

IN THE NEWS
UJC General Assembly opens in Los Angeles

An estimated 4,000 Jewish federation lay leaders and professionals gathered in Los Angeles for the United Jewish Communities' annual General Assembly.

This year's meeting of the North American federation system, which will run Sunday through Wednesday, is focused on Israel under the theme "Together on the Frontline, One People, One Destiny."

The gathering, which features scores of plenary, breakout sessions and workshops on Jewish communal topics, kicked off with an opening plenary highlighted by a speech by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

Olmert heads to Washington

Ehud Olmert left for a U.S. tour. The Israeli prime minister took off Sunday for a White House summit, to be followed by an appearance later in the week at the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly in Los Angeles.

Olmert and President Bush are expected to discuss prospects for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and for tackling Iran's nuclear program.

Lebanon war commander quits

A senior commander of Israeli forces during the Lebanon war stepped down. Brig. Gen. Gal Hirsch, head of the Galilee Division, tendered his resignation Sunday shortly before an internal report was issued on his performance during the 34-day war against Hezbollah.

Hirsch was blamed for security lapses that led to the abduction of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah gunmen July 12, sparking the conflict. Some of his subordinates also said Hirsch's wartime commands and tactics were unclear. Hirsch is the second member of the top brass to resign in the wake of the war.

WORLD REPORT

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Investment in outreach is paying dividends in Boston, study suggests

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — The majority of children in interfaith households in Boston — almost 60 percent, far above the national average — are being raised as Jews.

That's one of the key findings of the 2005 Greater Boston Jewish Community Study, commissioned by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the central planning and fund-raising arm of Boston's Jewish community, and carried out by Brandeis University's Steinhardt Social Research Institute.

Researchers interviewed 400 Jewish households by phone and an additional 1,400 individuals from a list provided by Jewish organizations. The margin of error differed by question.

Some local Jewish leaders say a key factor is the community's heavy investment in outreach programming — \$321,000 this year, almost 1.5 percent of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies' \$27 million campaign.

Those funds are given to programs aimed at interfaith families and individuals considering conversion run by the Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Services, the Reform and Conservative movements and other agencies.

"There's no other way to explain it," said Ed Case, publisher and president of InterfaithFamily.com, a Boston-area nonprofit that encourages intermarried families to make Jewish choices.

The study's preliminary findings, announced last Friday, show strong growth of the Jewish community, which now stands at

265,500, or 9 percent of the total population. That figure includes 57,000 non-Jews living in Jewish households; indeed, the study found that half of area Jewish households involve an intermarriage.

The number of non-Jewish adults in Jewish households has risen from 25,000 to 42,500 since 1995, the study found.

As increasing numbers of those interfaith families identify with the Jewish community, more and more are raising their children Jewish. Institute director Leonard Saxe, the primary investigator on the study, called the 60 percent figure "exceptional."

FOCUS ON ISSUES

In comparison, the National Jewish Population Study 2000-2001 reported that between 33 percent and 39 percent of children in interfaith households were being raised as Jews. The 2002 Jewish Community Study of New York put the figure at 30 percent in the New York area.

"When we first saw the 60 percent number, we said, 'that can't be true,'" said Gil Preuss, vice president for strategy and planning at Combined Jewish Philanthropies. But it made sense when he considered other figures: Some 37 percent of local intermarried families are members of synagogues, and more than 70 percent of the children who are being raised Jewish in intermarried families are receiving formal Jewish education.

The Boston study also reveals that 90 percent of local Jews "are connected in some way, even if it's just giving money" to Jewish organizations, Preuss continued.

All of this suggests a Jewish community that is vibrant and growing, in contrast to previous surveys that showed a drop-off in Jewish

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■ More than half of the kids in interfaith households in Boston are being raised Jewish

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populations in the Northeast.

Saxe and Combined Jewish Philanthropies officials are loathe to draw direct links between increased Jewish affiliation among the intermarried and increased communal investment in outreach programming, but Preuss said, "We hope it had some impact. Clearly we've tried to make the Jewish community and the CJP warm and welcoming."

Other Jewish leaders are less hesitant.

"CJP is the only federation that has made a serious commitment for over 10 years to fund this," said Paula Brody, outreach director of the Northeast Council of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose organization receives \$140,000 a year from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies for a wide variety of adult-education seminars and workshops aimed at interfaith couples and individuals considering conversion. "We offered these programs before the CJP funding, but it has enabled us to expand our offerings and advertise them in the secular press, so we can reach the unaffiliated."

