



IN THE NEWS

President Bush blasts U.N. rights commission

President Bush said the U.N. Human Rights Commission lacks credibility.

In his keynote speech on U.N. reform Wednesday to the opening session of the 2005-2006 U.N. General Assembly, Bush said the commission — which criticizes Israel more than any other nation, while including tyrannical regimes among its members — symbolizes what's wrong with the institution.

U.N. discussing disarming Hezbollah

U.N. officials are discussing the disarming of Hezbollah with Lebanese leaders.

"This is something that we are discussing with the Lebanese; it is the Lebanese government that will have to do it," U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Wednesday at the launch of the current U.N. General Assembly.

But Annan also said that Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for disarming the terrorist group, largely had been fulfilled when Syria pulled its troops out of Lebanon.

U.S. judge rules pledge unconstitutional

A U.S. judge ruled that reciting the pledge of allegiance in public schools is unconstitutional.

In his ruling Wednesday, Lawrence Karlton backed two families who said the pledge's reference to "one nation under God" constitutes religious coercion.

The judge ruled that he was bound by a 2002 precedent.

The Supreme Court later dismissed the case, ruling that the father of the children who sued then, Michael Newdow, could not do so because he did not have custody of his daughter at the time.

Newdow filed the more recent case on behalf of two other families.

The decision is expected to be appealed.

WORLD REPORT

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Program teaches rabbinical students how to use social justice in their jobs

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — Penina Podwol, a rabbinical student at the University of Judaism, was on a picket line in Chicago for the first time this summer with several colleagues when a Jewish chant broke out.

One of the rabbinical students started chanting "Hazak, hazak, v'nithazek," which is traditionally said in synagogue after the completion of each book of the Torah and translates to "Strong, strong, we will be strengthened." The striking hotel workers took up the chant, translating it into Spanish.

"The fact that we were Jews, and the people preventing them from going back to work were also Jews, meant they could see there are Jews who support them," Podwol says.

The five rabbinical students, each from a different Jewish stream, spent nine weeks in Chicago working with community and labor organizations, combining their fieldwork with group study of Jewish texts on social justice as part of a new summer fellowship program sponsored by the nonprofit Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

The idea behind the project is to encourage future rabbis to incorporate social-justice work into their rabbinates, says the program's creator, Rabbi Jill Jacobs. That's a different, more nuanced responsibility than simply participating in a social-action project, since rabbis are uniquely positioned to be the catalysts for such efforts.

"Rabbis should be actors in the community and be able to help their congregations, their Hillels, their JCCs, act as Jews in the larger community," Jacobs says. "Rabbis need to know how to involve people in social-

justice work in a way that feels authentically Jewish." Therefore, she says, it's important to have a program specifically designed for rabbinical students, "to give them a structural way to integrate the work with Jewish learning."

The rabbinic-intern program is one of a growing number of Jewish institutions — including congregations, campus Hillels and national organizations such as the American Jewish World Service — that are sponsoring social action projects at home and abroad, championing the idea that feeding the hungry, cleaning up cemeteries and building houses for the homeless can be powerful ways for young Jews to express their Jewish identity.

According to Jacobs, Rabbi David El-lenson, the president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, the main seminary of the Reform movement in the United States, was "instrumental" in pushing the rabbinic-intern program forward. He remains a fan of the project, saying, "The need for social justice remains a primary imperative of our tradition, and Rabbi Jacobs has taken the lead in having the texts of Jewish religious tradition speak to contemporary social problems."

HUC and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College each paid half of \$4,000 stipend for their student participants this summer. The other half of the stipend is paid for by the Righteous Persons Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation; these foundations cover the entire cost of the other interns and the rest of the program.

Jacobs says one of the reasons she cre-

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■ *Helping rabbis in training understand that social justice is integral to Judaism*

Continued from page 1

ated the fellowship program is that social justice is not a required part of the curriculum at most rabbinical seminaries. It certainly wasn't at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, the flagship institution of the Conservative movement, where she was ordained in 2003.

"I'd say none of them teach it," she says. "There's one elective course at HUC in L.A., but it's not taught every year. Various professors may incorporate aspects of social justice into their classes," but on an ad-hoc basis, she says.

Podwol, 28, says a course in social justice is offered as an elective every other year at the University of Judaism. She had spent a year in Israel with Otzma, a service-based leadership-development program for Jews aged 20 to 26, sponsored by the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for North American Jewish federations.

