

IN THE NEWS
Hamas pressed on violence, Israel

Members of the "Quartet" working for Israeli-Palestinian peace called on Hamas to renounce violence and accept Israel.

"All members of the future Palestinian government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the 'road map' peace plan, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan read Monday from a statement after a meeting in London of the Quartet, composed of the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

Annan also said donors to the Palestinian Authority would review their aid based on these principles.

Hamas offers truce

Hamas said it could suspend attacks if Israel withdraws from the West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem.

"We can accept to establish our independent state on the area occupied" in 1967, the Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, Mahmoud al-Zahar, told CNN on Sunday. "Give us one or two, 10, 15 years time in order to see what is the real intention of Israel after that."

Zahar said Hamas would respond to such Israeli withdrawals by extending the "truce" under which it scaled back attacks last year, but he declined to say whether the group would ever recognize the Jewish state's right to exist.

Still, he said this should not get in the way of talks.

Wendy Wasserstein dies of cancer at 55

Wendy Wasserstein, an award-winning playwright who wrote about women's challenges in contemporary life, died Monday at age 55.

Wasserstein, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1989 for "The Heidi Chronicles," had battled cancer.

WORLD REPORT

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\$15 million gift to Jewish school scores high marks, sets 'new bar'

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — A recent gift of \$15 million to a community day school in Rockville, Md., has raised the antennae of Jewish professionals not just because of its size but because of its goals.

Whereas previous gifts to Jewish day schools often were directed toward the construction of new buildings, campuses or even new schools, this latest gift to the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, among the country's largest community day schools, is notable because it is intended to cover what professionals call operational costs, or capacity building, Jewish educators are saying.

The gift, in other words, is not an endowment or part of a capital campaign. Rather it is meant to immediately affect the lives of students.

It is among the largest-ever gifts to an individual Jewish day school.

"It sets a new bar for investment in day schools and for reasons to invest," said Rabbi Joshua Elkin, executive director of the Project for Excellence in Jewish Education.

"These donors are very, very clear that they believe in the school as it is. What they're saying is that if we want our school to really realize its fullest potential, to have a very positive influence on the next generation of Jews in North America, the schools need to have the resources to be able to grow the excellence of their program as well as keep their institutions accessible," Elkin said.

The gift — which comprises \$10 million to enhance the school's educational programs and a \$5 million matching endowment for scholarships — is being given by Robert and

Clarice Smith and Robert and Arlene Kogod, through the Charles E. Smith Family Foundation. Robert Smith and Arlene Kogod are Charles E. Smith's children. The family has had a relationship with the school since the late 1970s.

"The Smith-Kogod families are thrilled about the new opportunities this gift will provide to support the school's mission of excellence," said Robert Smith. "I believe that the education received at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School will encourage and motivate our students to work and build a better society.

"The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives, and that is why we are so proud to support this school," he said. "Our families are committed to the philosophy that life is a journey with a purpose."

The \$10 million portion will be given in \$1 million dollar increments over 10 years and will allow the school to better integrate art, history and science into the Judaic and general studies curricula, the head of the school, Jonathan Cannon, told JTA. It also will aid in developing experiential, informal educational programs; and offer professional development programs to teachers, he said.

The additional scholarship money, he said, will allow the school to offer its education "to the widest possible economic spectrum, and that really meets the priorities of a Jewish day school."

The school, which is pluralistic and not affiliated with any movement, serves 1,500 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The gift, said Cannon, will enable the

Continued on page 2

**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ \$15 million donation to Jewish day school sets 'new bar'

Continued from page 1

school to "maintain its level of excellence and build on the level of excellence that can be beneficial to our students but also students at Jewish day schools everywhere."

The money, said Steven Kraus, director of day school, congregational and communal education initiatives at the Jewish Education Service of North America, or JESNA, will allow the school to address a number of the major challenges that face day schools in general today.

These challenges, he said, include making Jewish education affordable to a wide socioeconomic swathe and offering top-of-the-line professional development for teachers.

The gift to the Charles E. Smith School is one of at least three major gifts to days schools over the last several years. In 2001, the Sidney Kimmel Foundation announced a \$20 million gift to The Raymond and Ruth Perelman Jewish Day School, a Solomon Schechter school in Wynnewood, Pa., affiliated with the Conservative movement.

