

IN THE NEWS

Former Iranian leader calls Shoah a reality

Iran's former president said the Holocaust was a historical reality.

In what is being seen as an attack on the current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mohammed Khatami called the Holocaust a "massacre of innocent people, among them many Jews," the BBC reported.

Ahmadinejad has drawn international condemnation for repeatedly denying the Holocaust since taking office last year.

Dubai company defending itself

The Dubai company seeking to operate American ports is defending its ownership by a country that participates in the Arab boycott of Israel.

In a conference call with Jewish reporters Wednesday, Michael Moore, senior vice president for commercial for DP World, said his company follows the law in each country it operates in, which means it adheres to the boycott in the United Arab Emirates, but not in the United States.

He also noted the company services Israeli shipping companies that go through Dubai.

Bush administration officials said Wednesday that the United States is in negotiations with the UAE on a free trade agreement, which would require the country to end its boycott.

Judge denies motion in AIPAC case

The judge in the classified information case against two former pro-Israel lobbyists denied a motion from a journalism organization to weigh in.

Judge T.S. Ellis ruled Monday that the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press could not file a brief in the case against former American Israel Public Affairs Committee employees Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman because it would not help the court solve any legal issue. The men are accused of passing classified information to journalists.

WORLD REPORT

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Policy group seeks consensus on Katrina, steers clear of Iraq

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A defining moment at this week's gathering of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an organization that seeks consensus on Jewish policy, came during a fierce debate on the Iraq war.

It was defining because the organizers had already decided they would not formally debate Jewish policy on the war.

The decision to debate the Iraq war — but not vote on it — was typical of a three-day plenum that saw disagreements over how to deal with topics as diverse as how to deal with a Hamas-ruled Palestinian Authority, reform at the United Nations and the devastation wrought in the wake of last year's hurricane season.

The exception was a resolution on the massacres in Darfur that reiterated the JCPA's 2005 appeal "for the mobilization of both the Jewish and world community to end the genocide in the Sudan."

The JCPA is one of the principal organizers of a mass Washington rally on Darfur scheduled for April 30.

The JCPA, the umbrella body for the nation's Jewish community relations councils and about a dozen national Jewish groups that span the religious and political spectrum, creates policy by consensus. It's a process that many participants themselves privately call frustrating because it is difficult to achieve consensus from such a diverse range of people and organizations.

That frustration typically bubbles to the surface during the annual gatherings, and

this year was no exception.

Rabbi Israel Zoberman, from Virginia Beach, Va., chided the JCPA for even raising the Iraq issue at the conference, which began Sunday night and ended Tuesday. The Iraq discussion came at a session that, unlike most of the plenum's sessions, was not tied to any of the resolutions up for debate.

"This is the wrong issue for our great movement and the American Jewish community," said Zoberman, a Reform rabbi in an area with a high concentration of servicemen and women.

In contrast, Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said he and his movement advocated timelines that would signal an end to the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq, but whatever one believed, it was essential for Jews to debate the issue.

"What we can no longer afford to do is to walk away from the tough task of grappling with this war," said Saperstein, whose movement last summer approved a resolution to set such boundaries on the war. Saperstein spoke on a panel with Lawrence Kaplan, a New Republic writer who had taken issue in the magazine with the movement's stance.

The Iraq session was a bone for those who were unable to bring the issue formally to the JCPA's resolution session Monday night, on the eve of a day of Capitol Hill lobbying by the 400 activists from around the country attending the conference.

Getting a resolution past the relevant task force to the resolutions committee and through to the final session is arduous, and

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ Debates over Iraq, Hamas and the U.N. highlighted the JCPA plenum

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this year only 10 made it.

One of the primary criteria guiding the process is to achieve consensus, so anything too controversial is not likely to get to the full plenum, say participants in the system.

All 10 resolutions prepared for the plenum passed, but still engendered enough debate to suggest that even on issues as white-bread as isolating Hamas or supporting federal funds to rebuild the coastal regions after this past devastating hurricane season, there was some disagreement.

Some delegates objected to the resolution recommending a cutoff in any U.S. relations with a Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority because the United States has yet to finalize its policy pending a Hamas takeover. The terrorist group won a landslide victory in the Jan. 25 Palestinian legislative elections, but has yet to work out a power-sharing agreement with President Mahmoud Abbas, a relative moderate.

The objections were overruled, and the resolution urging the United States against "dealing with or providing assistance to a P.A. that is run by Hamas representatives or whose policies are guided by Hamas" passed the JCPA plenum.