Case says Boston's outreach investment rate is almost 10 times the national average given by Jewish federations, a figure the United Jewish Communities is unable to confirm.

"Boston has the most highly organized and best-funded outreach of any community, with San Francisco a close second," he said.

Preuss says the Combined Jewish Philanthropies used a 1995 Jewish communal study to redraw its strategic plan to encour-

age local synagogues and Jewish agencies to be more open and welcoming to the unaffiliated, particularly the intermarried. They increased funding for adult Jewish education, mainly run through synagogues, from \$3.6 million to \$6.4 million.

"It's an activist approach" to building Jewish identity, "connecting people in diverse ways to Jewish life," Preuss said. "That's how we see our purpose, not just to collect and distribute money."

Brody says her Reform outreach programs reach 600 to 750 non-Jews or interfaith couples every year, a number she compares to "a medium-sized congregation of unaffiliated people stepping into the Jewish community every year for the past 10 years."

One such couple is Nick and Amy O'Donnell. He's Catholic, she's Jewish, and four years ago, while they were dating, they took part in "Yours, Mine and Ours," a Reform outreach program for interfaith couples.

The program "offered a place where we could work through the things that were important to us in an environment that wasn't trying to herd us in one direction or the other," said Nick, 31, noting that they were getting enough pressure from their families. By the end of the course, they'd decided to raise their children as Jews.

"Boston has sent a particular message of welcome, and the data shows that families are responding," Brody continued. "If you put resources in this area, you will get results. You will get affiliation."

San Francisco's Jewish federation experienced similar results, according to planning director Karen Bluestone. That federation was one of the first in the nation to fund interfaith programming, she notes, following a 1986 Jewish communal study that revealed large numbers of intermarried families.

In the 20 years since, the Jewish population has more than doubled in the San Francisco Bay Area and intermarriage has increased, but increasing numbers of those interfaith households are identifying with the Jewish community.

A 2004 communal study showed that 40 percent of the children in interfaith households are receiving formal Jewish educa-

tion, and 40 percent of the adults indicated that their interest in Judaism has increased in the past five years. The numbers are about the same for Jews and non-Jews, she said.

While Bluestone admits that "there's no causality in the data," she said she sees a correlation between increased outreach and increased Jewish identification.

"Due to the investments we've made since 1986 in outreach and training to be more welcoming to interfaith families, we've seen a rise in the number of interfaith families identifying as Jews and raising their children Jewishly," Bluestone said.

Saxe says his study in Boston could "change the debate about intermarriage." He noted gender differences: The children are raised Jewish in virtually every intermarriage where the woman is Jewish, but the figure is much lower when the Jewish partner is the man.

That suggests that Boston's Jewish community should focus both on providing better Jewish education to non-Jewish mothers and on finding more effective ways to engage Jewish boys and young men in Jewish life, so they don't "run from the bimah," or dais, after their bar mitzvahs, he said.

The findings also suggest that intermarriage, instead of having a negative effect on a given Jewish population, can lead to the reverse if more intermarried families affiliate with the Jewish community.

That's true in Boston, Brody noted, where most of the "Jewish population" increase since 1995 is made up of intermarried households.

"What's remarkable is that these families see themselves not as where the Jewish partner has married out, but where the Christian partner has married in," she said.

Barry Shrage, president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, says he hopes other Jewish federations will take their cue from Boston and San Francisco.

"Other communities are beginning to invest in outreach," he said — "perhaps not to the level we have, but people are beginning to understand that it's something that needs to be done." ■

'Boston has the most highly organized and best-funded outreach of any community.'

Ed Case

President, Interfaithfamily.com



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Israel won't slow Falash Mura aliyah

By URIEL HEILMAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Leaders of the North American Jewish federation system are hailing an Israeli government decision not to halve the rate of Ethiopian immigration as an “important achievement.”

But advocates and some federation executives suggest Israel's move is just a feint, meant to distract supporters of Ethiopian aliyah from the fact that Israel still has not followed through on its March 2005 commitment to accelerate Ethiopian aliyah to 600 people per month. The current pace is 300 per month, although — until the recent backtrack — Israel had decided to cut it to 150.

“I wonder if we were sucker punched,”

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert meets with President Bush.

TUESDAY

- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert addresses the United Jewish Communities annual general assembly in Los Angeles.
- Koshersfest will take place for two days at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York.

