


**IN THE NEWS**
**Security Council begins to talk Iran**

The five veto-holders on the U.N. Security Council began discussing Iran and its nuclear program.

Representatives from Russia, Britain, France, the United States and China started meetings Wednesday night.

The full 15-member council probably will meet early next week to consider recommendations from the five.

The Security Council may impose sanctions on Iran, but probably will start off with a non-binding letter condemning Iran for its failure to cooperate with nuclear inspectors and for concealing aspects of its nuclear program.

**Olmert plans Israel's borders**

Ehud Olmert said he plans to set Israel's permanent borders by 2010.

Israel's interim prime minister said in a Jerusalem Post interview published Thursday that, if he wins the March 28 general elections, he would order West Bank withdrawals within four years in order to "get to Israel's permanent borders."

**Senate rejects travel ban amendment**

The Senate rejected an amendment that would have restricted congressional travel.

The Senate voted Wednesday against an amendment offered by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) that would have banned travel paid for by lobbyists, but would have allowed all trips taken by educational organizations and non-profit institutions.

Pro-Israel groups have been working to ensure that the original bill, which remains under debate, does not include a ban on non-profit travel, which would hamper their ability to send lawmakers to Israel.

■ **MORE NEWS, Pg. 8**

# WORLD REPORT

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Hillel

Hillel at the University of Texas, Austin, welcomes new and returning Jewish students with a barbecue at the beginning of the school year.

## Study to Jewish campus groups: Go universal to be more effective

By SUE FISHKOFF

**O**AKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — Jewish campus organizations need to become less parochial if they want to reach Jewish students more effectively.

They also need to integrate better into university life, build better relations with Jewish studies departments and re-evaluate their current focus on reaching ever-larger numbers of students.

So says a new study of Jewish college students conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

"Particularism in the University: Realities

and Opportunities for Jewish Life on Campus," surveyed more than 2,000 Jewish students and conducted 700 in-depth interviews at 20 unnamed U.S. colleges chosen for their large Jewish student populations.

Researchers found that Jewish college students know little about Israel and avoid formal organizations. They're also proud of being Jewish but dislike events that are "just for Jews" and are likely to change their

denominational affiliation and observance levels during their college years.

And in line with their non-Jewish peers, Jewish students speak of having "multiple identities," of which being Jewish is just one

*Continued on page 2*

**FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES**

## ■ Jewish campus groups must customize programs according to each school

*Continued from page 1*

— and not necessarily the most important.

“As a result,” the study concludes, “no single universal program could attract today’s students and hold them long enough to affect their Judaism.”

Not only that, the study continues, each campus has its own particular challenges and opportunities, its own personality clashes, power struggles, and organizational structure.

So instead of looking for the one-button solution, Jewish organizations and philanthropists who want to engage the next generation in Jewish life need to be flexible, and customize programs for each school.

“Is there one thing we could do that could have an impact on a large number of Jewish students?” asks Amy Sales, associate director of the Cohen Center and co-author with Leonard Saxe of the new study. “The answer is no. Each campus is different.”

The Avi Chai Foundation sponsored the study, Sales says, because there is a lack of data about Jewish college students and how their lives and interests change during those four years. Additional funding came from the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.

The suggestion to customize programs for each campus won’t be an easy pill to swallow for Jewish organizations or their funders, Sales admits, but it’s the only approach that makes sense.

For example, on some campuses Sales and her team visited, Jewish studies

departments are popular, with excellent teachers, and are well integrated into university life. On other campuses they were “lackluster” with “uninspiring faculty.”

The majority, 55 percent, of students surveyed spend no time at Hillel or any other Jewish group, a number that has not changed much in the past two generations. But the study showed that even as Jewish students avoid campus Jewish organizations, those who are engaged are prouder of being Jewish, more likely to increase their observance and place greater importance on Jewish values.

So how can these organizations be made more appealing? By adopting a more universal approach, the study suggests.

“A lot of these students have a real appreciation for Jewish-themed programs that are open to everyone,” Sales says. “They don’t want particularistic events, they love that ‘everyone’ goes to the Purim party. They want programs that let them feel Jewish and to share that with the rest of the students.”

Hillel, the umbrella group for Jewish campus life, needs to be better integrated into the life of the university as a whole, and Hillel directors need to build better relations with their Jewish studies departments, the administration and the local Jewish community, to create what Sales calls a “Jewish-friendly campus.”