Still, that fell short of policy to be touted next week by the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, at its policy conference, that would pin tougher-than-ever requirements on any assistance to the Pales-

tinian Authority, regardless of whether Hamas is in control, and would extend the requirements to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is still under Abbas' control.

Some of the JCPA member organizations had made it clear during the drafting process that they would be unable to endorse AIPAC's far-reaching restrictions.

In fact, the Reform movement, one of the JCPA's largest constituent groups, joined an interfaith appeal on Tuesday to the Bush administration to pursue a "careful" policy in the wake of the Hamas victory.

In a letter to Bush, the group supported the administration "not acting precipitously to cut off aid to the Palestinian people."

Some JCPA delegates were also clearly influenced by a session featuring Mara Rudman, a Clinton-era deputy national security adviser. AIPAC's recommendations "involve a sledgehammer when what is needed is a scalpel," said Rudman, who was one of several American Jewish monitors of the Palestinian elections.

Some disagreements derived from regional biases. The Louisiana delegation wanted to single out federal agencies in critiquing government performance in the wake of the hurricanes, but that was rejected as overly partisan.

Still, the resolutions on Katrina passed overwhelmingly, illustrating the JCPA's long-standing focus on poverty issues.

In his first opening address to JCPA as its new executive director, Steve Gutow highlighted that issue, saying: "We will fight to alleviate the poverty that permit hurricanes like Katrina and Rita to do so much more damage than

they possibly could if people did not live in such tragic economic straits."

Others linked the consensus position on poverty to the more divisive issue of the Iraq war.

Speaking of the war, Mahnaz Harrison, the chairwoman of the Pittsburgh United Jewish Federation's Community and Public Affairs Council, asked: "Can we forget about the economic cost to Americans when we are looking at social services being cut?"

The contentious issue of the war in Iraq is 'the wrong issue for our great movement and the American Jewish community.'

Rabbi Israel Zoberman
Virginia Beach, Va.

Vouchers for Jewish day schools?

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A gathering of Jewish leaders, academics and Israeli Knesset members discussed the possibility of pushing for U.S. government vouchers for private Jewish schools.

The proposal for such funding was suggested last week by several senior Israeli figures and was criticized by some of the American delegates to the World Jewish Forum hosted at Israeli President Moshe Katsav's official residence, Katsav's aides said Tuesday.

Those supporting the idea said such a government subsidy would help lower the high cost of private Jewish day school education. Robert Goodkind, president of

the American Jewish Committee, wrote in a letter to the committee that such a proposal would face rejection by many American Jews.

"The forum should be aware that a substantial majority of American Jews would be utterly opposed to such change," he said, arguing such a move could erode the sensitive boundary between church and state in the United States.

Other suggestions for strengthening ties at the forum, a body established by Katsav for dealing with Israeli-Diaspora issues, were founding a worldwide Jewish broadcasting network, an international bank to help finance Jewish education in the Diaspora and a class on Diaspora studies for Israeli high school students.

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Tour for non-Jewish students strengthens ties

By DAVID J. SILVERMAN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Bryan Hair says he traveled thousands of miles from the Christian college he attends in Tennessee to learn “the true meaning of the word courage.”

Hair had his epiphany atop a hill in an Israeli army base, peering at a Hezbollah tower less than a mile away in Lebanon.

“People live in fear there of a 9/11 every single day,” said Hair, who leads a pro-Israel advocacy group at Carson Newman College.

The American Israel Education Foundation, an affiliate of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, hosted 43 students from 40 different colleges on a first-time tour of Israel last month.

The students — from Ivy League schools, state universities, major Christian and historically black campuses — visited Christian and Jewish holy sites, army bases and tourist destinations.

The 10-day trip, the first of its kind underwritten by AIPAC, also involved meetings with policy makers, ambassadors, journalists and other opinion leaders. Other U.S. Jewish groups have sponsored tours for non-Jewish students in the past.

AIPAC says the mission is part of the pro-Israel lobby’s recent efforts to reach beyond the Jewish community to American communities not traditionally known for pro-Israel activism.

The students, all non-Jewish student leaders known for their pro-Israel sympathies, said they returned more passionate than ever before about advocating for the Jewish state.

“All these years I’ve been advocating for Israel and speaking about the U.S.-Israel relationship,” said Jamal Sowell, former student-body president at the University of Florida and now a graduate student in higher education at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. “But now that I had the chance to see firsthand what I’ve been advocating for, it takes my passion to a whole other level.”

That was the reaction AIPAC officials were hoping to hear.