WEDNESDAY

- The Koret International Book Awards will be presented in San Francisco.

THURSDAY

- Federal Judge T.S. Ellis holds a scheduling hearing in Virginia in the classified information case against Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, former lobbyists for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He is expected to set a date for the trial.
- The international convention of Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries takes place through Monday in Brooklyn, New York.
- The World Union for Progressive Judaism sponsors a 12-day mission to South America that will coincide with the Conference of the Jewish Communities in Latin America, a four-day gathering being held in partnership with Masorti Olami, the worldwide Conservative movement.

FRIDAY

- The 11th meeting of Germany's five-year-old Progressive Jewish student organization, Jung und Jüdisch Deutschland, takes place in Heidelberg through Sunday.

one federation leader told JTA. “They told us we're going to cut it, then we had to fight with them not to cut it, and now we should be pleased they're not going to cut it. Which is them saying to us: ‘Forget about the 600. You should be happy we're not cutting it all. This is the level for the foreseeable future.’”

In September, as part of the government's proposed 2007 budget, Israeli officials suggested halving the monthly Ethiopian aliyah from 300 to 150. However, on the eve of the Knesset vote last week that approved the budget, the director-general of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office sent a letter to the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella group, saying the plan to cut Ethiopian immigration had been dropped.

Stephen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, said the government's continued stonewalling on previous decisions to accelerate the aliyah betrays a philosophical difference about the value of Ethiopian immigrants.

“It's a matter of principle,” Hoffman told JTA. “I guess it just comes down to whether you think the aliyah of the Ethiopians is valuable or not, and I recognize that there are different views.”

At least, he added, “I'm happy we're not going backward.”

Last week, both federation leaders and the Jewish Agency for Israel, which is in charge of the immigrants' aliyah and absorption in Israel, sought to take credit for the government decision to maintain the status quo.

“If the government didn't change its policy to cut the aliyah, it's because of the lobbying of the Jewish Agency,” agency spokesman Michael Jankelowitz said. He pointed to an Oct. 24 meeting between Olmert and Jewish Agency Chairman Zeev Bielski, among others, as key.

But Robert Goldberg, chairman of UJC's board of trustees, said federation lobbying did the trick. A UJC fund-raising campaign, Operation Promise, aims to provide \$100 million for Ethiopian aliyah and absorption over the next few years, some of it channeled through the

Jewish Agency.

“It is clear that pressure brought to bear by our federation leadership — by you — has played a critical role in this decision,” Goldberg wrote to supporters last week.

“We remain engaged in supporting and assisting the preparation of the Falash Mura community in Ethiopia for their new lives in Israel with the help of the generous contributions that have been made to Operation Promise,” he wrote. “We will remain steadfast in our commitment to bringing about the conclusion of this aliyah as quickly as possible.”

There is some debate about how many eligible aliyah petitioners remain in Ethiopia. Most estimates put the population at 8,500-14,000, but independent media investigations have found that there

may be thousands more Falash Mura living in the countryside.

Falash Mura are Ethiopians of Jewish ancestry whose progenitors converted to Christianity several generations ago to escape social and economic pressures. In recent years they have been returning to Judaism — a bid, some say, to emigrate to the Jewish state along with their extended families. Most have moved from their rural homes to shantytowns near Jewish-run facilities in Addis Ababa and Gondar while they wait to emigrate.

Every month, approximately 300 are brought to Israel by the Jewish Agency. Once here, they're given housing, education and job training.

Nevertheless, many find it difficult to climb out of poverty, and many Ethiopian Israelis live on welfare in one way or another. The average Ethiopian immigrant costs Israeli taxpayers roughly \$100,000 over the course of his or her lifetime, according to government estimates.

Observers say that's partly why the government has dragged its feet for years on implementing successive Cabinet decisions to speed up Ethiopian aliyah. The original Cabinet decision to expedite the Falash Mura aliyah was taken in February 2003, when Ariel Sharon was prime minister.

I'm happy we're not going backward.

Stephen Hoffman

President, Cleveland federation

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. vetoes Gaza resolution

The United States vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel for killing civilians in the Gaza Strip. The council convened Saturday to debate a resolution, drafted by Qatar, condemning an errant Israeli artillery barrage that killed 19 Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip earlier in the week.

Nine of the council's 15 members vote in favor, four abstained, and the United States vetoed it.

The condemnation "would have used the tragic incident to advance a one-sided political agenda," U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a statement Saturday.