That, she says, is still rare. Although

researchers did come across some “more enlightened places” that try to create unity, more often they saw campuses where Hillel “is ‘going it alone,’” she says.

Part of the problem, the study notes, is that Hillel directors and Jewish studies faculty often distrust each other, with professors having “low regard for Hillel” and “refusing to sponsor events” that are limited to Jewish students, while Hillel directors “complain of free-thinking academics” they might consider “self-hating Jews.”

Another challenge Hillel faces, the Brandeis study continues, is balancing the tension between its goal of being an inclusive group for all Jewish students, and the proliferation

of niche groups created by more engaged students with specific interests.

In the best cases, researchers note, “the core commonality holds.”

But on other campuses, the niche groups tear at the center.

That sometimes occurs around Israel, which “often serves to divide rather than unify Jewish students,” the study notes. Students with clear opinions on Israel bring them to Hillel and form advocacy groups that “scare away” the 43 percent of Jewish students who don’t know or care much about Israel and are just looking for a safe place to be Jewish.

“You have to do Israel education,” Sales says, “but in the second semester, or later. It’s not the way to build community in the first semester.”

‘They don’t want particularistic events, they love that ‘everyone’ goes to the Purim party.’

**Amy Sales**

Associate director, Cohen Center

## Jewish students prefer ethics to Shabbat

By Sue Fishkoff

OAKLAND, Calif (JTA) — More Jewish college students place great importance on “leading a moral/ethical life” and “making the world a better place” than on observing Shabbat or supporting Jewish organizations, according to a new study of Jewish college students released by the Cohen Center at Brandeis University.

The figures vary, depending on whether the student surveyed is engaged, unengaged or a leader in campus Jewish life.

Just 24 percent of unengaged Jewish students say that caring about Israel is very important, versus 49 percent of engaged Jewish students and 61 percent of Jewish student leaders. Not surprisingly, students who have been to Israel are twice as likely to hold positive sentiments about the country as those who have not — 57 percent, as opposed to 21 percent.

They are also likely to place greater personal importance on Jewish values such as marrying a Jew, fighting anti-Semitism and observing Shabbat.

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# Frenchmen doubt murder was anti-Semitic

By BRETT KLINE

PARIS (JTA) — While Jews here are agonizing over the torture and murder of Ilan Halimi, some French remain convinced that the barbaric crime was not anti-Semitic.

The kidnapping and murder has been declared an anti-Semitic act by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, but also a violent crime whose motive was money.

CRIF, the Jewish representative council, led efforts to encourage the government to declare the case an anti-Semitic one, with CRIF President Roger Cukierman meeting with police and ministers regularly.

"People do not know what to do with such violence," said Dr. Bernard Kanovitch, a cardiologist and CRIF official. "This is an unheard of situation in post-World War II France, and the country is destabilized."

He said that Jewish community officials had said and done everything they had to.

"We have nothing more to add to this case," Kanovitch said. "I think we have to let justice run its course now."

Sarkozy increased security measures in the community following three more anti-Semitic attacks in a Parisian suburb over the weekend.

On Friday afternoon, a local rabbi's 17-year-old son was attacked by two men near the synagogue, and suffered a broken nose. Also on Friday afternoon, an 18-year-old man was attacked by a group of five men, who insulted him and stole his cell phone.

On Saturday night, a 28-year-old man wearing a kippah was verbally and physically abused by four men and suffered a dislocated shoulder, according to police sources. The culprits were found and placed in police custody.

But those incidents haven't received as much national media focus as the grisly murder of Halimi.

Since Halimi, 23, was found agonizing in a suburban train station Feb. 13 and died on the way to the hospital, the affair has been the talk of France, often in very critical terms.

Suspects reportedly told police they tried to kidnap Jews because "all Jews are rich," and they put cigarettes out on Halimi's face because "he was Jewish and we don't like Jews."

"The fact that the suspects said that all Jews are rich does not mean a thing," said

Sylvain Francois, a video editor at French television. "According to what we know now, I don't think it was anti-Semitic. It was cheap, violent crime."

"This was more an idiotic act than an anti-Semitic one," commented Gerard LeMoelle, a French television journalist. "This is not classic anti-Semitism of the extreme right or the extreme left as we know it here in France, so it can't be anti-Semitic."