In 2004, a group of anonymous families donated \$45 million to Jewish day school education in Boston. The money was to be spent over five years, with \$30 million divided equally among three schools and the remaining \$15 million designated for a tuition scholarship fund and grants for innovative educational projects.

"This is the leading edge of what I believe more and more giving will encompass. I think we're likely to see a sub-

stantial amount of investment that will combine needed capital infrastructure" plus a portion dedicated to "operational excellence," Elkin said. "It's the state of the art in grant making."

He added: "If you don't invest in the internal capacities you can't maintain this

kind of excellence over the long run."

"We hope it's a trend," Kraus said. "Hopefully there's a greater sophistication on everyone's part about the fact that we need significant funds to continue to grow the day-school enterprise. It's not only about buildings." ■

Israeli teens explore tough questions

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Arab and Jewish teens link arms on stage, smiling, singing, laughing and dancing. They look like a perfect paragon of peace.

They also represent a continuing struggle.

These 18 Israeli teens performed against the backdrop of a picture of the U.S. Constitution. But Peace Child Israel, a Tel Aviv-based coexistence initiative, offered more than just a symbolic overture last week at the National Constitution Center.

Standing before a sea of kipot and head scarves, teens from both sides of the tracks illustrated how cultural exchange can mend hearts and sway minds within Israel's borders.

Peace Child Israel started 18 years ago under the direction of the late Israeli actress Yael Drouyannof. According to PCI director Melisse Lewine-Boskovich, the group pushed boundaries from its inception.

"When the organization was founded, it was trendy and sexy to do cross-border work, but little attention was being paid to the intra-issues," Lewine-Boskovich says. "I call it the untold story."

That dichotomy permeates Israeli culture, she continues.

The teens' "interaction is almost nil because the schools are segregated," she explains.

"When you don't know something, there's fear and then there's mistrust," she said.

Peace Child Israel puts these issues under the microscope, prodding teens

to explore, rather than dodge, the tough questions. Pulling together Jewish and Arab high school students, many of whom are engaging in cross-cultural dialogue for the first time, discussions broach topics ordinarily considered taboo.

Cultural stereotypes creep into mediated forums, for example, and suicide bombings are confronted through improvisational games.

It's not surprising that the topics can strike an emotional nerve.

Group psychologists are on hand to help students work through delicate bouts.

Once the teens reach a certain level of intimacy, they begin crafting a skit together. Most shows delve into issues of coexistence, trip coordinator Deb Chamberlin notes.

"It's just their life," she says. "We work with the issues of their life."

Lewine-Boskovich calls the skit-writing process an "exercise in democracy and consensus-building."

"It's not easy," she says. "There are moments when one side wants the other side to understand and agree, and that's not going to happen."

PCI facilitators said they hope the U.S. tour, which whisked teens to Hebrew schools, Muslim societies, community centers and churches up and down the eastern seaboard, would strengthen ties in the group.

At Washington Township High School in Sewell, N.J., the visitors discovered a surprising way to connect to local students.

"The Arab kids spoke Spanish with our Puerto Rican students," teacher Eileen Lucarini says. "That really bonded them." ■

When you don't know something, there's fear and then there's mistrust.

Melisse Lewine-Boskovich

Director, Peace Child Israel

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German leader pledges solidarity with Israel

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was cast as a courtesy visit to bolster a decades-old alliance built from the ashes of the Holocaust, but German Chancellor Angela Merkel came to Israel with a real mission in mind.

With Israelis facing ever-greater threats in the form of Hamas and Iran, the new German leader used her first trip here to make clear that she took seriously Germany's post-Holocaust responsibilities toward the Jewish state.

"The existence of the State of Israel is and remains an inviolable pillar of German policy, you can be sure of that," the chancellor said Monday after laying a wreath at Yad Vashem. "We stand strongly at Israel's side, especially during difficult times."

A native of East Germany who saw first-hand the ravages of totalitarianism, Merkel made clear even before getting elected last November that supporting Israel and fighting anti-Semitism would be central to her foreign policy.

