush and his administration for what Democrats contend was a slow and at times remote response to the crisis.

Israel would have been uniquely placed to help, since a cadre of medical experts originally trained to attend to terrorist attacks has honed its expertise at earthquake and hurricane zones across the world. Most recently, Israel rushed medical personnel to Sri Lanka within hours of the tsunami in late December.

In 1998, Israel's lightning response to Al-Qaida attacks on U.S. embassies in east Africa — hours ahead of the arrival of U.S. rescuers — was credited with saving dozens of lives.

The original Israeli offer after Hurricane Katrina was for "the dispatch of medical teams numbering hundreds of people, considerable medical equipment, medicines and additional necessary equipment," according to a statement from the Israeli Prime Minister's Office.

But the Bush administration turned down that and other offers of first-responder and medical-professional help from abroad, JTA has learned.

Officials at the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency and the State Department did not return JTA calls seeking comment.

Israel's offer on Sept. 1, a day after the Bush administration declared Katrina's aftermath a public health emergency, came within the four-day window when such assistance is crucial. Israel might have had personnel on the ground by Sept. 2; authorities did not start evacuating the New Orleans

Continued on page 2

BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES

## ■ Israel's offer to send experts to the United States after Katrina was turned down

*Continued from page 1*

Superdome, where most refugees from the hurricane had gathered, until Sept. 3.

Officials involved in coordinating assistance did not want to comment on the record, but they said complex U.S. regulations regarding accreditation of doctors and other personnel might have been a factor, in contrast to Israel's experience in developing nations, where such rules are more flexible.

Additionally, no one anticipated that the most advanced medical system in the world would be so easily overwhelmed, experts said.

First-responder assistance from outside the region would have been crucial in the first days after Katrina, said Garry Briese, the executive director of the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

"These communities lost their firefighters. Buildings don't exist, homes don't exist, equipment doesn't exist," he said.

Briese, who has a relationship with Magen David Adom, the Israeli relief agency, dating back to the 1970s when he helped trained MDA medics, said Israel would have been uniquely placed to assist. But he wondered if the Israeli experts could have arrived in time, given the travel distance.

There no longer is a need for first-responder assistance, and his organization has called on its members to stop arriving in the region, Briese said.

"We have 150 first responders arriving every day in Baton Rouge," he said.

In the end, the United States asked Israel and other countries to deliver equip-

ment and material. Israel came through on Sept. 8 with 80 tons of food packages, diapers, beds, blankets, generators and other essentials on an El Al flight, partially funded by the Jewish National Fund, that landed in Little Rock, Ark.

"Jewish tradition says, 'To save a life is to save the entire world,' and this comes from the hearts of the Israeli people," said Eyal Sela, a senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official who accompanied the material.

Speaking to reporters in New York last Friday, Sela left open the possibility that the United States would ask Israel for expert assistance as well. A team of police forensic experts can be dispatched on 36-hour notice, he said, in addition to experts that have aided in other large-scale catastrophes such as the tsunami.

"Until now the request was 'send us items,' and we sent it," he said.

Bush cited Israel's assistance in a speech last Friday thanking countries for their offers of help.

"Israel sent tents and mineral water and medical supplies," Bush said.

But while such assistance is welcome for its symbolic value, it's probably superfluous by now, experts said.

"We're entering a phase where most people have basic access to commodities," said Dean Agee, a vice president of International Aid, a relief group known for its work in the tsunami zone. "But there is a very large psychological boost to see these countries offering help; usually it's the United States offering help."

Briese agreed.

"It's more of a good symbol," he said.

Agee foresees the need for more long-term assistance from Israel and other nations in rebuilding the region.

"In Mississippi alone, there are 200,000 roofs needing to be repaired," he said. "I have two photographs in front of me, of Sri Lanka in March and of Gulfport now. In terms of damage, you can't tell the difference."

*(JTA Staff Writer Chanan Tigay in New York contributed to this report.)*

**Why the United States turned down the Israeli offer is unclear.**

## Toronto Jews help build JCC in Kishinev

By SUZANNE WINTROB

TORONTO (JTA) — An Eastern European city known for an infamous pogrom a century ago is getting a Jewish community center of its own.

Living in the former Soviet republic of Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries, Kishinev's 18,000 Jews soon will have a center complete with recreational facilities, computer room, Holocaust center, vocational training and educational classes in Hebrew and English.

Built on the site of an old synagogue, The Kishinev Jewish Campus will unite all of the city's major Jewish communal organizations under one roof and provide a wide range of welfare, community and religious activities and services.

It's a gift from the Jews of Toronto, some of whom will be on hand when the first mezuzot are affixed at the center's Sept. 13 opening.

Allan Brown, for one, can't wait to get there.