"This crime is so over the top that the French are unable to see it as anti-Semitic,"

said Terence Kenny, a champagne export director originally from New York, who lives in a small town about two hours east of Paris. "Nobody wants to believe that this can be going on here, but I really don't think you can call the French anti-Semitic for being in denial."

Kenny said that Jews and anti-Semitism are not a usual subject of conversation in small-town France, but "once you begin explaining this, people agree that it is anti-Semitic."

Halimi was lured on a date with a girl who came to the cell phone store where he worked, and was then kidnapped and tortured for three weeks by a gang of young people called the "Barbarians" by the French press.

The alleged leader of the gang, Youssef Fofana, has been extradited from the West African nation of Ivory Coast, where his parents were born. Most but not all of the suspects arrested by police are of Arab North African or black African Muslim origin.

Many Arabs born in France agree that the crime is anti-Semitic.

Saida Elidrissi, an assistant bank manager of Muslim Moroccan origin, said the notion that all Jews are rich is false and is racist.

"If you replace the word Jewish with the word Arab, for me it would be clearly anti-Arab, so this is clearly anti-Semitic," she said.

"When the alleged leader was interviewed in Ivory Coast, it struck me how calm and relaxed he was," Elidrissi said. "He must be a real monster, so this is also a

sick crime."

Others used much stronger words.

"The French are cowards," said Yacine Dahmani, a technician of Muslim Algerian origin, born in the heavily North African Jewish and Arab district of Belleville in Paris. "These guys are anti-Semitic animals. The reactions of some French have disgusted me."

He said the crime clearly was anti-Semitic.

"The young people of North African and African origins born in the suburban housing projects live in clichés," he said.

"They really believe that Jews are all rich. Many of those young people are ignorant and live literally outside of society, but the French don't want to deal with any of this."

The case has brought out anger and frustration in some French people, heightening the sense of racial divide between some Gaullic French and French Muslims.

"These people are sick, and we French simply don't want to deal with this," said Chiapardelli Berengere, a city housing employee. "Our society is changing. These people are not French like I am French. The situation makes me angry."

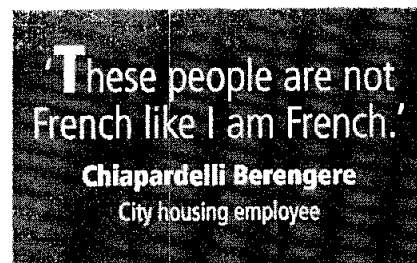
"There is little that Jews can do to deal with this French attitude," of anger and indifference, said Meir Waintrater, editor in chief of L'Arche, a widely read French-language Jewish monthly. "People cannot feel that the official response is coming from pressure from the organized Jewish community," he said. "So for now, we have to sit back and let justice run its course."

Others in the Jewish community are fed up.

"You can turn this around anyway you want, but the bottom line is that most French people do not give a damn," said Michael Sebban, an author and high school philosophy teacher in a tough northern suburb of Paris.

"I know first-hand how ignorant some of the North African suburban kids are and how much they hate Jews," Sebban said. "But I also know that my educated Arab friends know exactly what is going on. They know that most French people just don't give a damn about Jews or Arabs." ■

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES



# Without Sharon, parties vie for Russian vote

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Rows of posters of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stare down at a group of Russian immigrant voters gathered in the cramped front room of the Kadima Party's Jerusalem headquarters.

Casting glances at Sharon's image, the immigrants take turns firing off questions to Kadima candidates on healthcare, housing, and Hamas.

Zhanna Nosiakov, 27, who emigrated from Moscow in 1991 listens to the politicians but leaves as undecided as when she arrived.

"It all just seems like talk. We've seen other elections and see that nothing ever changes," said Nosiakov, who works as a secretary. She says there is a similar lack of enthusiasm among her Russian-speaking friends and colleagues.

Before Sharon — whom she calls a "father figure" — fell into a coma, Nosiakov's vote was safe with his new party, Kadima. Now, like many of her counterparts, she is uncertain. Kadima's support among the Russian speaking community has been steadily slipping since Sharon became incapacitated by a stroke in January.

Israel's political parties are in the midst of a battle for the votes of the Russian-speaking community that began

arriving in 1989. They represent some 720,000 votes, a large chunk of the diverse Israeli electorate, which heads to the polls March 28.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

During their years in Israel, the community has begun to vote less as a bloc. As a whole, its members tend to be predominantly right and center in their political views, but the younger

generation is beginning to vote along similar lines to the general Israeli population.

