

IN THE NEWS

Shalom extends an olive branch

In Tunisia, Silvan Shalom called for the Arab and Muslim world to make peace with Israel.

"Since taking office almost three years ago, I have made it my mission to extend Israel's ties with Arab and Muslim countries," the Israeli foreign minister said Wednesday in his address to the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis.

"Israel extends its hands in peace to all Arab countries and to the Islamic world."

Shalom met on the summit's sidelines with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Both voiced hope for renewed peace talks, though Shalom reiterated that the Palestinian Authority must first crack down on terrorism.

Israel, Qatar sign air deal

Israel's Arkia airline signed a partnership deal with a Gulf Arab airline.

Under the agreement announced Wednesday, Israelis will be able to take Arkia to Amman, Jordan, and travel on to some 20 destinations using Qatar Airways.

There still are no direct air connections between Israel and Qatar, which maintains low-level diplomatic contacts with the Jewish state, but Arkia says the partnership deal gives Israelis the right to travel through Qatar's airport.

Qatar declined comment on the agreement.

Reform Jews meet in Houston

The U.S. Reform movement opened its biennial convention.

Keeping teens involved, promoting lifelong synagogue membership and examining topics such as the war in Iraq and non-Jews' role in ritual life are on the agenda as the Union for Reform Judaism convenes its 68th General Assembly Wednesday through Sunday in Houston.

Nearly 5,000 people are expected to attend.

WORLD REPORT

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UJC promotes overseas funding, approves new allocation process

By RACHEL POMERANCE

TORONTO (JTA) — A 100-year old Jewish woman, whose closest relatives are dead, lives in a one-room walk-up apartment in the former Soviet republic of Moldova that she hasn't walked out of in four years.

The thought of Klara Kogan, who exists on a paltry government pension, haunts Steven Schwager, executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which provides relief and welfare to Jews abroad.

"We owe it to those people" to care for them, said Schwager, whose group provides Kogan with a home-care worker — and her only human contact. "Those people could be us."

■
Making the case for funding overseas needs has become increasingly difficult for the North American Jewish federation system, which raises money for local, national and international needs.

Jewish federations have increasingly put their campaign dollars toward local social service and educational needs; today, roughly 30 percent of funds raised by federations go overseas, down from 50 percent in earlier times.

But the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of the federation system, wants to change that.

At its annual conference held in Toronto this week, the UJC heavily promoted "Operation Promise," a special campaign to raise \$160 million over three years primarily to finance the aliyah of an estimated 17,000 Ethiopians of Jewish descent known as the Falash Mura.

The funds will also go toward the absorption of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, caring

for the Jewish elderly of the former Soviet Union and invigorating the identity of its Jewish youth.

Despite the fanfare around the special campaign, launched in September by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and endorsed by him via video conference at the General Assembly here, there is real concern about how it will resonate with donors across North America.

But Carole Solomon, who chairs the Jewish Agency of Israel's board of governors, said there was great urgency in expediting the aliyah of the Falash Mura and reuniting families.

"It's our every expectation that they will provide the necessary funds to complete this chapter of Jewish history," she said, referring to UJC and the federations.

■
The campaign comes amid another major development in the federation system's overseas work — the creation of a new allocations system.

With the 1999 creation of the UJC — a merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal and United Israel Appeal — came the Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee, which comprised a cross section of federation leaders to determine allocations overseas with the aim of increasing overseas dollars.

Fraught with politics and bureaucracy, the committee has cost several million dollars and has not substantially increased the allocation of overseas funds.

The system's major overseas partners are the JDC and the Jewish Agency for Israel, which runs aliyah and Zionist education worldwide.

While the federations' annual campaign, *Continued on page 2*

■ Raising money to help fund Ethiopian aliyah and elderly Jews in the FSU

Continued from page 1

which tops \$800 million, increased by 4 percent since 2000, dollars overseas have dropped by more than 4.5 percent since 2001.

The UJC board of trustees unanimously voted Tuesday to replace ONAD with a system that allows the Jewish Agency and the JDC to hammer out their own agreement for the next two years. A group of federation officials will monitor the process and the UJC board must then approve the deal by the two agencies.

Some hope the new format — a modified return to pre-ONAD days, when the Jewish Agency and JDC negotiated their funds — will restore a spirit of cooperation to the process.

Others call the resolution a compromise document that will satisfy no one, and some lament the lack of minimum amounts required by federations to allocate overseas, given past shortfalls.

In fact, the critical issue of shoring up overseas funds remains in question.

