

## IN THE NEWS

**Egypt won't cut off Hamas**

Egypt's foreign minister told Condoleezza Rice that his country is not ready to cut off a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

The United States wants the Arab world to join the West in cutting off the terrorist group until it recognizes Israel and renounces violence.

"We should give Hamas time," Ahmed Aboul Gheit said Tuesday at a Cairo news conference with the U.S. secretary of state.

**France vows to probe murder**

The French government is considering the recent murder of a Jewish man to be an anti-Semitic act.

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said Monday night that the minister of justice had ordered that last week's torture and murder of 23-year-old Ilan Halimi be considered "premeditated murder motivated by religious affiliation."

De Villepin spoke at the annual dinner of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France, or CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular French Jewish groups.

**Groups welcome high court ruling**

Jewish organizations welcomed a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the right of a small religious sect to use an illegal hallucinogenic.

The Uniao Do Vegetal argued that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act exempted the group from bans on the ritual use of hoasca, a tea containing diethyltryptamine.

The court decision Tuesday, the first on religious freedom written by Chief Justice John Roberts, said the government did not satisfy RFRA's requirement of a "compelling government interest" to halt a religious practice.

Jewish groups across the political and religious spectrum had filed briefs to defend RFRA.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Jail sentence for Holocaust denier spurs debate over combatting lies

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt was once sued by David Irving, but that doesn't mean she supports the jail sentence given to the Holocaust denier this week.

"I'm in principle against laws that promote censorship. I'm in principle against laws on Holocaust denial. I'm in principle against laws that prevent the publishing of cartoons in Denmark," Lipstadt, a professor of Jewish and Holocaust studies at Emory University in Atlanta, told JTA on Tuesday, a day after an Austrian court sentenced Irving to three years in prison for statements he made in 1989 saying there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Lipstadt said, however, that she understands the need for laws on Holocaust denial in countries such as Germany and Austria, given their records during World War II.

The sentence sent a potent message to both local extremists and the international community.

But it also added fuel to freedom-of-speech debates sparked by recent violent protests against Danish cartoons of the Islamic prophet Mohammed.

Irving, 67, was arrested in November, when he entered Austria to give a lecture at a far-right student fraternity.

Irving's lawyer, Elmar Kresbach, lodged an immediate appeal after the sentence was announced on Monday. He told reporters the sentence had been meant as a political warning.

"Irving had expected certain strictness by the court because he was a very well-known

case," he said. "But the sentence was too harsh. It became a bit of a message trial and the message was too strong."

Austrian prosecutors on the case want Irving to spend more time in jail. They appealed his sentence Tuesday, saying that three years is too lenient, given Irving's importance to right-wing extremists.

Irving, who faced up to 10 years in jail, had pleaded guilty to the charges. But he also had said he had changed some of his views and now believed that the gas chambers had existed and that "millions of Jews

died."

"I was wrong, I recognize my guilt," he told the court, in fluent German. "I have changed my ideas since 1989. History and historic research are like a tree in constant growth."

Judge Peter Liebetreu was not convinced. "The court did not consider the defendant to have genuinely changed his mind," he said after pronouncing the sentence. "The regret he showed was considered to be mere lip service to the law."

Lipstadt was not alone among Jewish observers in expressing concern over the latest chapter in Irving's well-publicized effort to deny the Holocaust.

"The sentence against Irving confirms that he and his views are discredited, but as a general rule I don't think that this is the way this should be dealt with," Antony Lerman, former director of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research, told JTA.

"It is better to combat denial by education and using good speech to drive out bad speech."

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BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES

## ■ Free speech issues resurfaced with Irving's three-year prison sentence

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"Freedom of expression is important," he said. "Once you start legislating about history, it could lead to a rocky road."

Other Jewish groups, however, praised the verdict.

"The sentence confirms David Irving as a bigot and an anti-Semite and also serves a direct challenge to the Iranian regime's embrace of Holocaust denial," Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center said in a statement.

Amos Luzzatto, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, welcomed the verdict for both the message it sent to local extremists and to the international community in the wake of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's declarations that the Holocaust is a myth.

"Even more than the conviction, it was fundamental to remove Irving's audience," he said.

"An Irving appreciated by supporters of the Iranian president gains strength and listeners; on the other hand, an Irving whom no one pays attention to is finished."

Irving looked shocked when the verdict was announced. "Of course it's a question

of freedom of speech," he said. "The law is an ass."