Furthermore, the community is a diverse group, coming from different educational and economic backgrounds. Geographically, their homes span the entire former Soviet Union, from small towns in Ukraine and mountain villages in the Caucasus to major cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg.

"It is not a united community," said Sergei Podrazhansky, the editor of Vesti, a large Russian daily newspaper in Israel.

According to a new survey by Mutagim, a major Israeli polling company, the Russian vote will fall this way: Yisrael Beitenu — 29 percent; Kadima — 18 percent; Likud — 13 percent; Labor — less than 1 percent. The remaining vote went to other parties or was undecided.

One issue that does appear to bind Russians is their desire for a strong leader. Feeling adrift without Sharon and spooked by the rise of Hamas, many are turning to Yisrael Beitenu, a hawkish party with an immigrant rights focus led by Avigdor Lieberman, who emigrated in 1978 from Moldova.

Lieberman's party, which has been gaining steadily in the polls in recent

weeks, may be the surprise success story of the election. According to recent surveys, the party could take as many as 10 seats.

Russian-speaking voters appear to be drawn to Lieberman's tough-talking approach to the conflict

with the Palestinians.

Lieberman's platform is considered controversial. One of his main proposals has been to redraw Israel's borders to include large Jewish settlements in the West Bank and exclude large Arab Israeli populations.

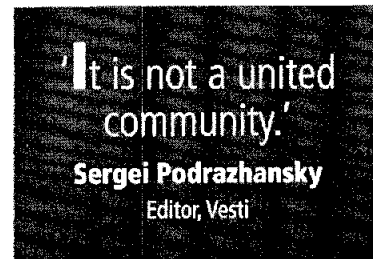
Some 90 percent of those supporting Lieberman's party are Russian speakers, said Eliezer Feldman, who oversees surveys of the community for Mutagim.

The Kadima Party is trying to woo the Russian-speaking vote through its six Russian-speaking candidates, who were presented in ads as the "commando force" of the community.

The Labor Party, meanwhile, led by former trade union leader Amir Peretz, has virtually no support among the Russian speakers. Jokingly they say that with his mustache, he looks too much like Stalin. Other points against him are that he has no higher education and that he ran the Histadrut, the umbrella union organization which reminds them of communism.

Likud, meanwhile is gaining momentum in the community. Likud campaign volunteers are going to Russian-speaking areas, trying to appeal to the Russians as a smart, thinking community that when considering the security situation, will want Netanyahu as their leader.

Netanyahu cut back social spending during his term as finance minister and now will have to work hard to erase his negative image among many in the community.



Brian Hendler

Posters of Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert are displayed as prospective Russian voters take part in a political meeting at Kadima's Jerusalem office, Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2006.

# Sharansky still fighting 20 years later

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Natan Sharansky emerges from the crumbling concrete building that houses Likud's campaign headquarters in search of a cup of coffee — and with a rare few minutes to reflect on 20 years of freedom.

"Living in a free society, especially in Israel, is full of events and developments. Every year sometimes feels like 20 years. But when you look back at 20 years it feels like a day," said Sharansky, flashing a mischievous grin.

He recalls that for days and weeks after his arrival in Israel he was unable to sleep at night, fearful that his newfound freedom was only a dream.

"I was afraid I would fall asleep and then wake up and be back in my cell," he told JTA in an interview.

Sharansky recently marked 20 years since the day he became a free man after nine years in Soviet prisons. A founder of the Jewish refusenik movement in Moscow, Sharansky became an international symbol of human rights and a champion for freeing Soviet Jewry. These days, Sharansky is busy campaigning for Likud and has a full schedule speaking on its behalf to Russian-speaking audiences. He sees this immigrant community shifting, as he has, into a fuller life in Israel.

"They are now dealing with the bigger questions of Israeli society," Sharansky said.

His path in Israel has not always been a smooth one. After entering the political fray in 1996 as the head of immigrant-rights party Yisrael B'Aliyah, he has seen his stature in Israel diminish.

When he arrived he was a symbol for everyone — on the political left and right, religious and secular. Everyone, he said, had been so involved in working for his release that they all felt he owed loyalty to their individual political agendas.

But Sharansky said he had no illusions.

"If I wanted to stay true to myself I'll disappoint everybody," he recalled telling himself.