"Nothing much will improve unless there's an increase in overseas allocations, and that takes more than a document," said Ellen Heller of Baltimore, the JDC's president. "That takes advocacy."

There is no formal advocacy committee, UJC President Howard Rieger told JTA. But the resolution allows for an aggressive approach to raising overseas funds, he said.

It asks federations to increase overseas giving, provides incentives for those that do and calls for the consideration of punitive measures against noncompliant federations.

For many local federation leaders, making the connection to overseas needs in general and Operation Promise in particular is tough amid so many competing local demands.

People don't see overseas concerns as their responsibility because they have never seen the problems firsthand, said Michael Nissen, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara in California.

Federations are also facing increased local costs due to growing numbers and budgets of local agencies like day schools, said Steven Rakitt, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta.

Still, Rakitt said that "sometimes a special campaign has a way of providing a laser focus," suggesting the new campaign will generate additional funds overseas.

"We have a responsibility to Jews wherever they live, and an elderly person who's hungry in Atlanta or hungry in Belarus is our responsibility."

Operation Promise has already raised \$32 million in pledges, according to UJC officials.

Several federations are responding to the campaign by soliciting individual major donors rather than rolling out a massive campaign.

Privately, several officials said they didn't want to conduct a "second-line campaign" because it would raise questions among donors, who understand that the annual campaign already funds these types of overseas needs.

The UJA-Federation of New York, which has been a leading proponent of the push to expedite the aliyah of the Falash Mura, has already appropriated \$5.7 million to the cause.

John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of the New York federation, said his federation would provide an additional \$18 million over the next three years for the other elements of Operation Promise.

"This is our way of fully participating in Operation Promise," he said.

Jay Sarver, a UJC board member from St. Louis and the budget and finance

chairman of the Jewish Agency, said that although the needs of Operation Promise are contained in the federations' annual campaign efforts, the urgency of the situation demands more funds in a shorter time frame.

In Cleveland, the community has already pledged nearly 90 percent of its goal to raise almost \$6 million for Operation Promise, said Stephen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.

These pledges come on top of its annual campaign as

well as a \$137 million capital campaign.

Success comes "if you ask and you take the time to explain why you're asking."

Still, it may be a tough sell.

"It's going to take some real strategic marketing and an incredibly intensive fund-raising effort to reach the \$160 million goal, and if we don't reach that goal the Jewish Agency and JDC are going to be in a tremendous debt situation," said Richard Wexler, a UJC board member from Chicago.

Moshe Vigdor, director general of the Jewish Agency, said that "if we have less, we will be able to do less, unfortunately."

But the aliyah operation is unlikely to be halted, even in a funding crisis, according to senior UJC and Jewish Agency officials.

"We have an obligation here," Rieger said.

He noted that Ethiopia and Israel reached an agreement last week, that officials say could prompt the Ethiopian immigration to begin in the next couple of weeks.

The \$100 million cost of funding the aliyah is broken down as follows: \$23 million for preparing and educating the Jews before they immigrate, \$40 million for their needs in Israeli absorption centers, and \$37 million for programs that integrate Ethiopians once they have moved out of the absorption centers, Vigdor said.

Zeev Bielski, the new chairman of the Jewish Agency, which will assume the bulk of responsibility for the education and preparation for the Falash Mura aliyah, said he hoped that the entire immigration would be completed by the end of 2007. ■

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Richard Wexler
UJC board member

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With new leader, group hopes to raise profile

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — The new leadership of the Russian Jewish Congress says it has the expertise to help the group raise more money for domestic Jewish needs and better represent Russian Jews abroad.

But whether the new leaders will be able to catapult the RJC back into the forefront of Russian Jewry remains to be seen.

The change at the top took place Nov. 10, when more than 100 donors and leaders of the RJC unanimously accepted the resignation of Vladimir Slutsker, a financier and member of Parliament.

The new president, chemical magnate Vyacheslav "Moshe" Kantor, was approved in a near-unanimous vote. He's awaiting a formal approval at the group's next national convention, tentatively scheduled for early next year.

Moscow native, Kantor, who was unavailable for comment, will be the fifth president in the RJC's relatively short history. In January the group will mark 10 years since it was founded by Vladimir Goussinsky, a media mogul who was later expelled from Russia over a conflict with President Vladimir Putin.

The RJC has raised more than \$70 million from domestic donors to support various Jewish projects since its founding. The group also aspires to represent Russian Jewry to the government on political and social issues, but its role has diminished in recent years.

Some leading RJC donors last month accused Slutsker, who served as president for a year, of conspiring with the Russian government to deny Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, re-entry to the country after he visited Israel in September. Slutsker denies the charge.

