

IN THE NEWS
Rice names anti-Semitism adviser

Condoleezza Rice named a senior adviser on anti-Semitism.

The U.S. secretary of state announced the appointment on Wednesday of Gregg Rickman to the newly created position.

The position stems from 2004 legislation sponsored by U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) that expanded State Department monitoring of anti-Semitism.

Rickman, for years a top Republican congressional aide, wrote a book about his years in the 1990s directing the Senate Banking Committee's investigation of the role the Swiss banks played in the Holocaust.

P.A. arms funding disclosed in transcript

Millions of dollars in foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority was used to buy weapons, Israel's Shin Bet security agency said.

The Shin Bet released a transcript Wednesday of its interrogations of Fuad Shobaki, a former Palestinian Authority financier and confidant of Yasser Arafat who was jailed in the West Bank city of Jericho until Israeli troops took him into custody in May.

Shobaki was quoted as saying that Arafat ordered the mass procurement of weapons when the intifada began in 2000.

This included the purchase of arms from Iran, some of which were sent to the Gaza Strip on the Karine-A ship in 2002.

Israel cracks West Bank terror cell

Israeli soldiers killed two suspected Palestinian terrorists in the West Bank.

Troops surrounded the Nablus hideout of an Islamic Jihad cell Wednesday, killing two of its gunmen in the ensuing firefight. Another terrorist was taken into custody.

WORLD REPORT

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Bowing to numbers, Conservatives reach out more to intermarried pairs

By SUE FISHKOFF

BERKELEY (JTA) — Stephen Lachter didn't know what to expect when a friend dragged him to a Men's Club meeting at his Conservative synagogue five years ago.

"My father was in a Men's Club, and to me, it was guys sitting around playing pinochle and volunteer ushering," he admits.

Instead, Lachter was surprised to see "interesting people having serious discussions," and he "fell into a session on kiruv," or outreach, to intermarried families. He found himself deeply involved in the conversation.

"I said to myself, this is something shuls need to be talking about," he said.

Today Lachter is a kiruv consultant, a lay leader trained to reach out to intermarried families in his Washington congregation. He's part of a nationwide program run by the Conservative movement's Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, aimed at making Conservative synagogues more welcoming to their non-Jewish members.

The initiative comes at a time when the Conservative movement is concerned about declining numbers, and is realizing the need to reach interfaith families. In some instances the push comes from rabbis, in other cases from lay people.

In the past three years, the Men's Club has held seven training seminars for lay leaders, and now has close to 40 kiruv consultants working in Conservative congregations around the country. The consultants set up kiruv committees at their synagogues

and organize discussion groups with intermarried couples, their parents and grandparents.

Lachter says it's "amazing" how eager people are to talk.

In his own congregation, "people have come out of the woodwork, people who have never talked about it before, they want to talk about how the shul treats them," he says. "How do you talk to your child who is interdating? We don't have that language. How do grandparents deal with their grandchildren, teaching them what Judaism is without

treading on toes?"

The federation also has organized rabbinic seminars for Conservative rabbis interested in the project, working on the assumption that kiruv consultants have to work closely with their rabbis to be effective. More than 120 rabbis have taken part in such seminars, including about 30 at the most recent gathering, held earlier this month at Berkeley's Congregation Netivot Shalom.

Rabbi Chuck Simon, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, is passionate about kiruv. In his two decades at the group's helm he has consistently been out in front of the Conservative movement on the issue, prodding the leadership to do more to make congregants' non-Jewish spouses feel welcome.

His work is bearing fruit, he claims. Last December, at its biennial convention, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism announced its own, more proactive kiruv initiative, which advocates a more open

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■ Conservative synagogues are doing more outreach with intermarried families

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attitude toward members' non-Jewish spouses, while still holding out conversion as the preferred goal.

That document, which has been distributed to Conservative congregations around the country, doesn't go as far as the Men's Club kiruv initiative, which Simon started working on six years ago — but he says it's a big step in the right direction.

"Four years ago, we set our goal to put kiruv on the Conservative movement agenda within five years. We did it in three and a half," he states.

In its April 2006 edition, the federation's Kiruv Initiative states its position as "in favor of conversion if possible," while recognizing that many non-Jewish spouses "lead Jewish lives and raise Jewish families" even if they don't convert themselves.