Despite the initial success of Yisrael B'Aliyah, it has since dissolved and officially merged into Likud. Its voters have dispersed to various political parties. Sharansky, who has held three Cabinet posts, is no longer in the Knesset, although

he is deeply involved from the outside.

He resigned from the government last May because of his opposition to the government's plan to withdraw from Gaza.

Despite the difficulties, he says he wakes up every morning in his Jerusalem home and feels that he lives in paradise.

"With all the disappointments, fights, ups and downs and political and ideological" disputes, "I live with the feeling that I live in a paradise." He pauses and adds, "a paradise with much to fix."

He said his role in the refusenik movement was in some ways a good schooling in the divisions within Jewish society. Although all the organizations helping from the outside were committed to the same larger goal, he had to maneuver between their individual rivalries.

But he said he also learned a powerful lesson from his interactions with the KGB, about their perceptions of the Jewish world.

"For the KGB, there were no differences," he said. "In the KGB documents they saw us all as one."

This, he said, taught him a lesson regarding the strength of the Jewish people, something of which he thinks Jews have lost sight.

"The most important thing is how spiritual and powerful we Jewish people are," he said.

Israel's Palestinian neighbors, meanwhile, have been living under what he calls a "corrupt dictatorship." It is no surprise, he said, that Hamas won the Palestinians' recent elections; in fact, he has been warning about the possibility for years.

He said the rush toward elections would give a false impression of democracy. "Elections have nothing to do with democracy. There have been elections in Russia, under Sad-

dam Hussein. Elections (should be) the end process of democratic changes," he said, adding that elections cannot be offered as a substitute for real democracy.

His recent book, "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror," has become one of President Bush's favorite books. Bush even instructed his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, and other aides to read it.

Sharansky argues in the book that freedom and with it, human rights, is the essential ingredient for any society to thrive and that ruling powers must be careful not to appease dictatorships.

Critics see a conflict between his promotion of human rights and his hard-line approach when it comes to the Palestinians. Sharansky,

however, sees no contradiction and says the Palestinian can have a state, but not at the expense of Israel's safety and security.

He said it is time Jews remind themselves of their own achievements and power. When the Jews in the former Soviet Union were assimilated they were weak, he said.

When they recovered a sense of their Jewish identity they found their strength and in turn, their purpose, a purpose that helped him endure prison.

"We need to understand the uniqueness of our place in history," he said. ■

## INTERVIEW

'Elections have nothing to do with democracy. There have been elections in Russia, under Saddam Hussein.'

Natan Sharansky



Brian Hendler

Natan Sharansky at his house recently in Jerusalem.

# WZO elections send a message on pluralism

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — America may be thousands of miles from Israel, but some here hope that the results of recent World Zionist Organization elections send a powerful signal to Israeli leaders about American Jewry's commitment to religious pluralism in Israel.

Of the 145 delegates up for grabs in balloting for the U.S. slate to the WZO's 35th Congress of the Jewish People, 89 went to parties representing progressive religious movements — Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist.

"This is a victory for the Reform movement, both in America and abroad," said Scott Dubin, campaign manager for The Association of Reform Zionists of America, which easily won the elections, taking home just over 38 percent of the 75,686 votes cast. That gives ARZA 55 delegates to the June congress in Israel.

"It's a victory for those who want to shape Israel's agenda, to see an Israel where non-Orthodox marriages are recognized, non-Orthodox conversions are legitimate and non-Orthodox rabbis can perform these ceremonies," Dubin said.

The second-biggest vote-getter was the Religious Zionist Slate, which won 24 percent of the votes and 35 delegates. It was followed by Mercaz U.S.A., the Zionist organization of the Conservative Movement, which won 22 percent and 32 delegates.

Rounding out the list were Zionist Organization of America, 3.4 percent and five delegates; Hatikva, a liberal coalition of Ameinu and Meretz, 3.3 percent and five delegates; Likud, 2.2 percent and three delegates; Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, 1.3 percent and two delegates; Green Zionist Alliance, 1.3 percent and two delegates; Herut USA, 1.3 percent and two delegates; Dor Zion, 1.2 percent and two delegates; Russian American Jews for Israel with .85 percent and one delegate; and American Zionist Coalition, with .7 percent and one delegate.

This was the third straight election that ARZA won, though its number of delegates has dropped from 70 in 1997 to 61 in 2002 to 55 this year.