Most of the RJC's leading members also said they were unhappy with how Slutsker ran the organization, which many said had withdrawn from serving the community.

Slutsker, who is known for his close ties to top Russian officials and to the country's prosecutor general, rejected the group's offer to stay on in an honorary capacity.

Kantor is a well-known figure in the Russian business community and also enjoys close relations with top political figures, a prerequisite for business success in post-Communist Russia.

Those who backed Kantor's nomination said his presidency could make a

difference for the RJC, which once was the leading voice of Russian Jewry.

"He has extensive experience in the Jewish world and in top-level international Jewish politics, and he also brings in a new team of managers who have western business experience," said Yevgeny Satanovsky, a former RJC president who was replaced by Slutsker last year and now is making a comeback in the group's leadership circle.

Similar to most Russian business tycoons, Kantor, 52, made his fortune in the first years of Russia's new capitalism, relying largely on connections he made with top government officials under former President Boris Yeltsin.

His main business asset is Akron, a chemical holding firm regarded as one of Europe's largest fertilizer producers. Akron owns two of Russia's biggest plants in the industry, and recently acquired massive production facilities in China.

Kantor enjoys a reputation as a patron of the arts, and experts rank highly his collection of contemporary art, which includes a number of top-quality works by Russian Jewish artists.

"He certainly has this air of aristocracy that no other Jewish leader after Goussinsky had," Satanovsky says.

Like many Russian business magnates, Kantor lives mostly abroad, making Geneva his home. Those who know him well say he aspires to become a Jewish leader of international scale.

Outside Russia he goes by his recently acquired Jewish first name, Moshe. He made several attempts in recent years to assume key roles in international Jewish politics — first in the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and most recently in the European Jewish Congress, where he was appointed chairman of the board of governors.

"His presidency at the RJC will most likely bring about his new attempt to enter the door of Europe, now with the backing of one of the continent's largest Jewish communities," a source who insisted on anonymity told JTA.

Last week, Kantor received the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit from Polish

President Alexander Kwasniewski for his role in financing a conference on the Holocaust in Krakow earlier this year that was attended by world leaders, including Putin.

"We hope that those donors who used to give to RJC will continue their support, and that Kantor will be a better stimulus to increase their giving," said Solomon Bukingolts, whom Kantor picked as the group's new chief executive officer.

Bukingolts, a Latvian American and an econom-

ic adviser to Latvia's president, said that aside from supporting humanitarian, educational and charitable Jewish causes in Russia, the new RJC leadership will work to strengthen Russian Jews' relations with Western European and U.S. communities.

"The RJC will become a more visible and more meaningful part of Jewish affairs internationally," he told JTA.

Like many members of Russia's business elite, Kantor is not free from allegations of unscrupulous business dealings and of utilizing his Kremlin connections to advance his business interests.

His name was mentioned among those who actively sought to take over some assets of the Yukos oil company and its founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, when the Kremlin launched its campaign against Yukos in 2003.

"This is the reality with the world of Russian business, and when the Jewish community of Russia gets a new leader from these circles, it's almost guaranteed that this new figure has had some problems with reputation," a Russian Jewish leader who asked that his name not be published told JTA. "This is the nature of Russia's young capitalism, and the Jewish community has to live with it."

Some participants in last week's meeting insisted that the RJC issue a statement concerning the situation of Rabbi Goldschmidt, whom Russian authorities refused to allow back into the country after he visited Israel in late September. The government hasn't given any explanation for its action.

Mikhail Fridman, the RJC's main donor, said the sensitivity involved in the situation required abstaining from public statements, and that he was working to help Goldschmidt obtain the necessary permission to re-enter Russia.

Moshe Kantor
'certainly has this
air of aristocracy.'

Yevgeny Satanovsky
Former RJC president

ACROSS THE
FORMER
SOVIET UNION

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Would-be bomber caught

Israeli troops caught a would-be Palestinian suicide bomber. The terrorist was arrested Wednesday at a checkpoint outside the West Bank city of Nablus after a bomb belt was discovered in his bag. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Elsewhere in the West Bank, the Israeli army arrested six suspected Palestinian terrorists Tuesday night.

Arafat poison rumor lingers

An aide to the late Yasser Arafat claims the Palestinian leader died from a slow-acting poison. Ahmed Abdel-Rahman said in an interview published Wednesday by the London-based newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi that a poison was injected into Arafat's ear in September 2003, leading to his death more than a year later.

No evidence was offered for the charge, nor did Abdel-Rahman speculate in detail over who might have carried out the alleged assassination.