The Toronto businessman and volunteer first heard about the Jews of Kishinev, now known as Chisinau, several years ago when the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee partnered Kishinev Jewry with the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto.

The JDC acquired the building in 2003 and called upon Toronto to help rebuild the community's Jewish roots. A \$500,000 donation from Toronto resident Stephen Lewar, who since has passed away, made construction of the new community center possible.

Building on JDC's Hesed Yehuda initiative, which offers basic welfare needs to Kishinev's Jewish elderly, the center's ORT Computer Center will provide computers and Internet access to Kishinev's elderly.

Kishinev is known for a 1903 program that spurred Jewish migration from the Russian Empire to the United States. Forty-nine Jews were killed and more than 500 injured on April 6-7 — the beginning of Easter — when angry mobs rampaged through some of the city's poorest quarters.

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# As U.N. summit opens, Jews to meet heads of state

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — When international leaders converge in New York this week for the United Nations 2005 World

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ Confirmation hearings begin for Judge John Roberts for chief justice of the United States. Roberts appears before the Senate Judiciary Committee after the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist and is expected to face tough questions from Democrats over his views on abortion and the separation of church and state, among other issues.

■ Karen AbuZayd, an American appointed this summer as commissioner general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency — the principal body administering aid and welfare to Palestinian refugees — is in Washington through Tuesday meeting with officials to discuss refugee issues now that Israel has pulled out of the Gaza Strip.

### TUESDAY

■ Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon arrives in New York to attend the opening of the United Nations General Assembly session, where he is expected to receive a warm reception after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Sharon will meet with President Bush and other senior U.S. officials to discuss reviving talks with the Palestinians. Also high on Sharon's agenda are Iran's nuclear plans. The top U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, meets next week to consider whether to refer Iran to the U.N. Security Council for sanctions, a move Israel favors.

### WEDNESDAY

■ President Bush addresses a dinner commemorating 350 years of Jewish life in the United States. Bush will speak at the National Building Museum in Washington at a dinner marking the end of a year of commemorative events. Previous presidents have participated in the 250th and 300th anniversary celebrations.

■ The John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington launches "A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People." The exhibit recreates the Polish town of Wadowice, where the young Karol Wojtyla — the future pope — had close Jewish friends.

### SUNDAY

■ Leading Orthodox rabbis and Torah scholars participate in a two-day conference on conversion in Newark. The main focus will be to share information with rabbis in communities throughout the United States and Canada who face the challenges of universally accepted conversions.

Summit, they'll hobnob with one another and huddle with their representatives in America.

But their get-togethers won't end there.

They'll also be taking part in scores of meetings with American Jewish organizations eager to establish contact, renew old friendships and educate them on issues of Jewish concern.

"The world leaders get the opportunity here to see what American Jews look like and what they think," said Rabbi Israel Singer, the chairman of the World Jewish Congress.

The WJC kicked off the frenzied period of powwows surrounding the Sept. 14-16 conference last Friday with an event showcasing leaders closer to home: Newt Gingrich, the co-chair of the American Task Force on the United Nations, told members of the WJC that the United States ought to be "determined to shame the other democracies into joining us" in demanding better treatment for Israel. U.N. insiders and observers say Israel remains a second-class citizen at the world body.

Gingrich, the former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, further stressed that without "profound" reform, the United Nations would become irrelevant.

"The United Nations has failed," he said. Still, he added, the world body is worth fighting to save and the United States must be "militant" in pushing its values and interests there.

If reform efforts fail, however, "We should systematically find other institutions and other ways to be effective," he said.

The new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, also addressed the group. "What we really need" at the U.N., Bolton said, "is a cultural revolution."

As of last Friday, Bolton said, U.N. representatives were still haggling over a definition of terrorism and whether or not national liberation groups ought to be exempt from the label.

"We know what the answer is," he said.

By far the largest organizer of these meetings is the American Jewish Committee, which has been coordinating them for the last 15 years. During each of the last two years, the AJCommittee has held an average of 65 meetings with world leaders in conjunction with the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, which the World Summit launches.

Numerous other Jewish groups are taking part in high-level meetings with presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers hailing from capitals around the globe. Some meetings involve several groups; others will be smaller, with just one or two groups.

The American Jewish Congress is hosting a meeting, to be attended by numerous members of the Jewish community, with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

The Musharraf meeting is considered a breakthrough because Pakistan, a Muslim nation, has no ties to Israel.

On Sept. 18, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will be meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The following day, the conference will meet with Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom.

Sharon will also be meeting with a group of top donors to the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the North American Jewish federations, during his visit.