She noted that Israel had apologized for the incident and was investigating the cause, which was believed to be an equipment malfunction. Israel was shelling the region to stop rocket attacks on southern Israel.

The resolution "included an unsubstantiated determination that Israel had violated international law. The resolution included inflammatory and unnecessary language that would aggravate the situation in Gaza.

"The resolution, moreover, failed to include any reference to terrorism or to condemn Hamas for its threats to broaden the attacks against Israel and the United States," Rice said.

Bush calls for help in Argentine warrants

President Bush called on the international community to assist Argentina in arresting a former Iranian president wanted in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center.

"We applaud Argentina's justice system for its tenacious pursuit of justice against the perpetrators of this terrible attack, and stand ready to support the Argentine prosecution in any way we can," the White House said in a statement over the weekend, referring to the blast at the AMIA Jewish center in Argentina that killed 85 people and wounded 300.

"We call on all governments to support the Argentine government, to condemn such violent acts, and to work with the community of concerned nations to combat terrorists and all those who fund, support, harbor and encourage them." Judge Rodolfo Canicoba-Corral issued warrants last week naming former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, six other former Iranian government officials and one Hezbollah operative as accomplices in the attack.

MIDDLE EAST

Hezbollah ministers quit

Hezbollah and another Shi'ite party, Amal, quit the Lebanese Cabinet. Five ministers from Hezbollah and its allies resigned Saturday after talks collapsed with the Lebanese government over increased control for the pro-Syrian Shi'ite factions.

Hezbollah would not budge on its demand for enough Cabinet seats to give it veto power over all major government decisions. Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora did not accept the resignations, which means the Cabinet is still legally intact. Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah threatened demonstrations Monday if the group's demands are not met.

Peaceful gay pride rally in Jerusalem

About 2,000 people gathered Friday under heavy police guard for a gay pride rally at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Participants waving rainbow flags and holding signs calling for civic equality thronged the stadium at the university's Givat Ram campus.

The venue was a compromise between gay activists and fervently Orthodox representatives after two weeks of violent Orthodox protests against the gathering, originally planned as a march through downtown Jerusalem.

The crowd was a mix of gay and straight Israelis, many of whom said the violent demonstrations spurred them to come to the rally.

"When I saw where the violence could lead I felt it was my obligation to be here," said Dvora Jacobi, 63, a chemist from Rehovot.

The event passed without serious incident, but police did detain five religious men found at a Jerusalem park with clubs, knives and a gun.

Olmert: Don't leave Iraq prematurely

Ehud Olmert urged the United States not to withdraw prematurely from Iraq.

"If there is a premature pullout before Iraq has a robust government with a strong authority that can keep the country from collapsing into an internal civil war, America will have to think about the possible ramifications on neighboring Arab countries with moderate governments," the Israeli prime minister said in an interview in *The Washington Post's* Sunday edition.

"How will it affect the stability of these countries against the radical forces that might flourish as a result of a premature pullout of America?"

Iran threatens retaliation

Iran threatened to retaliate for any Israeli military strike against its nuclear sites.

"If Israel takes such a stupid step and attacks, the answer of Iran and its Revolutionary Guard will be rapid, firm and destructive, and it will be given in a few seconds," a spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said Sunday.

WORLD

World Jewish Congress convenes

The World Jewish Congress governing board convened Sunday in Paris. More than 100 Jewish leaders from around the world were expected.

Guest speakers include Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European commissioner for external relations; Thomas Hammarberg, commissioner for human rights at the Council of Europe; and Ambassador Marc Otte, E.U. special representative to the Middle East peace process.

A session devoted to inter-religious dialogue will feature Dalil Boubakeur, president of the French Muslim Council; French Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk; and Andre Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris. French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin will deliver the keynote address at a dinner for delegates at the French Senate.

Serbian neo-Nazis sentenced

Fifteen neo-Nazis in Serbia were sentenced to up to one year in prison for disrupting last year's Kristallnacht commemorations.

The Novi Sad issued sentences ranging from suspended sentences to three months to a year in prison. The neo-Nazis barged into an anti-fascist gathering memorializing Kristallnacht, the evening of Nov. 9, 1938, when Nazis attacked Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues in Germany and some parts of Austria, heralding the onslaught of the Holocaust.

The accused were filmed swinging crowbars and shouting anti-Semitic slogans. "This conviction should be a lesson for the future, so something like this would never happen again," said the presiding judge, Djurdjina Bjelobaba, according to *The Associated Press*.