"The FJMC favors meeting these people where they are and assisting them in making Jewish choices," the document concludes.

That's a subtle distinction from the United Synagogue position. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the United Synagogue's executive vice president, speaks diplomatically about the federation approach.

"Anything one can do to encourage people to identify more clearly as Jews is good," he says. "It's not the approach we're using, but it's hard to be against an attempt to reach out to people."

The 30 rabbis gathered in the Beit Midrash at Berkeley's Congregation

Netivot Shalom were all interested in the Men's Clubs approach.

Some of their congregations already are working with kiruv consultants and have implemented some of the steps Simon advocates, such as referring to "milestones" rather than "mazel tovs" in temple bulletins and allowing for announcements of intermarriages and births to intermarried couples.

Others are considering having kiruv consultants, and have come to Berkeley to share ideas with like-minded colleagues.

Some of these rabbis, including Netivot Shalom's Rabbi Stuart Kelman, were part of The Tiferet Project, a four-year effort that culminated with last year's publication of "A Place in the Tent," a booklet that urges the Conservative movement to adopt a more welcoming attitude toward intermarried families.

"For me, it's not even a question," Kelman says of the kiruv consultant idea. "One of the reasons there's no bimah in my congregation is I'm trying to create a congregation that is accessible. I don't think the rabbis can do it themselves; the best way to create cultural change is to empower lay people."

Many of the rabbis have practical concerns: Their members are intermarrying, and they don't want to lose them.

Rabbi Chai Levy of Congregation Kol Shofar in Tiburon, Calif., notes that the most recent statistics from Marin County show that 90 percent of children aged 2-to-5 in families that identify as Jewish have a non-Jewish parent.

"The future of my congregation is, obviously, intermarried couples," she says. "I have to think seriously about these people."

Some of the rabbis say they're more forthcoming than factions in their own congregations. One rabbi, who asked not to be named, said his ritual committee was "not as progressive as I am, and I want ammunition to bring them along in the direction I think they should move."

Congregations with kiruv consultants report satisfaction with the project.

Evan Dobkins, immediate past president of Temple Israel in Ridgewood, N.J., says "behavior patterns" in his mid-sized Conservative congregation were "turning away non-Jewish spouses," and the congregation was losing members.

Two years ago he sent Howard Schreiber to a Men's Clubs training session. Schreiber, intermarried himself, had a vested interest in making the congregation more welcoming to families like his own, which have committed to raising their children Jewishly.

Schreiber set up a kiruv committee, and has organized discussion groups in people's homes facilitated by trained volunteers.

Dobkins says the congregation is very happy with the results. For his part, Schreiber is careful to stress that he's not trying to impose any particular solution, but

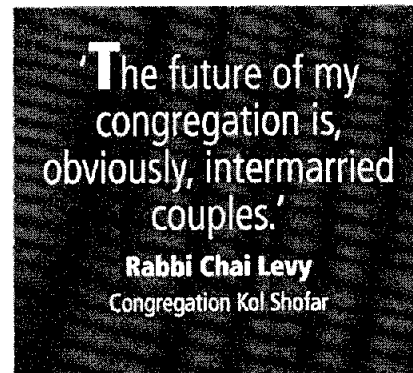
merely provoke discussion of an issue every congregation faces, and help his Conservative shul strike that delicate balance between openness and commitment to halachah.

"We've raised awareness in our synagogue," he says. "I wouldn't say our objective is change, but to make everyone in the shul comfortable with reality in a way that does not compromise the integrity of what we stand for."

Simon says the kiruv consultancy program will expand significantly in the coming year. Rabbinic and lay training seminars are planned for Cincinnati and Anaheim, Calif., this November, with more to follow in the spring. This winter the federation will begin an online evaluation of cultural change in the congregations taking part in the program.

Both Simon and the rabbis who have signed onto the project say they'll continue to push the Conservative envelope — and they're convinced they'll bring the rest of the movement along.

"All the trends go from West to East," says Rabbi George Schlesinger of Congregation Beth Ami in Santa Rosa, Calif. "Being here, we're able to be cutting edge. This will sweep across the country." ■



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Nazi archive to open to researchers

By **TOBY AXELROD**

BERLIN (JTA) — For the first time since it was created after World War II, an archive in Germany containing tens of millions of documents on victims of Nazi persecution will be open for historical research.