In the past ARZA ran on a slate with the Reconstructionist group, which ran on its own for the first time this year. Even taking this into account, this year's results repre-

sent a net loss of four seats for ARZA.

The Religious Zionist Slate, meanwhile, has gained seats in each of the last three elections, going from 16 in 1997 to 29 in 2002 to 35 this time.

Founded at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, the WZO — whose original goal was establishing a Jewish homeland — has convened more than 30 times to debate issues facing the Jewish people.

The WZO provides roughly half of the decision-making power of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Half of the agency's board of governors are from the WZO, as are many members of its committees.

U.S. Jewry's desire for religious equality in Israel "will no doubt be a message that will be given," said W. James Schiller, president of the American Zionist Movement, the U.S. affiliate of the WZO that ran the elections. "How it will be received and how it will be translated, I don't know — other than that, in past years, there has been movement to benefit both the Reform and Conservative movement in Israel."

However, some question whether anyone in Israel pays attention to the WZO. Yossi Beilin, leader of Israel's Meretz-Yahad Party, has called the body a "pathetic vestige of the organization founded by Theodor Herzl, which was most relevant in the years leading up to the founding of the State of Israel."

A total of 75,686 votes were cast for 12 slates this year. Although 88 percent of registered voters actually voted, the actual number of votes represents a drop from 2002, when 88,753 people cast ballots, and an even steeper fall from 1997, when 107,832 people voted.

"There is some disappointment here in the Masorti movement," as the Conservative movement in Israel is known, said Rabbi Andrew Sachs, director of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly in Israel. "Not only in the lower numbers of people who voted, but also in the apparent disinterest of the American Jewish community to financially support, or to help out on any kind of grand scale, the

Reform and Conservative movements here in Israel."

The liberal movements in Israel have spent decades fighting for parity in a religious milieu dominated by the Orthodox establishment.

Last year, Israel's High Court granted full recognition to so-called "leaping converts" — non-Orthodox converts who study in Reform or Conservative academies in Israel and complete their conversions abroad.

Non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel have not been endorsed. Israel also hasn't sanctioned marriages by non-Orthodox rabbis.

"Everybody in the Knesset understands the importance of the Jewish community in America," said Arye Meikel, Israel's consul general in New York. "Everybody is always interested in their point of view. On the other hand, I think the Knesset looks at the way of thought of the people who live in Israel and this is what determines" policy.

Even so, Sachs said, the results can't hurt.

"There's no question that having larger number of representatives from the denominations as delegates will go further toward ensuring that the allocations to the denominations here in Israel are not reduced," Sachs said. But he added, "It is, perhaps, a reflection of the apathy of the American Jewish community that so many fewer people voted."

The AZM election committee will meet in coming weeks to look at how to increase participation in future elections.

"We thought that" interest in Israel's political situation "would yield a good return," Karen Rubinstein, the AZM's executive director, said after voting concluded late last month.

Taken as a whole, the election results highlight the shift the Zionist movement in the United States has made in the past 10 to 15 years, from a movement dominated by ideological parties to one dominated by religious groups, she said.

Several observers said this may have to do, at least in part, with the fact that the religious movements have inherent recruiting grounds to get out the vote: their synagogues.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

**'It's a victory for those who want to shape Israel's agenda.'**

**Scott Dubin**  
Campaign manager, ARZA

# Esther's story carries a lesson: Help women

By MOSHE KAVEH

RAMAT GAN, Israel (JTA) — The Jewish calendar is replete with dates that bear the mark of national memory. For example, the upcoming festival of Purim has come to symbolize the survival of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. But memories aren't enough. Jewish holidays enable us, first and foremost, to take a look at our current reality and gain insights that can help us build a more just and moral society in the future.

From this standpoint, the Fast of Esther, is no less important than the holiday. Queen Esther used her resourcefulness and wisdom to reverse Haman's murderous decree. Esther's fast has become, in recent years, a day devoted to improving the status of agunot, women whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce. The name of the story is women's empowerment.

Marriage and divorce take place in Israel in accordance with Jewish law, but it is important to remember that Jewish law places most of the power in the man's hands. Jewish laws state that a couple may divorce only when the man grants his wife a bill of divorce, called a *get*, of his own free will, and she accepts it from him. Many husbands who cannot be located, or who

refuse to release their wives from the bonds of marriage, prevent women from seeking a new life. Under such conditions, countless women in Israel and elsewhere are blackmailed and abused — emotionally and economically — by husbands who place obstacles along the road to freedom.