She also spent two years working for her local Jewish federation but says she only grasped the universal aspects of the Jewish notion of social justice after traveling to El Salvador in December on a trip for rabbinical students organized by the AJWS.

"That trip, where we worked with local farmers and then had conversations about it among ourselves, introduced me to Jewish social justice as not something you just do for Jews," she says. "It was a transformative experience."

Podwol spent this summer working with UNITE HERE, a labor union repre-

senting hotel employees in a strike against Chicago's Congress Hotel. She did outreach to local rabbis, bringing strikers to talk to them and encouraging the Chicago Board of Rabbis to write a letter calling for open dialogue between the striking workers and hotel management. "Maybe the fact that the owner and his manager onsite are Jewish might help," she says.

That connection between social justice and religious values was not lost on the participating community groups either.

Dion Miller Perez, the executive director of the Telpochcalli Community Education Project, a Latino community organization where rabbinical student Will Friedman did a summer internship, says it was "pretty exciting to have a person of faith" working with them.

Friedman, 24, is a student at Chovevei Torah, a modern Orthodox seminary in the Bronx, N.Y. In addition to helping the Telpochcalli group get permission from the Chicago public school system to build a school-community center on abandoned public land, he used his skills as an MIT graduate to set up a computer lab for the group's English as a Second Language class, attended mainly by Latino mothers.

"The summer reminded me how important it is to be in other communities, offering the skills I have and seeing how best they can use them," he says.

Miller Perez says his organization "didn't have the skills or the time" to set up the computer system itself, and he praised all the rabbinical students for their commitment, saying, "It was a really cool thing seeing folks out there putting their faith on the line, whether it was with our workers on the picket line or helping our moms."

Just as important as the community work, the fellows say, were the two days a week they spent studying Jewish texts.

Friedman admits he "didn't expect a yeshiva" level of study but says he found the opportunity for in-depth discussion of Jewish sources with rabbinical students from other movements invaluable. "We had great conversations, each week on a different theme — poverty, labor, housing."

Sometimes, he says, Jewish sources suggest actions he calls "problematic." He points to a talmudic passage the group studied about the hiring of workers, which

permits a Jewish employer to "follow local custom," meaning that workers may be paid and required to work according to usual work conditions in their homeland, rather than according to the regulations of the employer's place of residence.

"That's exactly the problem of globalization," Friedman

notes, adding that he and the other summer fellows "are still struggling with what that text is trying to tell us."

Emma Kipley-Ogman, 24, a second-year rabbinical student at Hebrew College in Newton, Mass., says her school offered a seminar on social justice in December, but she wanted more in-depth knowledge of the relevant Jewish sources. "As a rabbi, I think it's very important to learn how to move other people to get involved. It's essential that we know what our texts say about poverty, homelessness, and other issues."

The students were each mentored by a Chicago rabbi of their denomination and were required to present a program on social justice either in Chicago or in their home seminaries.

Kipley-Ogman's summer internship was with the Coalition to Protect Public Housing. She went door-to-door in low-income Chicago neighborhoods surveying public-housing residents about their needs. Then, for Tisha B'Av, she developed and taught a class at Minyan Lomdim, a Chicago synagogue, exploring talmudic, Biblical and rabbinic allegorical texts about displacement along with articles and editorials about public-housing problems in the city.

"Reading these stories in parallel was in the hope that each could teach us about the experience of the other," she says. She was gratified when one synagogue member responded to a letter from a public-housing resident about to be thrown out on the street by saying, "It's as if someone told Lomdim we couldn't meet anymore," she relates.

"I hope that kind of empathy will move her to action," she says.

'The need for social justice remains a primary imperative of our tradition.'

Rabbi David Ellenson

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Canadian Jews surprised by religious law ban

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — Pressed by demonstrators who say Muslim religious law threatens women's rights, the premier of Ontario said this week that the province will no longer support faith-based arbitrations, a move that has sent shock waves through the Jewish community.

Dalton McGuinty's pronouncement, which could be translated into law this fall, also removes the legalistic teeth from rabbinical courts and Christian tribunals operating across the province.

Rabbinical courts have been practicing in Ontario for more than a century and were specifically empowered to do so by provincial legislation enacted in 1991 in matters related to family and civil law, such as divorce, child custody, inheritance and workplace conflicts.

However, McGuinty asserted Sunday in an interview with The Associated Press that religious arbitrations "threaten the common ground" of the residents of Canada's most populous province.

"There will be no sharia law in Ontario," McGuinty said, referring to the Islamic legal code. "There will be no religious arbi-

tration in Ontario. There will be one law for all Ontarians."