The fact that she visited Israel so soon — compared to the last five years in which her predecessor, Gerhard Schroeder, made no such effort — was welcomed in Jerusalem.

Aides to acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he and Merkel hit it off, especially since the German chancellor appeared to agree with Israel's rancor over the inaction of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas against terror.

"He has fallen in love with his image of being a weak leader," Yediot Achronot

quoted Merkel as saying of Abbas in one closed-door discussion.

The terror issue looms large after Hamas' victory in last week's Palestinian elections. Merkel has matched President Bush in calling for the international community to isolate a government led by the radical Islamic group until it reforms.

"Such a Palestinian Authority cannot be directly supported by money from the E.U.," Merkel said ahead of a meeting with Abbas in which she was expected to request that he use his influence to get Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel.

Merkel made a point of not meeting with Hamas representatives during her two-day visit. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Islamic group issued an urgent appeal to foreign donors not to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority.

"We urge you to understand the Palestinian reality, and not to rush in and impose conditions and demands that ignore this reality and increase the suffering of the people," Ismail Haniya, head of the Hamas parliamentary faction, said in the Gaza Strip.

With Palestinians so dependent on foreign aid, some political analysts predict that a united European stand against Hamas will not last.

"Merkel's no-nonsense leadership is especially needed to ensure that the

E.U.'s enunciated criteria for dealing with Hamas do not get watered down," wrote Elliot Jager, an editorial writer at The Jerusalem Post.

On another front, Merkel is considered key to countering the Iranian nuclear threat against Israel.

She was one of the first Western leaders to condemn Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Holocaust denials and calls for the Jewish state to be "wiped off the map" last year.



Under her watch, Germany — one of the three E.U. nations trying, with little success, to talk Iran out of its nuclear plans — has shifted to a more aggressive approach.

Merkel told reporters that Iran "is not only a threat to Israel, but to the entire democratic world."

"Iran is now crossing a red line and Germany finds to be unacceptable the Iranian president's remarks regarding the distortion of history and we cannot countenance this. We will work to expand the refusal to accept Iran's position and we will create a broad base that will refute this position," she said.

In another show of solidarity with Israel, Merkel's government has approved the discounted sale of two German-made Dolphin submarines to Israel, which will significantly expand its defensive capabilities.

Hungary marks Holocaust Memorial Day

By AGNES BOHM

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Politicians, Jewish leaders and members of the Catholic Church gathered at the Hungarian Parliament to mark the first-ever international memorial day for the Holocaust.

"The tragedy of the Hungarian Jews started in this room, in the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament with the passing of the anti-Jewish laws before the war," Peter Feldmayer, the president of the Hungarian Jewish community, said Sunday to the crowd. "Most of the Hungarian people still do not think that the Holocaust was part of the Hungarian history," he added.

Hungary's event was one of many that took place around the world in late January. Each year, more countries are marking Jan. 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as Holocaust memorial day.

"Hungary was the only country in Europe to turn over so many fellow citizens in the shortest possible time," Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany said in his speech, referring to the more than 400,000 Hungarian Jews who were deported mainly to Auschwitz during three months in 1944.

Laszlo Solyom, Hungary's president, praised Hungary's Jewish Nobel Prize-winning author Imre Kertesz's book "Fateless" for helping to understand the Holocaust, especially Hungary's role in it.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Hebron squatters agree to leave

Settlers squatting in Palestinian-owned market stalls in the West Bank city of Hebron agreed to leave under a compromise deal with Israeli police.

Eight families who took up residence in the abandoned stalls next to the Avraham Avinu settlement in Hebron left Monday, saying they had received assurances from Israeli authorities that they could return when Palestinian leases on the land expire.

The settlers stake a claim on the market, which was owned by Jews who fled Arab riots in Hebron in 1929.

Palestinians and some Israeli groups describe the squatters as part of a systematic effort by settlers to eject Arabs from the heart of the biblical city.

The compromise averted the squatters' forced eviction, which was meant to take place this week.

Haredi center in Jerusalem rejected

Jerusalem city officials recently rejected a plan for a large convention center solely for fervently Orthodox Jews.