Austria was part of the Third Reich during World War II, and the country only began to come to terms with its Nazi past in the late 1980s, after it came to light that President Kurt Waldheim had lied about his World War II activities as a soldier in the German army.

The country, which currently holds the presidency of the European Union, is one of 11 countries that have laws making Holocaust denial a criminal offense.

The Austrian law subjects to prosecution anyone who "denies, grossly plays down, approves or tries to excuse

the National Socialist genocide or other National Socialist crimes against humanity in a print publication, in broadcast or other media."

In the weeks before Irving's trial took place, violent protests over cartoons depicting Mohammed ignited debates over the limits of free expression and led some to question the validity of legislating what one could say about the Holocaust.

"I don't think there's a parallel between

this and the cartoon, but in the eyes of the general public that thinks about issues of free speech, it's an understandable connection," Lipstadt said.

Britain and the United States have no laws on Holocaust denial.

Both the Wiesenthal Center and the Anti-Defamation League acknowledged the dilemma in their statements.

"While Irving's rants would not have led to legal action in the United States, it is important that we recognize and respect Austria's commitment to fighting Holocaust denial, the most odious form of hatred, as part of its historic responsibility to its Nazi past," Cooper of the Wiesenthal Center said.

This was not the first time Irving had tangled with the law for his views.

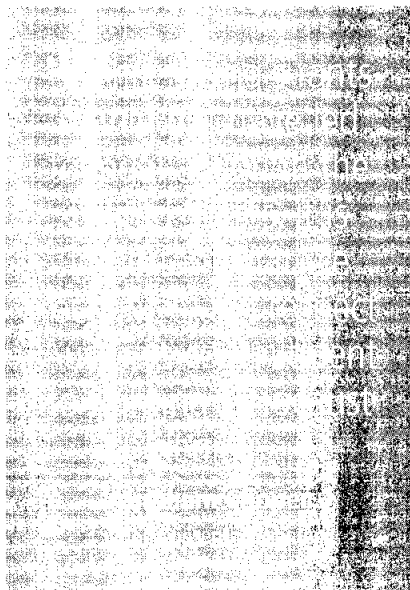
In 1992, a German court fined Irving for having publicly declared that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. He was barred from entering Germany and several other countries.

In 2000 he lost a highly publicized libel lawsuit in London against Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin books, after Lipstadt called him a Holocaust denier in her 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory."

That victory, perhaps, helps support her conviction that books, and not laws, are what should fuel the fight against denying the Holocaust.

"We don't need laws to fight Holocaust deniers. We've got history on our side," she said.

*(JTA Foreign Editor Peter Ephross in New York contributed to this report.)*



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## Activist's ejection leads to complaint

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Jewish Defense League activist filed a police complaint against Georgetown University after campus police ejected him from a Palestine Solidarity Movement conference.

Campus security threw Bill Maniaci of Reno, Nev. and Matthew Finberg of Boulder, Colo., out of the conference on Saturday.

Erik Smulson, a spokesman for the private university in Washington, said the men had been warned three times not to disrupt the proceedings.

Maniaci said he had interrupted speakers twice to urge them to answer a question

on suicide bombing.

He said two campus security officers kicked or hit him in his ribs and knocked his head while dragging him out.

He filed a police complaint and plans lawsuits against the university and against campus police and administrators.

Maniaci, 64, has a heart condition and said he was treated for a concussion after the incident. Smulson said the ejection was non-violent.

The university hosted the movement's annual conference this weekend.

The PSM calls for divestment from Israel.

# On Israel visit, U.S. Jewish leaders quiz parties

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — In a crowded hotel conference room, American Jewish leaders lined up to ask questions of the new faces leading the Labor Party.

They wanted to know the party's positions on Hamas, religious pluralism and civil marriage. Among the questions was one that became something of a theme of the group's pre-election visit, as they met with the leaders of Israel's major political parties: How would they deal with possible future evacuations of Jewish settlers in the West Bank — both from illegal outposts and from longtime, legal settlements?

"To have a Jewish democracy, we will have to bring most of the settlers back," said Ami Ayalon, the former head of the Shin Bet security service, who recently joined the Labor Party.

But, he cautioned, "We need to talk to settlers before violence starts."

Ayalon was addressing a mission from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations during its annual visit to the Jewish state last week. The group includes 52 Jewish organizations representing a range of religious and political perspectives.