Rabbinical courts and other modes of faith-based arbitration would continue to operate, but the government intends to withdraw legal authority from such entities, making their decisions much harder to enforce.

Dismayed by the lack of consultation, Jewish groups reacted with surprise and consternation. As they plan their strategies, they're seeking clarification of the government's

intention and how it will translate into legislation.

Joel Richler, the chairman of the Canadian Jewish Congress' Ontario region, described the move as a "knee-jerk reaction" and indicated

that the CJC was preparing to challenge it.

"We're concerned about a process that didn't take place, and we're concerned that government supports that were working quite well have been pulled without an opportunity to discuss it with the premier," said Rachael Turkienicz, the vice chairwoman of CJC's national executive.

The government apparently ignored recommendations by former Attorney General Marion Boyd in a report issued last winter. Boyd recommended continued use of Ontario's Arbitration Act, provided that additional safeguards are implemented in response to concerns that sharia law impinges on women's rights, for example.

Boyd found no evidence that women face discriminatory treatment under sharia law, but many Muslim and other women assert that it curtails women's rights and

would erode Canada's secular legal tradition. High-profile activists such as the Toronto writer Margaret Atwood and the human-rights supporter June Callwood lent additional publicity to the anti-sharia protest.

Rabbi Reuven Tradburks, the secretary for Toronto's beit din, or rabbinical court, was unavailable for comment Tuesday. However, he told the Canadian Jewish News that while he understood the concerns raised about sharia, "the solution is not necessarily to throw out all faith-based arbitration." ■

'There will be one law for all Ontarians.'

Dalton McGuinty
Ontario Premier

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

Jewish-Muslim tensions surface over U.K. Holocaust fight

By DANIELLA PELED

LONDON (JTA) — A furious row that erupted after Muslim groups called on the British government to abolish Holocaust Memorial Day highlights the bitter tensions between the United Kingdom's Jewish and Muslim communities.

The controversy was sparked when Muslim leaders told the government that the annual commemoration on Jan. 27 — the date of the liberation of Auschwitz — should be changed to a "Genocide Day" to avoid alienating the Muslim community.

They say they want other atrocities — including what they claim is Israel's attempted genocide of the Palestinians — to be included.

"There are 500 Palestinian towns and villages that have been wiped out over the years," Ibrahim Hewitt, the chairman of the British nonprofit Interpal, which provides aid to Palestinians, told the Sunday Times. "That's pretty genocidal to me."

"Of course we will oppose this move," said Mike Whine of the Board of Deputies, the representative body of British Jewry. "The whole point is to remember the darkest day of modern history."

Holocaust Memorial Day was established in 2001. The Home Office contributes more than \$900,000 to the day's commemorations each year, and the queen recently was made patron of the trust that supervises it.

The British government insists that the Holocaust memorial event will continue in its present form.

"The government has no plans to change the name or nature of" Holocaust Memorial Day, a Home Office spokesman said. "The commemoration of the Holocaust as a defining tragedy of modern history will remain central to" Holocaust Memorial Day.

Jewish leaders may have been satisfied by Home Office reassurances, but the dispute has underscored the fault lines in Muslim-Jewish relations that have persisted here despite the best efforts of interfaith groups.

The Jewish community long has been enraged by the consistent refusal of the Muslim Council of Britain, the main U.K. Muslim umbrella body representing 400 organizations, to attend official Holocaust Memorial Day celebrations.

"We believe that as it stands," Holocaust Memorial Day "sends out the wrong signal," Muslim Council spokesman Inayat Bunglawa said. "The title itself sounds a little too exclusive. It should send the signal that all people's lives should be intrinsically worth the same."

Since its inception, organizers of Holocaust Memorial Day have taken pains to include the victims of other atrocities; last year's event marked the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

Jewish groups found Muslims' absence from the 2005 ceremony — held at Westminster Hall, attended by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, and broadcast during prime time on BBC television — particularly insensitive, as it marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon, Musharraf talk

Ariel Sharon met Pakistan's president at the United Nations.

Pervez Musharraf shook hands with and introduced his wife to the Israeli prime minister at a reception Wednesday for leaders attending the United Nations World Summit.

Musharraf earlier had declined an Israeli invitation to hold formal talks with Sharon at the event.

The Israeli and Pakistani foreign ministers met earlier this month in Istanbul, signaling a thaw in ties, and Musharraf is to address American Jewish groups in New York this weekend.

