

IN THE NEWS
Merkel: Stop nuclear Iran

Germany's chancellor said the world must prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons. "It is time that the U.N. Security Council address sanctions," Angela Merkel said after meeting Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, according to a release issued by the German Embassy in Washington. Merkel reportedly also vowed to stand by Israel against Iran.

"Israel will never face Iran alone. Germany will be beside it like a fortified wall," Yediot Achronot quoted Merkel as telling Olmert. According to the newspaper, Merkel told Olmert that Germany has reduced its trade with Iran by 12 percent to protest the policies of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has called repeatedly for Israel to be destroyed.

Rabbis disappointed after Carter meeting

A group of six rabbis from Phoenix met with former President Carter to discuss concerns about his new book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Rabbi Andrew Straus, who initiated Tuesday's meeting, said Carter pledged to condemn Palestinian terrorism more vigorously, though Straus and others left the meeting sad and frustrated at Carter's refusal to work for the release of captured Israeli soldiers.

Carter said his efforts to negotiate a prisoner exchange were rebuffed by Israel.

Israel to rule on targeted killings

Israel's highest court will rule on the legality of targeted killings in the Palestinian territories.

Ha'aretz reported that a ruling by the High Court of Justice is expected Thursday, nearly five years after the Public Committee against Torture in Israel petitioned the court in January 2002 to end the policy.

WORLD REPORT

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On human rights holiday, a call for tikkun olam

By BEN HARRIS

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's been 58 years since a new religious holiday was widely recognized by the Jewish community, but Rabbis for Human Rights hopes a historic event marking its 58th anniversary this year will be the newest addition to the Jewish cycle.

International Human Rights Day, celebrated each year on Dec. 10, marks the U.N. General Assembly's adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a landmark document that launched the contemporary movement for the protection of basic civil, political and social freedoms.

Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, the domestic counterpart of the Israeli group, chose this year's commemoration to launch its first conference on Judaism and human rights to draw attention to an oft-overlooked international holiday and to the group's campaign against torture.

A ceremony Sunday across from United Nations headquarters in New York had a distinctly religious flavor, with readings and prayers drawing from Jewish and non-Jewish sources and the lighting of a symbolic Chanukah menorah for human rights.

"Never in human history has Human Rights Day been viewed as an important day, and we would say a sacred day," Rabbi Brian Walt, the North American group's executive director, told JTA. "We hope we will encourage and inspire the Jewish community to see the consonance between the teachings of Judaism and its contemporary expres-

sion in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The conference signifies not only the North American group's development into an entity that does more than just financially support its Israeli counterpart; it also reflects the emergence of tikkun olam — literally "repairing the world" — as a defining element of American Judaism and an integral component of rabbinic training programs.

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, a 7-year-old Orthodox rabbinical school in New York City, requires the study of texts relating to Jewish ethical obligations, as well as a course on community organizing that teaches students to build coalitions around issues of common concern and to leverage those alliances to push for political change.

At the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, a \$1.5 million endowed chair in social responsibility is part of a new leadership preparation program that focuses partly on social-action training. The program requires rabbinical students to study Jewish texts related to tikkun olam and perform field work in that area with rabbinic mentors.

"On a voluntary basis, we've had electives in social action and social responsibility over the years, but it's now becoming a required part of the core curriculum of the rabbinic program," said Rabbi Norman Cohen, provost at HUC.

Jonathan Sarna, a professor of Jewish history at Brandeis University, describes the trend as a "cyclical phenomenon" that

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *The Jewish embrace of the social-justice agenda varies across denominations*

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was last evident in the post-World War II period, but regressed in the 1980s as American Jewry began to look inward.

"There was a pendulum shift widely perceived away from some of these universalistic notions and toward greater concern with Jewish issues," said Sarna, citing the campaign for Soviet Jewry as a prime example. "What is so interesting is that we've seen a move back in the other direction."

The Jewish community's embrace of the social-justice agenda varies across denominations. Nearly a third of attendees at this week's conference, which ran Sunday to Tuesday, came from the Reconstructionist movement, a stream that makes up less than 3 percent of American Jewry.

The Orthodox community, meanwhile, was vastly under-represented, with only a handful of rabbis and students taking part in the conference.

Rabbi Dov Linzer, head of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, recognized the hesitation in the Orthodox world to become involved in organizations such as Rabbis for Human Rights. A conversation Monday among Orthodox participants in the conference — virtually all of them affiliates of Linzer's yeshiva — dealt exclusively with how to draw more Orthodox rabbis into human rights work.