They were in Israel during an especially intense period, even by local standards. Among the issues they were discussing were the Iranian nuclear threat, Hamas' recent victory in Palestinian Authority legislative elections and the upcoming Israeli elections.

They also bore witness to Israel's new political landscape. After six decades during which Labor on the left and Likud on the right dominated Israeli politics, Kadima, the first centrist party with major support, is leading in the polls ahead of the March 28 elections.

Delegates did not speculate on whom their constituencies supported politically, focusing instead on what information about the parties and issues they could bring home.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Presidents Conference, said he thinks both Israelis and American Jews are becoming less ideological about Israeli politics.

The delegates definitely learned from the visit, he said.

"Hearing different points of view helps

them better understand the dynamics of the issues," he said. There's a consensus on most of the issues, such as cutting off aid to a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority and getting tough on Iran's drive for nuclear weapons and calls for Israel's destruction, Hoenlein said.

Most seemed reconciled to further withdrawals from the West Bank. Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has pledged further withdrawals, which he described as a continuation of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's path. Sharon has been in a coma since an early-January stroke.

"There is very little dissension within this year's mission," said Rabbi James Lebeau, a representative of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. "Another disengagement will take place, and my sense of protest or dissension" among the delegates "is in what felt like the mistreatment of the evacuees in the first disengagement, and that the second disengagement would be handled more humanely."

The group met with some settlers evacuated from Gaza, and also with Ilan Cohen, the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office who helped oversee the withdrawal.

Gerald Platt, of American Friends of Likud, said the dramatic footage of Jewish settlers clashing fiercely with Israeli soldiers and police during the evacuation of the illegal Amona outpost earlier this month weighed heavily on delegates.

"In every discussion here, every speaker is questioned about their plans for future disengagements in view of the Amona behavior," Platt said.

After Olmert's address to the group in Jerusalem, Stephen Savitsky, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, questioned him about the former Gaza Strip settlers, some of whom reportedly have yet to receive full government compensation.

Olmert also spoke indirectly of his plans for further withdrawals.

"We will take care of our security, we will fight against the terrorists but we will keep all the doors open for the possible future movement that will create a better chance for a meaningful dialogue with our neighbors and that will make sure that we can protect the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state," he

said. "We want every part of the Land of Israel, but first and foremost we want to make sure that this country will remain quieter, a Jewish state and a democratic state."

Conference members were especially interested in how the different prime ministerial candidates would handle the challenge of Hamas, which is poised to

lead the Palestinian Authority.

Olmert told the group that Israel was prepared to break ties with the Palestinian Authority once a Hamas-led government is sworn in.

"I here, on behalf of the government of Israel, pledge to you that we will not negotiate and we will not deal with the Palestinian Authority that will be dominated, wholly or partly, by a terrorist organization," Olmert said. "Once the government is dominated by a majority of Hamas people, it ceases to be the authority which it was. It becomes something entirely different, something that Israel is not ready to compromise with, nor is it ready to actualize it."

Amir Peretz, head of the Labor Party, also called negotiations with Hamas a red line.

Hamas "is a terrorist organization and no funds must reach them, not from Israel and not from the international community," he told the American group. "I call on the entire international community to adopt this red line as well."

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who is running on a campaign platform pledging to be tough on Hamas, sought to contrast his stance with Olmert's.

"How may we vote for a candidate who did not understand the relevance of Hamas' rise to power?" he said of Olmert.

The group heard from major contenders in the upcoming Israeli election — Olmert, Peretz and Netanyahu — on withdrawal and dealing with the Hamas-led P.A.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Olmert upbeat on peace

Israel's Ehud Olmert said there is still hope for peace with the Palestinians despite Hamas' political rise to power.

"Naturally, the chances of reaching a quick agreement with a Hamas government are much smaller," the interim prime minister said in an interview broadcast Tuesday by Israel Radio.

"On the other hand, despite the reduced chances, hope has not ended. I am responsible for two things: The struggle against Hamas and preserving the hope and opportunity of reaching an accord," he said.

Olmert, the front-runner for the March 28 general elections in Israel, has ruled out talks with the Palestinian Authority under Hamas unless it renounces terrorism and recognizes the Jewish state's right to exist.

In the interim, he vowed to press ahead with security operations. "We will fight against terror with all our strength and we will do this every day," he said.

### Jerusalem attack foiled

Israeli security forces foiled a Palestinian mortar barrage on southern Jerusalem.