The International Tracing Service's 11-member International Commission announced its decision late Tuesday after two days of intensive discussions in Luxembourg. At issue was how to protect the privacy of Holocaust victims and survivors.

The decision means that historians and others soon will have access to ITS files in Bad Arolsen, Germany, on more than 17.5 million civilians who suffered under the Nazi regime. Conditions for use and publication of information still must be determined.

Paul Shapiro, director of the museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, called it "an important accomplishment," noting that it "took many years to reach this formality."

The agreement now must be ratified in each of the commission's 11 member countries.

"This is an important first step," Shapiro told JTA. "We hope the next step won't take as long. And we want it to happen while survivors are still here with us."

Arthur Berger, senior adviser on external affairs for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, said the commission expects to set up an expert panel to go to the archive in late June to assess the technology there. A project to digitize the archive — many of the documents are in very fragile condition — is more than half finished.

"We're trying to make the archive much more accessible to survivors and their families, and also give scholars access for the first time" to a huge amount of information, Berger told JTA. "It's going to take time."

Historians are sure to flood the archive with requests for a look at rooms full of dusty documents that may contain answers they've been seeking for decades.

"We are all waiting to see what the conditions for entrance are," said historian Beate Meyer of the Hamburg-based Institute for the History of German Jews.

"I heard that there are some files from the Hamburg Gestapo, and I am very interested to see those," she said, adding that the Nazi secret police "destroyed or burned all papers and documents in February and March 1945, so we have no files left in Hamburg. When we heard that there might be something in Arolsen, we were very excited."

In addition, she said, the archive is sure to contain information that would shed light on the "terrible odysseys of individual Jewish forced laborers through a lot of concentration camps."

This information should be accessible to the public, she said.

Until now, ITS files on individuals have been used almost solely to prove compensation claims. Other files, including historical background on concentration camps, have been open to researchers since 1996.

The archive also is preparing a data bank of the individual files for future research purposes.

"We are pleased that after 60 years, the millions of written proofs for the Nazi mass murder against Jews will be open for researchers. It is a strike against all those Holocaust deniers," said Rabbi Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress' Policy Council. "The opening of the archives is necessary to continue research into this dark chapter of our history; it is necessary to preserve the past so future generations could learn a lesson from it."

Germany had announced its support for the move in April, dropping objections based on the legal obligation to protect victims' privacy. But regulations still will apply to the publication of information from the files that might be embarrassing or otherwise private — such as the nature of pseudo-scientific experiments performed on people, reasons given for the arrest of individuals, issues related

to collaboration with Nazis, or sexual orientation.

Regarding victims and survivors, "you have to accept the privacy and right of someone who doesn't want to read in a book something about his sexual orientation or other such things," Meyer said.

German has strict privacy laws, but the laws go much further to protect the identity of former Nazis and their families. Historians often must remove the names of alleged perpetrators — aside from the well-known ones — from published research.

"If they are persons of public interest, you can publish almost everything about them," Meyer said.

"But if they were not sentenced in a trial, you can't publish the name."

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum had charged in March 2006 that the ITS and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which administers the

archive, had failed to cooperate with the ITS International Commission board, which voted unanimously in 1998 to open the archives.

All 11 commission members — Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom and United States — voted in favor of the move. Also present but not voting were representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The archives were created in 1943 when the international section of the British Red Cross began collecting data on missing persons at the behest of Allied forces. Bad Arolsen now houses more than 50 million card files on persecuted civilians.

In recent years, the ITS issued nearly 1 million certificates enabling people subjected to forced labor to obtain compensation. Since 1945, the archive has sent more than 11 million responses to inquiries from former victims or their families. ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

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NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Germany miffed at Hamas visit

The German government disavowed a Hamas official's visit to Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel's office said Wednesday that it was "annoyed" by this week's visit by Palestinian Authority Refugees Minister Atef Odwan, who entered Germany on a Swedish-issued regional visa.

"The German government rules out any contact with Hamas members. The Hamas minister who came to Germany is an unwanted person for the German government," a government spokesman said.

Odwan left Germany on Tuesday after lobbying lawmakers to help end the cutoff of Western aid to the Palestinian Authority under Hamas.