"Traditionally, modern Orthodoxy was a lot about what we can get from the outside world in terms of culture, how we can be intellectually enriched," Linzer told JTA. "Where that really falls short is understanding what we owe the outside world."

A true modern Orthodoxy and true engagement is not just about taking, but about giving as well."

There are exceptions, of course: This summer's rally in Washington against the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, drew a large Orthodox contingent, including several busloads of students from Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Kenneth Brander, dean of Y.U.'s recently established Center for the Jewish Future, is on the rabbinic advisory board for the American Jewish World Service, a Jewish social justice organization that founded the Save Darfur Coalition with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

But some Jewish groups have been turned off by the human-rights community's frequent abuse of human-rights law to demonize Israel. And Orthodox groups have been slow to unite with liberal rabbis around the issue.

Some, like the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel, generally don't participate in cross-denominational efforts. Rabbi Avi Shafran, the group's public affairs director, said his organization doesn't want to "muddle the message that we stand for" by uniting with non-Orthodox rabbis.

But Tsvi Blanchard, one of the few Orthodox rabbis at this week's conference, says Orthodoxy has been preoccupied for several decades with its own internal community building.

"It's only been recently that, outside of individual members of the community, there's been the social-cultural-religious resources to reach out beyond ourselves," said Blanchard, director of organizational development at CLAL—the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

To the extent that Orthodox Jews are prepared to become active beyond their communities, Blanchard says they're

unlikely to do it with groups that are perceived as less than fully supportive of Israel — an accusation that has dogged Rabbis for Human Rights due to its vocal activism on behalf of Palestinians.

The original Israeli group has been a leading voice of opposition to the Jerusalem municipality's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes built without proper permits.

Rabbis for Human Rights says the municipality routinely denies building permits to Arabs. Municipal officials have said that Palestinians, sometimes sponsored by the Palestinian Authority, build illegally in an attempt to claim disputed land.

That issue intruded unexpectedly on the conference: Word arrived Monday morning that a home whose demolition Rabbi Arik Ascherman, executive director of the Israel-based group, tried unsuccessfully to prevent in 2002 had just been destroyed again after Rabbis for Human Rights helped rebuild it in 2005.

The assembled rabbis and rabbinical students quickly composed a letter of protest to Israeli and American officials and held a press conference Monday at the Israeli Consulate in New York. They also raised enough money to rebuild a significant part of the dwelling.

In describing the letter to his colleagues at the conference, Walt described himself as a proud Zionist. In an earlier interview with JTA, he rejected the suggestion that the group's work on behalf of Palestinians implies a lack of concern for Israeli security.

"Yes, we do oppose the policy of administrative home demolition, but that's not a security concern," he said. "In fact, I would argue the demolition of homes is in some ways a policy that endangers the security of Israel."

Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna describes the interest in tikkun olam as a 'cyclical phenomenon' that was last evident in the post-World War II period.



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Chief rabbi joins environmental call

LONDON (JTA)— Britain's chief rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, signed a letter representing a multifaith call "for urgent attention to and action on the environment."

The letter, published in the London

Times last week, said, "As religious leaders from several different faiths, we can draw upon the teachings on environmental conservation in all our traditions."

\$5 million bonus for birthright

By JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and his wife, Miriam, will donate an estimated \$5 million for 2,000 young adults to participate in a birthright Israel trip.

The individuals are among the 20,000 to 40,000 who are on the waiting list for birthright, which provides free 10-day trips to Israel. The waiting list has grown for the popular program for college and post-college Jews because of insufficient funding.

The development comes amid speculation that Adelson is about to start a foundation that would give between \$200 million and \$250 million annually to Jewish causes and Israel.

The organization announced the gift at its banquet Monday evening.

Associates of Adelson have said that he is contemplating underwriting the entire birthright Israel waiting list, but that deal is not yet in its final stages.

Adelson, the CEO of Las Vegas Sands Corp., which owns and operates the Sands and the Venetian Casino Resort in Las Vegas, seems to be positioning himself as one of the top American Jewish philanthropists.

The son of a Boston cab driver, Adelson, 74, first made the Forbes Fortune 400 list in 1995 after selling his computer trade-show company Comdex for more than \$800 million.

After buying the Sands and taking it public, his wealth skyrocketed. Adelson, who is building a Vegas-like strip in Macao, China, is estimated to make \$1 million an hour.

His publicist told JTA that he is expected to overtake Warren Buffet as the second wealthiest American sometime in the next year.