The Shin Bet said this week that it had arrested several members of a Fatah terrorist cell in the West Bank city of Bethlehem who had planned to fire a stolen mortar at nearby Gilo and Har Homa, both neighborhoods on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem.

The cell is suspected of involvement in gun attacks on Gilo, and of receiving instruction from a member of the Popular Resistance Committees, a terrorist coalition in the Gaza Strip.

According to the Shin Bet, some members of the cell remain at large in Bethlehem after the Palestinian Authority refused Israeli calls to arrest them.

### U.S. experts discuss boycott with Saudis

The United States sent experts to Saudi Arabia to review its boycott of Israel.

The Saudis are maintaining their boycott despite their long-awaited ascension last year to the World Trade Organization, which bans boycotts of member nations.

Prior to joining the WTO in September, the Saudis gave assurances they would drop the boycott, leading Israel to withdraw its power to protest its joining.

But in December, the Saudis said they were maintaining the boycott.

### Jewish Republican heads Libby defense fund

A prominent Jewish Republican is leading a fund-raising drive for Lewis "Scooter" Libby's legal defense.

Mel Sembler, a board member of the Republican Jewish Coalition and the U.S. ambassador to Italy from 2001-2005, is spearheading the Libby Legal Defense Trust.

Sembler, a Florida shopping-mall magnate, describes Libby, the former chief adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, as "one of the unsung heroes in fighting the war on terror" on the trust's Web site, [www.scooterlibby.com](http://www.scooterlibby.com).

Libby, who is Jewish, resigned in October after his indictment on perjury charges related to his leaking the name of a CIA operative whose husband criticized the Iraq war.

Other prominent Jews on the trust's board include Sam Fox, the chairman of the RJC; Shelly Kamins, a Washington-area real estate developer; professor Bernard Lewis, a prominent scholar of Islam; Stuart Bernstein, the former ambassador to Denmark; and Dennis

Ross, the top U.S. envoy to the Middle East during the Clinton administration.

### Jewish teacher chains himself for peace

A Jewish teacher in California chained himself to a bench to protest the Iraq war and poverty.

Public school music teacher Hyim Jacob Ross, who also teaches ethics, spirituality and interpersonal communication at two synagogues in the San Francisco Bay Area, chained himself to a park bench in Oakland, Calif., on Monday for a five-day protest fast.

He told reporters he's protesting the massive spending on the war in Iraq at a time when poverty and inequality are still so prevalent in this country.

Ross, in his early 30s, is subsisting on water only, and he unchains himself for bathroom breaks.

## WORLD

### Latvia apologizes for wartime behavior

Latvia's president apologized in Israel for her country's behavior during World War II.

"We are deeply sorry about the participation of Latvia in the atrocities of the Holocaust," Vaira Vike-Freiberga said at the President's Residence in Jerusalem.

About 75,000 Latvian Jews, more than 90 percent of the country's prewar Jewish community, were murdered during the war by the Nazis, with help from some local residents.

Vike-Freiberga also reiterated Latvia's commitment to Israel's existence, and said Iran should be prevented from developing nuclear weapons.

### Bank admits to Nazi ties

Germany's Dresdner Bank helped finance the crematoriums at Auschwitz, according to a study commissioned by the bank.

During the Nazi era, Dresdner was part of a construction company that built the crematoriums at the death camp in Poland, according to the report, which was released last week after seven years of research.

The company also financed Nazi weapons plants and did business with Nazi-linked authorities in Eastern Europe.

### Reform to get recognition in Czech Republic

The Czech Federation of Jewish Communities took a step toward recognizing Reform congregations as legal religious entities.

Previously this recognition had only applied to Orthodox and conservative movements while reform congregations had only the status of cultural or civic organizations.

The bylaw change will entitle Reform congregations to have a greater voice in community affairs where they are based and to have their rabbis put on the state payrolls, as is the case with Christian priests and rabbis from the other streams of Judaism in the Czech Republic.

The bylaw change is expected to receive final approval in June.

### Tunisia joins European Jewish Congress

The European Jewish Congress voted to make Tunisia a member of its organization on Sunday.

There are approximately 1,500 Jews living in Tunisia.

The European Jewish Congress is made up of leaders of 41 European and north African communities.

It is affiliated with the World Jewish Congress and fights anti-Semitism in Europe, as well as championing Jewish and Israeli causes with European politicians and the European Union.