But the method he described appeared to be aimed at recalling the botched Israeli attempt to poison senior Hamas official Khaled Meshaal in Jordan in 1997.

The cause of Arafat's death, in a French hospital in November 2004, remains a mystery, with his medical records providing little conclusive data.

Quayle's firm buys stake in Israeli bank

A company headed by Dan Quayle bought part of Israel's second largest bank.

Gabriel Capital and Cerberus Capital Management, whose chairman is the former U.S. vice president, paid more than \$500 million for 9.99 percent of Bank Leumi, which recently was privatized.

Quayle's company has the option to buy an additional 10.01 percent of the bank.

Peace activist's killer apologizes

The murderer of a peace activist in Israel apologized for the 1983 killing.

"I did something unacceptable," Yonah Avrushi told Israel's Army Radio on Wednesday about the killing of Emil Grunzweig, who was killed when Avrushi threw a hand grenade at Peace Now activists as they called for the dismissal of then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon during the Lebanon War.

Avrushi also said his life sentence should be reduced, saying he was a changed man.

NORTH AMERICA

Zionist elections under way

Elections got under way for U.S. representatives to the World Zionist Organization's 35th Congress of the Jewish People in Israel. Voting began Tuesday and will run through Feb. 28.

Twelve different slates are running for the 145 available slots. Two new groups are among those running this year: the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and RAJI: Russian American Jews for Israel.

Also running are the Green Zionist Alliance; Herut, North America; The Jabotinsky Movement; Hatikva: The Progressive Zionist Coalition; Arza: Association of Reform Zionists of America; the Religious Zionist Slate; Dor Zion; Bnai Zion; World Confederation of United Zionists and Dor Zion; Mercas USA: the Zionist organization of the Conservative movement; the American Zionist Coalition; Baltimore Zionist District and Fuel for Truth; the Zionist Organization of America; and Likud.

WORLD

Germany arrests Holocaust denier

An accused Holocaust denier was arrested on arrival at Frankfurt airport Tuesday.

Gernar Rudolf, 41, was deported from the United States this week. He will serve a 14-month prison sentence in Baden-Wuerttemberg for a 1995 conviction on charges of slander and incitement to hatred. He also faces further charges of publishing right-wing propaganda on the Internet.

Rudolf, a chemist, published an article in 1991 claiming that Zyklon B poison gas was never used in Auschwitz.

He fled to the United States to avoid serving time in German prisons.

Paris honors Rabin

Some 1,200 people turned out at Paris' City Hall on Monday to pay homage to the late Yitzhak Rabin.

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of Rabin's assassination, Mayor Bernard Delanoë affirmed his adherence to what he called Rabin's message of peace and brotherhood, declaring "We are all warriors of peace."

Zundel's trial delayed

Ernst Zundel's trial in Germany on charges of incitement to hatred and Holocaust denial was delayed.

The trial was postponed until a new defense lawyer can be found.

According to a German court, Zundel's appointed lawyer, Sylvia Stolz, was disqualified because her petition to the court included potentially actionable statements of an anti-Semitic nature.

Stolz reportedly also wanted to bring in extremist Horst Mahler as her co-counsel, but Mahler is banned from working, the court said.

The trial of Zundel, 66, most likely won't resume until next year.

Zundel had left his native Germany in 1958 allegedly to avoid military service.

Nevzlin: Putin won't free tycoon

It would take a regime change in Russia to free Mikhail Khodorkovsky, one of his business colleagues said.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday in New York, Leonid Nevzlin, a partner of Khodorkovsky in the Yukos oil firm, said Russian President Vladimir Putin "will never let out" Khodorkovsky, who was sentenced earlier this year to nine years in prison for tax evasion, fraud and embezzlement.

Supporters of Khodorkovsky, who has Jewish roots, claim the case against him is politically motivated.

Nevzlin, a former Russian Jewish Congress head who now lives in Israel, chairs the board of governors of the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv, and was in New York for a gala dinner of the museum's American Friends organization.

Russia has asked Israel to extradite Nevzlin to face charges that include contract murder, charges he called "bogus."

Israel, E.U. to talk trade

Israel and the European Union opened negotiations on the free trade of fish and produce.

Covering both fresh and processed products, the agreement will be discussed as a part of the Euro-Mediterranean partnerships, of which Israel, nine other countries and the Palestinian areas are members.

The idea of a free-trade agreement between Israel and the European Union was launched in 1995 and is seen as an important step toward increasing European investment in Israel.

The agreement is expected to take effect Jan. 1, 2007.