In November he and his wife, an Israeli-born doctor, gave \$25 million to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Israel. Adelson is also building a state-of-the-art, \$25 million Jewish community high school in Las Vegas, where he lives. He has also built a Chabad center there.

Adelson, a major funder of Republican candidates, is also involved with the Anti-Defamation League and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

According to his longtime friend Arthur Marshall, the chairman of the

Bank of Nevada, Adelson is fulfilling his dream by giving to Jewish causes.

"We were at an AIPAC meeting several years ago at the Venetian," Marshall said. "The room was dark and quite filled, and Sheldon leaned over to me and said, 'Art, at the end of my life, all of the money and hotels won't mean anything to me. The only thing that will count is if I do something for my people.'"

Orthodox to boycott El Al?

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For El Al, the skies just got a lot less friendly.

The airline created as Israel's national carrier, which recently was privatized, is scrambling to fend off a boycott threat from fervently Orthodox customers angered by its apparent breach of religious law.

It all began at the end of November when, in a bid to relieve a backlog caused by the closure of Ben Gurion Airport in a labor dispute, El Al allowed some flights to operate into Friday night, the beginning of Shabbat. There also was a report of El Al passengers on a flight out of Russia being served non-kosher sandwiches.

Fervently Orthodox Jews, who make up as much as 30 percent of El Al's clientele, grumbled for weeks afterward about the need for the carrier to sign a contract committing to ritual code.

Then Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, leader of the powerful Lithuanian religious community, issued an edict Sunday ordering his followers to stop flying El Al.

"It is not reverential of the heavens, and it is not proper, to fly El Al — even if this means a heavy price to pay," he wrote.

Elyashiv speaks for tens of thousands of Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and religious experts predicted that other fervently Orthodox sects would follow suit.

Ma'ariv projected that a sweeping embargo by the community could cost El Al as much as \$320 million a year in lost revenues. The Israeli daily quoted an unnamed official at the airline as saying El Al could be forced to fly full-time on Shabbat in order

to stay solvent. Birthright, which started providing free trips to Israel for Jews aged 18 to 25 in 2000, sent its 100,000th participant to the Jewish state this summer.

Started by philanthropists Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman, the program has been jointly funded by private philanthropists, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Israeli government and the North American federation system. ■

to stay solvent.

The airline has been fighting to stay competitive since the privatization, despite rising fuel costs and the launch of rival Israeli carrier Israir.

Secular Israeli commentators saw a new struggle for the soul of the Jewish state. But for many religiously observant Jews, it was just a legitimate use of market forces.

"This is not even a struggle," said Yossi Eliatov, deputy editor of the fervently Orthodox journal BaMishpacha. "This is an implementation of the consumer's elementary right to service with respect — if not respect for values, then for the customer, and if not for the customer, then for the company's economic interests."

El Al has long considered flying on Shabbat, arguing that operating just six days a week makes it difficult for the airline to compete. When it was the national carrier, company leaders were

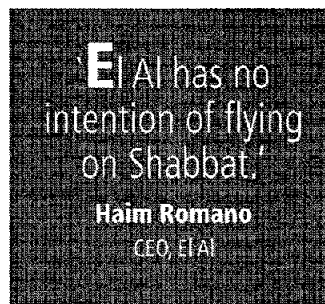
more willing to bend to religious dictates, but when the Israeli government interest was sold many speculated that El Al would begin operating seven days a week.

But El Al CEO Haim Romano says that's not in the cards. While El Al is far from formally accepting Orthodox dogma, Romano said there was no plan to disrupt a decades-old status quo against Shabbat flights.

"El Al is the only Israeli airline in the world that keeps Shabbat and honors it," he told reporters. "El Al has no intention of flying on Shabbat."

According to Romano, talks were under way with representatives of the fervently Orthodox community to stem the crisis.

"There is no boycott," he said. ■



NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Bush to meet with Jewish educators

President Bush will meet with leading Jewish educators.

Bush will use his annual Chanukah meeting with Jewish leaders, set for Dec. 18, to focus on higher education.

He plans to meet with leaders of Hillel, Chabad and Jewish universities, as well as some students.

Also Monday, Bush will light the White House menorah and host the White House's annual Chanukah party.

Annan to refugees: Settle for Palestine

Kofi Annan hinted that he thinks Palestinian refugees should accept resettlement in a future Palestinian state.

The outgoing U.N. secretary-general gave a valedictory speech Tuesday in which he discussed at length the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and how to solve it.