The key to solving the dilemma lies, for the most part, with the policies of teachers of Jewish law and the Rabbinic courts. These authorities must provide swift and creative solutions to the distress suffered by agunot, because not finding a proper solution to the issue severely endangers the status of Jewish law as a moral doctrine for future generations.

The ability of the Jewish people to survive various Diasporas and serious existential dangers derives, in part, from the wisdom of great rabbinic interpreters who were able to keep an open mind and make more lenient decisions in light of changing realities.

Various practical measures can be taken to help empower agunot: separating the divorce process from the division of the couple's property; signing a pre-nuptial

agreement; having the rabbinic courts employ various Jewish rules, such as renouncing or annulling the marriage as a bad transaction; rescinding the common procedure of allowing the rabbinic court to decide matters relating to the children in a divorce; and by appointing to the rabbinic courts judges with a legal background who

are familiar with the entire gamut of the Israeli public. Application of any of these options must occupy the rabbinic world day and night in order to relieve the despair experienced by so many women.

Esther was a courageous woman. Even though she was trapped by the arbitrary rules imposed by King Ahasuerus, she made her Jewish brethren believe that they could be saved. Just as Esther's distress was the distress of the entire Jewish people, so too, the cries of the agunot and women who are refused a divorce must echo in the ears of all sectors of society and the nation. This cry must not remain muted.

*Moshe Kaveh is the president of Israel's Bar-Ilan University. This piece originally ran in Yediot Achronot.*

OP-ED

Leaving the issue of agunot unsolved endangers the status of Jewish law as a moral doctrine.

## Not just about fun: Camp seen as a key to Jewish identity

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — "Continuity" and "identity" long have been buzzwords in the Jewish community — and one essential component of establishing them as facts on the ground, advocates believe, is summer camp.

More than 400 people got together Sunday and Monday in Jersey City, N.J., as the Foundation for Jewish Camping convened its National Leaders Assembly. It was the first conference bringing together leaders of camps from across the Jewish spectrum.

The meeting drew participants from across the country to hear from funders and experts. By bringing together leaders of diverse camps, organizers also were hoping to spur the launch of a unified Jewish camping movement that will work toward what camps can't achieve on their own.

"Jewish camps are one of the fundamental places we have to put our emphasis," said Harold Grinspoon, principal of the Harold Grinspoon foundation and the Grinspoon Institute for Jewish Philanthropy. "If we're going to keep ourselves from dissipating in this marvelous democracy, it's going to be because we put our kids around the campfire," he told the assembled group.

The foundation announced at the conference that it was launch-

ing the Executive Leadership Initiative to offer experienced camp professionals business, management and leadership skills.

The program will include development seminars, on-on-one coaching and mentoring, in addition to other programming.

The initiative, known as ELI, will help to professionalize the field, one of four major areas where foundation officials believe the Jewish camping world needs to improve.

In addition, officials say, the movement must boost its advocacy capabilities; increase its capacity, and seek out money for innovative programming.

All of this, foundation leaders say, will cost somewhere in the area of a half-billion dollars. Raising that money will mean convincing philanthropists that camping is an essential component for building Jewish identity and ensuring Jewish continuity.

The foundation hopes to conduct a study on the effect the Jewish camping experience has on kids and their Jewishness. Such studies have been done in the past by individual camping movements like Ramah, the Conservative Movement's camping system, but haven't looked at the differential impact of various types of camps.

There are more than 130 non-profit, overnight Jewish summer camps in North America serving some 60,000 campers. About 12,000 college students and 7,000 other Jewish adults staff these camps.

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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Gaza crossing reopened

Israel lifted a security closure on the main commercial crossing into the Gaza Strip.

Karni crossing reopened Thursday following a closure of more than two weeks imposed when Israeli forces received warnings of a terrorist attack.

The United Nations warned last week that food supplies in Gaza were dwindling due to the lack of imports through Karni, while produce slated for export to Israel was spoiling.

### Israeli Arabs eye mainstream parties

More than one in five Israeli Arabs will vote for "Zionist" parties in the upcoming elections, a poll found.

While 36 percent of Israeli Arabs are not expected to cast votes March 28, the survey commissioned by A-Shams radio station found that more than 20 percent of Arab voters would back mainstream parties like Kadima and Labor.