But Pakistan has said it will only normalize relations with Israel after the creation of a Palestinian state.

Indonesian hears Israeli

Israel's foreign minister met his Indonesian counterpart.

Silvan Shalom held private talks Tuesday with Hassan Wirayuda in New York before the United Nations World Summit.

Israel and Indonesia have no formal ties and there was no official comment on the meeting.

Shalom hopes to parlay Israel's Gaza Strip withdrawal into a thaw in relations with the Muslim and Arab world, but the Israeli daily Ha'aretz quoted Wirayuda as saying it was too early for Indonesia to consider normalization with the Jewish state.

Talks on Israeli held in Egypt

Israel is in talks to free a Bedouin citizen imprisoned in Egypt on espionage charges.

Jerusalem sources said Wednesday that Israel's ambassador to Cairo, Shalom Cohen, had met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit to discuss the 21-year-old former Negev resident who was arrested four years ago after crossing the border into Sinai.

Egypt sentenced the Israeli to a 15-year jail term, accusing him of espionage. Israel denied the charge.

According to sources in Jerusalem, Israel has offered to release several Arabs in return for the jailed Israeli.

Rafah tunnel sealed

Egyptian security forces sealed a tunnel used to smuggle arms from the Sinai into the Gaza Strip.

Egyptian officials said Wednesday that the 33-foot-deep tunnel in the southern Gaza border town of Rafah had been closed.

A stockpile of light arms found inside was confiscated. Cairo is under pressure to show that it can secure Rafah after Israeli troops withdrew from the Gaza-Egypt border corridor this week.

The deployment of 750 Egyptian border troops along the 8-mile frontier is expected to be completed Thursday.

Israel fears that weapons and ammunition could have been smuggled into Gaza this week as Egypt left the border with Gaza completely open, allowing thousands of Palestinians to cross back and forth without inspection or control.

NORTH AMERICA

Rabbi beaten in Ukraine

A rabbi and his teenage son were attacked and beaten in Kiev. Rabbi Michael Menis and his son, 14, both citizens of Israel, were attacked Sunday near the National Expo Center in the Ukrainian capital.

The father and son managed to escape and reported the incident to police, who detained eight of the attackers, including a young woman.

They reportedly told police that they attacked the "Jews to purify the nation."

The attackers reportedly were members of a neo-Nazi skinhead gang.

WORLD

Rice: Iran, Syria still back terrorists

Support for Palestinian terrorism remains an element in the U.S.-led isolation of Iran and Syria, Condoleezza Rice said.

"Iran remains the principal supporter, along with Syria, but Iran even more so, of terrorist activity, including Hezbollah, and the Palestinian rejectionists at a time when Mahmoud Abbas is trying to build a Palestinian apparatus that is free of terror," the U.S. secretary of state said in an interview with CBS before the opening of the U.N. General Assembly. "And so whether it's on the nuclear front or the human-rights front or the terrorism front, Iran is a problem for the international system and it is a problem for the Middle East."

Of Syria, Rice said, "If they really are in favor of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and a Palestinian state, then why are they supporting Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Damascus and Hezbollah and getting money to Palestinian rejectionists at the time that Mahmoud Abbas is trying to cut off terrorist activity and make peace with the Israelis?"

Orthodox rabbi to praise Roberts

The president of the Rabbinical Council of America will testify in support of Judge John Roberts for chief justice of the United States.

Rabbi Dale Polakoff will be one of numerous representatives of outside organizations testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday.

Polakoff, of Great Neck, N.Y., said his organization was approached after it endorsed Roberts earlier this year.

The Rabbinical Council represents centrist Orthodox rabbis throughout the country.

L.A. synagogues to get more security

The mayor and police chief of Los Angeles assured the Jewish community that a strong police presence will be in place during the High Holidays.

"We will raise our visibility to an even higher level than in past years," Police Chief William Bratton said during a news conference Monday at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, attended by FBI, state and local officials.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa sought to buck up nervous Los Angeles residents by declaring that "Los Angeles is as well prepared as any other city in the United States."

John Fishel, the president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, announced that a special fund had been established to assist smaller synagogues with security measures during the High Holidays.

Group to launch TV ad

A Jewish group is launching a television ad demanding equitable treatment for Israel at the United Nations.

The American Jewish Committee ad is to begin airing on CNN on Thursday, during the World Summit of international leaders at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

"What happens when one member state is not treated equally?" the ad's narrator asks. "This diminishes the stature of the U.N. itself."