He called for Israel to remove all troops and settlers from the West Bank, so Palestinians can build a state there and in the Gaza Strip.

This, he said, would lead to "a solution that respects the rights of Palestinian refugees and is consistent with the two-state solution and with the character of the states in the region."

Saudi envoy talks about common interests

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington discussed areas of common interest with Israel when he met with a pro-Israel group.

Leaders of the Israel Policy Forum, a group that backs increased U.S. engagement in the Middle East, met Monday with the ambassadors of Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and met last week in New York with the Egyptian ambassador.

Prince Turki al-Faisal, the Saudi envoy, stressed "the growing commonality of interests between Israel and the kingdom in the wake of Iran's ascendancy," an IPF statement said.

The meeting was Prince Turki's last before his sudden resignation from the post this week and his return to Saudi Arabia.

Duke howls at Wolf

Appearing on CNN, David Duke attacked Wolf Blitzer as an "agent of Israel" and said President Bush's advisers sounded like "a Jewish wedding."

Duke, a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, a former Louisiana state legislator and a Holocaust denier, attended a conference in Tehran this week questioning the veracity of the Holocaust.

MIDDLE EAST

Gunmen kill Hamas judge

A Palestinian judge was shot dead in front of his Gaza courthouse. Wednesday's killing of Bassam al-Fara in Khan Yunis was the second assassination of a Palestinian judge this week.

No one took responsibility.

In addition to his judicial duties, Fara was described as a senior member of Hamas' military wing; the terrorist group blamed his death on the rival Fatah faction.

Fatah spokesmen denounced the "act of anarchy," but also said Fara was involved in attacks on Fatah members.

Jewish Agency eyes pensioners

The Jewish Agency for Israel is launching a campaign to attract American Jewish pensioners as immigrants.

The project, reported Wednesday by Ma'ariv, would target well-off American Jews aged 65 and over in hopes that they will retire

to Israel, bringing their savings — and possibly their children and grandchildren — with them.

"This could be a significant contribution to the economy and tourism, and to strengthening the connection between the Jewish communities and Israel, because these people are well known and are leaders in their communities," Jewish Agency Chairman Zeev Bielski told the newspaper.

Olmert invites pope

Ehud Olmert invited Pope Benedict XVI to visit Israel.

The Israeli prime minister reiterated the long-standing invitation during talks Wednesday with the pontiff in Vatican City.

Israel Radio quoted the pope as saying he would be happy to visit the Holy Land "when the political situation calms down."

Iran calls for action on Israeli nukes

Iran called for international action against Israel's assumed nuclear arsenal.

Tehran's Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's apparent admission of nuclear capabilities in a television interview earlier this week warranted foreign intervention.

"This confession reveals a real threat to security and stability in the Middle East, and shows the evil aims and plots of this regime," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini, who called for "effective and rapid measures in the U.N. Security Council and the Organization of Islamic Conference and other regional organizations to combat these explicit threats."

Olmert aides have denied he reversed Israel's policy of "ambiguity" over its nonconventional capabilities.

Israeli gets 3 years for church bombing

An Israeli man was sentenced to three years in prison for attacking a Nazareth church.

Haim Eliahu Havivi, his wife, Violette, and their daughter entered the Basilica of the Annunciation in March with a baby stroller loaded with firecrackers and gas canisters.

Ensnared in the riots left 13 police officers and 13 civilians wounded, as well as four cars in flames. Violette Havivi, who is Christian, received a six-month suspended sentence. The couple were convicted in September of conspiring to commit a crime, incitement, general mayhem and unruly behavior in a public place.

Gaza mutineer gets off lightly

A former Israeli army officer who refused orders to help evacuate West Bank settlers was spared serious punishment.

A court-martial on Tuesday decided to make do with a reprimand in the case of the ex-captain, who was discharged after his act of ideological insubordination in the summer of 2005.

The defendant, who commanded a combat engineering platoon, refused orders to block an access road to two of four West Bank settlements that were evacuated under then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan.

Media reports described the officer as a resident of Kiryat Arba, another West Bank settlement.

Diplomats join Yad Vashem symposium

Forty diplomats are to join a symposium at Yad Vashem on Holocaust denial. "Holocaust Denial: Paving the Way to Genocide" will take place Thursday.

Ambassadors attending the symposium — partly a response to a Holocaust denial conference in Iran this week — will come from 40 countries, including the United States, Uzbekistan, Greece, Poland and Mexico.