There was equal Israeli Arab support of 1.6 percent for the right-wing Likud and liberal Meretz parties.

Around 58 percent of Israeli Arab votes in the elections will go to "Arab" parties that are generally anti-Zionist, the poll found.

### New Israeli drone due

Israel reportedly will unveil its biggest-ever unmanned aerial vehicle.

Jane's Defence Weekly reported this week that Eitan, a UAV with a wing-span of 80 feet, will soon be formally introduced into Israel's air force and navy.

With an altitude ceiling of 50,000 feet, Eitan is intended for long-range reconnaissance and can carry weapons payloads of up to 3,960 pounds.

Israel is considered a world leader in the unmanned aerial vehicle industry.

## WORLD

### Spaniard: Make Israel a NATO member

Spain's former prime minister said Israel should become a member of NATO as a warning to Iran.

If Israel becomes part of the Western alliance, Iran "will behave differently," Jose Maria Aznar said at a conference organized Thursday by Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, one of NATO's two main military commands.

Aznar is now a security analyst.

In recent months, the president of Iran has alluded repeatedly to a desire to destroy Israel.

NATO officials have said that the issue of Israel joining the alliance is not being considered right now.

### BBC criticizes itself over story

BBC officials censured the corporation's online news service for a biased report about the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The BBC's board of governors said a report published late last year failed to give a balanced account of a U.N. resolution regarding the 1967 Six-Day War, the Guardian newspaper reported.

The report said the resolution called for Israel's withdrawal from areas seized during that war, when in fact it called for a land-for-peace settlement and did not envision full withdrawal.

The BBC instituted a panel to investigate its Middle East reporting following complaints from pro-Israel groups that the corporation's coverage is biased.

### Security seminar for Russian, Ukrainian Jews

Some 30 Jewish community leaders from Russia and Ukraine recently attended a security seminar in Israel.

The Feb. 20-March 1 seminar, sponsored by the Ohr Avner Foundation, was organized by the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union in response to a recent spate of attacks against Jews and Jewish property in the region.

It was aimed at helping Jewish institutions in Russia and Ukraine upgrade their security preparedness.

Participants attended classes in Israeli self-defense techniques, witnessed a training session for Israeli security agents, set up virtual security systems for communal objects and took part in mock exercises.

### Rock musician blasted for Israel concert

Palestinian artists urged a British musician to cancel an upcoming concert in Israel to protest the West Bank security fence.

Roger Waters, a British singer-songwriter from the band Pink Floyd — known for the hit "Another Brick in the Wall" — announced recently that he would perform in Tel Aviv this summer.

This angered many Palestinians, who had been buoyed by Waters' past campaigning against what they call the West Bank "wall."

A group of artists wrote a letter asking Waters to cancel the concert, but were rebuffed.

"I would not rule out going to Israel because I disapprove of the foreign policy any more than I would refuse to play in the U.K. because I disapprove of Tony Blair's foreign policy," Waters told the Guardian newspaper.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Students protest scholar's speech

Jewish students at Columbia University protested a speech by a scholar critical of Holocaust restitution groups and Israel.

Some of the dozens of protesters at Norman Finkelstein's speech in New York City on Wednesday evening held up two-sided red signs showing a picture of his face with a red heart, followed by the word "Hezbollah."

Others wore white T-shirts with signs reading "Norman Finkelstein: Your Hatred Is Not Wanted at Columbia."

Finkelstein, a professor at DePaul University in Chicago, argues that Israel and Jewish organizations have exploited the memory of the Holocaust for financial and political gain. Critics say Finkelstein, the son of survivors, minimizes the memory of the genocide.

### JCPA elects new chairwoman

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs officially elected Lois Frank, a longtime Atlanta-area activist and volunteer, as chairwoman.

Frank, who was chosen at the JCPA plenum last month, has more than 20 years of experience working in the Jewish community.

She has served as chair of the Community Relations Committee of the Atlanta Jewish Federation, national advocacy chair for the American Jewish Committee, and national chair of the Jewish Coalition for Literacy.

Frank will serve a two-year term as head of JCPA, the umbrella body for Jewish community relations councils across North America.

### Jewish studies program gets federal money

An American university received a \$500,000 matching grant from the U.S. government to support its Jewish studies program.

The money, given by the National Endowment for the Humanities to Johns Hopkins University, will go toward collections and a librarian for its Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Jewish Studies Program.