Jewish officials also will be meeting with leaders from, among other countries: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Egypt, France, the Vatican, India, Italy, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Morocco, Oman, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

Other groups that will be participating in such meetings include the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, B'nai B'rith, the Claims Conference, and NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

Getting the opportunity to learn what American Jews think about.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## WORLD

**Musharraf: Sharon 'courageous'**

Pakistan's president praised Ariel Sharon as "courageous" for Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

"What we have seen on the TV, Israelis not wanting to leave, being forced out, is a courageous thing to do," Pervez Musharraf told The Associated Press in an interview last Friday.

Still, Musharraf said he would not meet with the Israeli prime minister later this month when both attend the opening of the U.N. General Assembly.

The leader of the Islamic nuclear power has come under fire for allowing his foreign minister to meet with Israel's foreign minister last month, and Musharraf is to address U.S. Jewish groups during his New York visit.

Musharraf said he does not expect Pakistan to establish ties with Israel until a Palestinian state has been created.

## MIDDLE EAST

**Egypt takes over Gaza border**

Egyptian troops began deploying along the Gaza Strip's southern border.

Around 200 border police fanned out along the Egyptian side of the frontier last Friday, with another 550 expected to be posted there this week.

Israel is handing over security control of the Gaza-Egypt border to Cairo as part of its pullout from the Gaza Strip.

Egypt has pledged to fight arms smuggling from the Sinai to Palestinian terrorists in Gaza.

**Sharon: Settlement building to continue**

Ariel Sharon said Israel will continue to build in West Bank settlement blocs despite any U.S. objections.

"The major blocs will stay as part of Israel," the Israeli prime minister told The Washington Post in an interview published Sunday.

"Yes, we have small-scale construction within the lines."

While President Bush has said Israel can expect to keep West Bank settlement blocs under a final peace accord with the Palestinians, the U.S.-led peace "road map" calls for their expansion to be halted.

**Conservative head chastises Shas leader**

The Conservative movement chastised a leading Israeli rabbi for saying Hurricane Katrina was divine punishment for Israel's Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the executive vice president and CEO of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, wrote to Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual head of the Shas Party and a former Israeli chief rabbi, that he was astounded by his commentary.

"God gave the Torah to humanity with the hope that we would live by it and interpret it intelligently," Epstein said. "For you to speak with such certainty about what God wants is arrogance. To attempt to convince others of the truth of your interpretation is irresponsible."

In his weekly sermon Sept. 7, Yosef claimed that Katrina "was God's retribution" for U.S. pressure on Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Noting that many of the hurricane's victims were black, he also suggested they were punished for being irreligious.

The Reform movement and several American Jewish groups also have criticized Yosef's comments.

## NORTH AMERICA

**Group launches Israel campus program**

The Israel on Campus Coalition launched a new effort to enhance relationships between American universities and Israel.

"Israel begins with i," which includes efforts to offer campuses an image of Israel beyond the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, was launched Sept. 8 in New York.

The program, which the ICC's 30 member groups want to customize for individual campuses, will help students present Israel "in a tangible, positive light," said Lynne Schusterman, whose Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation founded the ICC coalition in 2002 along with Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and other organizations.

**Jewish groups bring Protestants to Israel**

Two American Jewish groups announced plans to bring mainline Protestant leaders to Israel.

Thirteen Protestant leaders will participate in an "Institute in Israel," beginning Monday, sponsored by the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella group and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Several mainline Protestant groups have resolved to divest from American companies that deal with Israel's military.

**Berger fined \$50,000 for taking documents**

A court fined Sandy Berger, former President Clinton's national security adviser, \$50,000 for mishandling classified documents.

Ruling Sept. 8, U.S. Magistrate Judge Deborah Robinson also suspended Berger's access to classified documents for three years.

Berger, one of the top Jewish officials in Clinton's administration, admitted to sneaking out National Archive documents in 2003 as he researched how prepared the country had been for terrorism ahead of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

**Senate panel passes Violence Against Women Act**

A Senate committee passed a bill reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act.

The Senate Judiciary Committee on Sept. 8 approved the legislation, which provides services to victims of domestic violence and works to protect women and children from abuse.

"Since this groundbreaking legislation first passed, violence against women has dropped; domestic violence is down by 50 percent; murder by an abusive partner is down 22 percent; and now more than half of rape victims report the crime," said June Walker, president of Hadassah. "But much more can and must be done to protect the women of our nation."

The legislation is set to expire at the end of the month.

**Sentence for lying about Hamas conviction**

A Philadelphia court sentenced a Palestinian to a year in prison for lying on an immigration application about an Israeli conviction for membership in Hamas.

A federal court handed down the sentence Sept. 8, but Atef Hasan Ismail Idais, 28, is likely to be released in the next few days because he has been in prison since his arrest on Sept. 9, 2004.

Idais claims the confession that led to his 1999 conviction in Israel was coerced through torture. He denied membership in the terrorist group.

Since arriving in the United States on a student visa in 2000, Idais has married a U.S. citizen and fathered a daughter.

Authorities plan to deport him once he is released.