“These students are America’s future leaders, and these missions give them the tools they need to become more effective advocates for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship,” AIPAC board member Barry Silverman said. Most of the students previously

had attended AIPAC student policy conferences in Washington.

Sowell, an African American, says he has been working hard to expand pro-Israel outreach to different cultures, a goal he shares with AIPAC.

“It steps up advocacy to a whole other level,” he said.

The case for Israel needs to be made by people of various cultures “because what happens in Israel is going to come back to affect all of us here in America,” he said. “I’ve tried to stress it’s not a Jewish issue — it’s a human issue.”

Many participants say they intend to pursue careers in policymaking. Brian Colas, a junior at Liberty University, a small Christian school in Virginia, is considering joining the State Department after graduation.

“Going on the trip gave me a better ability to articulate to others why it is in America’s best interests to have a strong relationship with Israel,” said Colas, the president of Liberty’s Stand with Israel club.

“Having an ally we can work with in the Middle East is the best way to achieve our long-term goals in the region of stopping terrorism, establishing democracy and getting rid of tyranny,” he said.

Colas cited a poll he read indicating that Palestinians would model their ideal government on Israel’s.

Other participants said they better understand Israel’s security situation after visiting an army base along the border with Lebanon.

Seeing firsthand how small Israel is, and how close it is to its enemies, conveys the sense of urgency, said Grant Woodard, a senior at Grinnell College in Iowa and the national president of College Democrats in America.

“It makes you understand why it is so necessary to take security measures such as building the fence,” he said.

Woodard joined Paul Gourley, a graduate of the University of South Dakota and current chairman of the College Repub-

lican National Committee, as honorary chairs of the AIPAC mission.

The two issued a joint resolution urging the United States and its allies not to deal with Hamas, the terrorist group that won a landslide victory in legislative elections last month, unless it disarms, renounces violence and recognizes Israel’s right to exist. The resolution also endorsed legislation that would tighten sanctions on Iran until it complies with nuclear inspectors.

“Israel is a beacon of freedom and democracy in the Middle East,” said Gourley, who was joined by several of his Republican board members.

Some of the more religious Christians on the trip said they always had been interested in Israel because of the Bible

and the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

“My love for Israel is genuine,” said Hair, a Baptist. “Following the political situation the last few years and going to Israel have added a different viewpoint on why I love it, without forsaking my old opinions.”

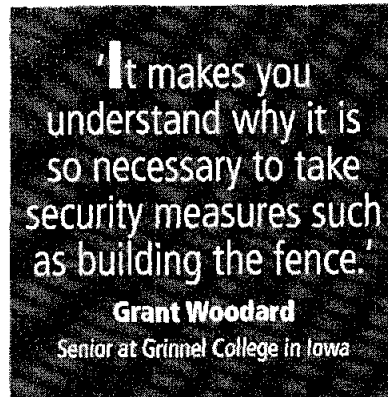
Hair expressed regret that many in the world consider Israel overly dependent on the United States.

“The world must see that Israel can stand on its own,” said Hair, as a strong, vibrant, and self-sustaining democracy.

On two occasions in Israel, the non-Jewish students joined with 84 Jewish students who were on a separate AIPAC-sponsored mission. They met with Richard Jones, the U.S. ambassador to Israel; Avi Granot, President Moshe Katsav’s top adviser; and attended a roundtable discussion with Steven Erlanger of The New York Times, Joel Greenberg of The Chicago Tribune and former CNN Middle East correspondent Jerrold Kessel.

Jewish students on the separate AIPAC tour were heartened to join non-Jewish students on some events, said University of California-Berkeley junior Marissa Matthew, who attended AIPAC’s Jewish trip.

“It makes you that much more excited to support Israel when you see that you’re not alone in the fight,” she said.



NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Gang leader denies he murdered French Jew

The alleged leader of a gang suspected of murdering a French Jew denied he carried out the murder.

Speaking calmly this week from his cell in the Ivory Coast, where he fled after the murder, *Youssef Fofana* admitted that he was involved in kidnapping Ilan Halimi, but said he did not kill him.

A lawyer for Halimi's family said he was shocked by Fofana's calm demeanor during the interview. Halimi was found brutally murdered Feb. 13 in Paris.

After initially hesitating, French officials have labeled the crime an act of anti-Semitism.

Threats issued at Ukrainian synagogue

A man burst into a synagogue in southern Ukraine, shouting anti-Semitic threats.

The incident occurred on Feb. 22 in the Geshar Synagogue in the Crimean town of Kerch.