The controversial proposal for an \$8 million, gender-segregated cultural center was shot down after harsh criticism from non-haredi officials, the Jerusalem Post reported.

The capital's mayor, Uri Lupolianski, is fervently Orthodox but has pledged not to favor one group over another.

The proposed center would have been bigger than the city's International Convention Center, which is not dedicated to any particular segment of society.

Nir Barkat, leader of the city council opposition, called the proposed center "an immense and completely unnecessary waste of money," the Post reported.

El Al wants flight decision reversed

El Al petitioned Israel's High Court to block flights by a rival Israeli airline on the Tel Aviv-New York route.

El Al's petition, filed Sunday, said the Tourism Ministry's recent decision to grant regular flights to Israir is illegal.

Israir said the petition reflects El Al's desire to maintain a monopoly over the route.

Google to expand in Israel

Google is planning to start a resource and development center in Israel.

Sergey Brin, who founded the Internet search giant, told Ha'aretz about the step at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland.

Google has already opened a marketing and sales branch in the Jewish state.

NORTH AMERICA

Spielberg defends 'Munich'

Steven Spielberg lambasted members of the Jewish community who came out against his film "Munich."

Speaking as part of a roundtable in the latest Newsweek magazine, Spielberg said criticism leveled at him and screenwriter Tony Kushner over the depiction of Israel's hunt for the Palestinian masterminds of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre is unfair.

Some American Jews, he said, "have grown very angry at me for allowing the Palestinians simply to have dialogue and for allowing Tony Kushner to be the author of that dialogue. 'Munich' never once attacks Israel, and barely criticizes Israel's policy of counterviolence against violence," he said. "It's the most questioning story I've ever

had the honor to tell. For that, we were accused of the sin of moral equivocation. Which, of course, we didn't intend — and we're not guilty of."

The controversy, Spielberg added, "made me feel a little more aware of the dogma, and the Luddite position people take any time the Middle East is up for discussion."

Jewish school opens in New Orleans

A Jewish school recently reopened in New Orleans.

The Torah Academy reopened earlier this month, welcoming 28 students from nursery school through eighth grade — slightly more than half the students it had before Hurricane Katrina, the New York Jewish Week reported.

Another Jewish school in New Orleans, the New Orleans Jewish Day School, delayed its reopening from January to August because too many students are attending schools in other cities this year.

Bukharians plan to move to Israel

An entire community of Bukharian Jews plans to emigrate from the United States to Israel.

Rabbi Michael Borochoy, a leader of the New York community, which hails from Uzbekistan, was quoted as saying recently that hundreds of his community members were in talks with the Jewish Agency for Israel about moving en masse to Beit Shemesh.

"The community understands that it is important to settle in Israel," Borochoy told Ma'ariv. "We want to bring all of the Bukharians from New York. If the government gives us support and benefits, I am certain that everyone will immigrate to Israel."

The Jewish Agency confirmed that talks were under way.

Holocaust memoir tops charts

Oprah Winfrey's seal of approval catapulted Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir to the top of the book lists.

A new edition of "Night" is the top-selling biography in the United States, The New York Times reported.

"Night" is Winfrey's current book-club choice.

WORLD

Anti-Semitism up in Ireland?

Recorded incidents of anti-Semitism in Ireland increased during the first half of 2005.

In a submission to the European Information Network on Racism and Xenophobia, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism reported incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism in Dublin in three of its bimonthly bulletins for the year.

However, most if not all the damage done to Jewish property in the capital is believed to be the work of one man, David Hughes, who was convicted in September of criminal damage.

The bulletins note a significant drop in reported anti-Semitism following Hughes' arrest in June 2005.

Germans honored for backing Jewish culture

Six German citizens were recognized for their contributions to preserving Jewish history and culture.

At an award ceremony Jan. 25 in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day, the sixth annual Obermayer German Jewish History Awards were presented to Robert Kreibitz, Johann Fleischmann, Guenter Heidt, Rolf Hofmann, Kurt-Willi Julius and Karl-Heinz Stadler for their work in their respective hometowns.

All were nominated by Jews whose ancestors had fled Nazi Germany. The award was created in 2000 by American Jewish businessman Arthur Obermayer, who has roots in Creglingen, Germany.