China presses Hamas on Israel

China urged Hamas to recognize Israel. "We don't necessarily agree with Hamas policies, but we respect the people's choice," Zhai Jun, a Chinese Foreign Ministry official, told reporters Wednesday.

He added: "On this basis, we can urge the Hamas government to respect agreements previously signed with Israel, to recognize Israel and to return to talks." China reportedly invited Hamas officials to a forum on China-Arab relations later this month.

Polish restitution bill likely delayed

The resignation of a Polish Cabinet minister could delay the passage of a restitution bill for Jewish property. Secretary of State Ryszard Schnepf quit this week after a newspaper article in a Polish daily in which he said that Poland's prime minister wants the country to join in a German-Russian oil pipeline.

Schnepf, whose father was head of the Polish Jewish community during the Communist regime, was in the midst of negotiating the details of a law that would compensate Jews for the confiscation of their property by the Nazis and Communists.

Meanwhile, a meeting that was to take place on the compensation bill earlier this week between Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and leaders of the Claims Conference was canceled.

Israel warned against going it alone

France warned Israel against setting its border unilaterally in the West Bank. On a visit to Israel, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said Wednesday that Israel should restart negotiations with the Palestinian Authority toward a peace accord.

"Unilateralism will not allow either side to achieve its goals," he told reporters. "It is inconceivable that an international border would be set unilaterally."

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert travels to Washington next week seeking President Bush's support for his "convergence plan" under which Israel, in the absence of talks with the Palestinian Authority, would withdraw from most of the West Bank and annex some settlements.

MIDDLE EAST

Dead end for Hamas?

U.S. officials have reportedly predicted that the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority could collapse by August.

The London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat on Wednesday quoted unnamed U.S. officials as saying the Hamas government would not last another three months if its international isolation is sustained.

According to the report, the Bush administration believes that the

European Union, as well as moderate Arab countries, will abide by its ban on financial dealings with the Palestinian Authority as long as Hamas refuses to reform.

Al-Qaida eyes Israeli diplomats

Israel is tightening security around its embassies after Al-Qaida loyalists called for three Israeli diplomats to be killed.

The pictures of the diplomats recently appeared as part of a hit list on a Web site affiliated with Osama bin Laden's international terror network.

Israeli sources said that in response, the Foreign Ministry has ordered heightened security at Israeli missions in potentially dangerous countries.

Peretz wants crossing opened

Israel's defense minister ordered the opening of the main commercial crossing into the Gaza Strip. Amir Peretz, who has called for Israel to help ease a deepening Palestinian humanitarian crisis, on Wednesday called for the Karni crossing to be opened.

But the decision is subject to review by the Israeli military, which has noted intelligence alerts that Palestinian terrorists will try to attack Karni or penetrate Israel through it.

NORTH AMERICA

Casey to oppose Santorum

Bob Casey won the Democratic nomination in the U.S. Senate race in Pennsylvania. Casey, who has strong Jewish backing in his bid to unseat Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), handily defeated two primary rivals, including Alan Sandals, a Jewish attorney from Philadelphia.

Casey won some 85 percent of the vote. Sandals and another candidate, Chuck Pennachio, represented a protest vote against the national party's preference for Casey, a conservative anti-abortion Democrat.

Casey is leading in polls against Santorum, one of the most conservative members of the Senate. Santorum maintains some Jewish support because of his consistent pro-Israel record.

Foundation honors Jewish educators

The Covenant Foundation gave its 2006 award to three Jewish educators.

Jane Taubenfeld Cohen, head of the South Area Solomon Schechter Day School in Stoughton, Mass.; Marc Kramer, executive director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network in New York; and Rabbi Loren Sykes, executive director of Camp Ramah Darom in Atlanta, received the 15th annual award granted by the foundation.

Each recipient receives \$25,000, and another \$5,000 is given to the recipient's institution. The Crown Family Foundation established the awards in 1991.

Y to sell Makor building

The 92nd Street Y in New York City is selling its Steinhardt Building.

The two programs housed there, Makor and Daytime, will eventually move to the 92nd Street Y.

The building was valued at \$16 million when it was donated to the Y in 2001 by Jewish philanthropist and Y board member Michael Steinhardt.

The 92nd Street Y was founded in 1874 by Jewish leaders as an educational, cultural and community center for all religions and races, and Makor is a cultural center aimed at New York Jews in their 20s and 30s.