The man, whom police later identified as Igor Nechiporenko, 30, threatened to kill Jews "to finish the Nazis' work," witnesses said.

Local Jews said this was the third time that the man insulted Jews at the same synagogue, but that police failed to react to two previous incidents.

Police are refusing to consider last week's incident a hate crime, saying it was an act of hooliganism committed by a drunk.

Boris Kapustin, the leader of the Kerch Jewish community, told JTA he fears the man "will kill somebody next time" if police don't stop him.

Australian group could pull out of WJC

The representative body of Australian Jewry is considering pulling out of the World Jewish Congress if the WJC doesn't drop a lawsuit against a former WJC official.

"That's one of our options," said Grahame Leonard, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, told JTA.

Leonard's group wrote a letter to WJC's president, Edgar Bronfman, disassociating itself from the move and asking WJC to discontinue proceedings against Isi Leibler.

The New York State Attorney General's Office recently concluded an investigation of the WJC stemming from charges by Leibler, a former president of the Australian council.

The investigation uncovered serious financial mismanagement at the WJC and a top official was relieved of financial oversight responsibilities. After the investigation ended, the WJC announced that it was filing a lawsuit in Israel against Leibler.

"It is the World Jewish Congress's responsibility to recoup the money and the losses in revenues caused by Isi Leibler's ongoing war against the World Jewish Congress," a spokesman for the group told JTA.

MIDDLE EAST

Hamas lawmakers arrested

Israeli police arrested two Hamas lawmakers in Jerusalem.

The two Palestinians, including Mohammed Abu Tier, who is second on Hamas's parliamentary list, were taken into custody Wednesday at an Arab-run hospital in eastern Jerusalem.

They were accused of trying to enlist hospital staff for unspecified illegal activities on behalf of the radical Islamic group.

Hamas had no immediate comment on the charge.

Two West Bank shootings

Palestinians killed an Israeli in the West Bank.

The Al-Aksa Brigade claimed responsibility for the drive-by shooting at a gas station near Migdalim, but Israeli police said they were not ruling out a criminal motive in the man's killing.

Hours later, an Israeli driver was seriously wounded in a shooting near the Palestinian town of Kalkilya.

In the Gaza Strip, a senior Islamic Jihad terrorist was killed when his car exploded.

Israel denied involvement in the incident.

Arab firm slams Israel deal with soccer team

An Arab country's national airline criticized the decision of a British soccer team it sponsors to promote Israeli tourism.

Emirates Airlines, which pays \$5.2 million for the naming rights to Arsenal's new stadium in London, and whose logo appears on team jerseys, censured the \$600,000 deal. The deal will go into effect for the 2006-2007 season, with an option to renew for another year.

Israel will be promoted on LCD billboards in Arsenal's Emirates Stadium, on banner ads on the team's Web site and in its official magazine, where the Jewish state will be billed as Arsenal's "official and exclusive travel destination."

The club said it cleared the deal with UAE officials, but a spokesman for the national carrier denied this, calling the deal "unfortunate," and adding that the company will "do our best to persuade Arsenal not to renew its deal with Israel."

Olmert cleared in house sale

Israel's state comptroller cleared Ehud Olmert in a real-estate probe.

Micha Lindenstrauss said in a report published Wednesday that he could find nothing suspicious in Olmert's sale of his Jerusalem villa to a Jewish American philanthropist for \$2.69 million.

Under the purchase agreement, Olmert and his wife stay on as tenants in the property, paying \$2,250 in monthly rent.

The deal had raised speculation about whether it gave the new homeowner, who has previously supported Israeli political campaigns, unfair leverage over the interim prime minister.

Olmert denied any wrongdoing.

NORTH AMERICA

Zionist elections voting concludes

Voting concluded in the elections for the World Zionist Organization.

As of Wednesday, 74,358 people had voted to select the American slate to the WZO's 35th Congress of the Jewish People, to be held in Israel in June, said Karen Rubinstein, executive director of the American Zionist Movement.

Some mail-in ballots were still expected to come in before results are announced March 6.

Thus far, nearly 87 percent of those who registered to vote actually did, besting 2002's 79 percent.

But fewer total people voted this time around: In 2002, some 88,000 people cast ballots.

"We thought that" interest in Israel's political situation "would yield a good return," Rubinstein said. "We're certainly going to be sitting down and looking at it in terms of why the numbers are going down."

Among the WZO's most important functions is providing roughly half of the decision-making power of the Jewish Agency for Israel.