

Canadian Jewish news

Canada urged to push for changes to UNRWA

By PAUL LUNGEN

TORONTO - Canada has a unique opportunity to take the lead in pushing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency 2for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) to exclude Palestinian terrorists from its payroll and to adopt the same criteria on refugees that the UN uses elsewhere, an Israeli researcher said last week.

David Bedein told a small workshop at the Shaarei Shomayim Congregation that Canada has leverage as chair of the Refugee Working Group, an independent multilateral assembly that supplements bilateral discussions on Palestinian refugees. Canada can push for the application of the principles used by the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the Palestinian situation, he said.

Ottawa urged to act against suicide bombing

By PAUL LUNGEN

TORONTO - The Canadian government is being asked to use its influence at the G8 meetings in Russia this summer to make suicide bombing a crime against humanity.

Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay was asked to consider the step as part of Canada's role in the war on terror, said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Rabbi Cooper met with MacKay and other lawmakers two weeks

ago as part of a Canadian visit during which he released Digital Terrorism & Hate 2006, a CD that contains updated information about the use of the Internet by terrorists and hatemongers. Rabbi Cooper also met with Justice Minister Vic Toews and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day.

Rabbi Cooper said the G8 meeting is expected to be contentious, "but suicide bombing can't wait. If there's a joint resolution on this, [it will mark] an important step forward."

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Since its creation in December 1949, UNRWA has had jurisdiction over Palestinian refugees, while UNHCR has a mandate to address the humanitarian needs of all other refugees around the world. UNRWA has departed from the principles of resettlement and normalization that UNHCR applies universally in all other refugee situations, said Bedein, founder of the Israel Resource News Agency.

Instead of "resettl[ing] refugees with dignity," UNRWA predates its operations on a "right of return" for Palestinians to homes they once possessed in what is today Israel. Bedein argued that "right of return" does not exist as a principle in international law and that by advocating it for Palestinians, UNRWA has kept them in "a situation of limbo" since 1949.

As a result, UNRWA is guilty of "the ultimate crime of manipulating people's human dignity," he stated.

Bedein said UNRWA's staff includes many members of Hamas, the radical Islamic terrorist organization that recently formed the Palestinian Authority government. Canada, which has announced it will not fund the Hamas government, co-ordinates the 38 donor countries who provide funds for the UNRWA payroll, gives UNRWA \$11 million and makes sure it remains solvent, Bedein stated.

In addition to UNRWA's employing numerous Hamas operatives, schools it administers in refugee camps use textbooks that fuel the conflict with Israel. They ignore the historic Jewish connection to the land and maps in the textbooks don't include Israel at all, he said.

Bedein said the concept of the right of return has been integrated into the "UNRWA curriculum" and is part of the pervasive atmosphere in the camps. UNRWA camps have celebrated Martyrs' Day, which honours suicide killers.

Bedein said donors providing funds to UNRWA should demand accountability of how those funds are used in UN schools.

Bedein's address was sponsored by the Media Action Group and the Canadian Coalition for Democracies.

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Major life insurers revise Israel travel guidelines

By PAUL LUNGEN

TORONTO - Manulife Financial, Transamerica Life Canada and Sun Life Financial, three of the country's largest insurers, are advising brokers and distributors that they have revised their foreign travel guidelines to permit the sale of life insurance to travellers who visit Israel.

Manulife, Canada's largest insurer and the second-largest in North America, issued guidelines recently that advised retailers, "It may be possible to cover travel to Israel (excluding West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights), Bahrain, Qatar and United Arab Emirates for up to eight weeks on a standard basis if the applicant is under age 75."

The advisory followed one from Sun Life, which states, "For life coverage, travel to rateable countries for a maximum of eight weeks annually can now be considered for standard rates. Previously, in order to qualify for standard rates, travel was limited to a maximum of four weeks annually."

"Manulife has been at the forefront of assisting me with helping to obtain a positive response and clarification on the Israel travel issue for the past two years," said David Brown, partner with insurer and financial planner Al G. Brown & Associates.

Brown has been among a number of agents working to convince insurers to lift restrictions on life insurance sales to people visiting Israel. Until recently, policy issuers declined to write life insurance to individuals who planned to visit Israel for prolonged periods. Re-insurers, which assume much of the risk, were convinced that travel to Israel was too dangerous and declined to back such policies.

Brown contended that these fears were not grounded in statistical data.

Responding to concerns expressed by insurance retailers, insurance companies have been issuing policies that excluded liability for policy holders while they were in Israel over a certain length of time, or which charged travellers higher premiums.

Brown cautioned that while the large insurers will now write policies for visitors to Israel, there is no blanket promise of coverage. The Manulife advisory's second paragraph states: "The underwriter will consider factors such as plan reinsurer, length of travel, applicant's age and underwriting assessment when determining if travel to a particular country is insurable. The travel risk for countries are reviewed regularly, and if the risk changes, then the underwriting position will also change."

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Matzah Girl

Toronto Heschel School kindergartner Amanda Kauffman makes holes in rolled-out dough to prevent bubbles from forming during the matzah-baking process. She and her fellow Heschel students in senior and junior kindergarten visited the Chabad Lubavitch Model Matzah Factory earlier this month.



BRIAN SCHARFSTEIN / CHAIR

BOB SILVER / FOUNDING CHAIR

BRIAN SCHARFSTEIN

APPOINTED CHAIR OF GROWWINNIPEG

Dr. Ted Lyons, President of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, is pleased to announce the appointment of Brian Scharfstein as Chair of the GrowWinnipeg Steering Committee. Brian has been involved in employment networking for immigrants and young people, working with groups of young people to meet their needs in the community and helping with resettlement. He brings continuity, experience and renewed energy to the task of planning the next stages of GrowWinnipeg. "I look forward to the opportunity to meet with more young people who will shape the future of our community. I also look forward to reaching out to my contacts in the business community of Winnipeg to enlist their help in successfully integrating new immigrants into our workplaces, even as we make room for our new graduates."

Bob Silver has provided the community with an outstanding contribution in launching GrowWinnipeg and serving as its founding chair. The Jewish community has welcomed more than 1500 new immigrants in five years. Under Bob Silver's watch the Federation developed a strong relationship with Manitoba Immigration who accepted the JFW as a community support organization for the Manitoba Nominee Program. At the same time the committee began developing strategies to promote Manitoba to our young people with newsletters and employment networking fairs. The Jewish community is indebted to Bob Silver for his ongoing commitment and involvement.

U.S. Jewish news

Focus on issues

U.S. officials looking to Israel for partnership and ideas against terror

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) - For years, American law enforcement and security experts have been looking to Israel for the latest in homeland security practices. Now Congress is hoping to work with Israel and other at-risk countries to develop science and technology applications to fight terrorism.

Israel advocates are behind new legislation that would create an office within the Department of Homeland Security for counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and its allies. Israel is one of a handful of countries named in the legislation that U.S. officials believe could provide technological assistance. The effort comes as numerous states and municipalities, as well as law enforcement agencies, are sending representatives to Israel to pick the brains of counterterrorism leaders.

While there is much to be learned from watching Israel fight terrorism, even more can be garnered by partnering with them in developing new tools, lawmakers said. "We have gone and looked at what was there, not with a notion of partnering with cooperation, but taking back what we saw and trying to duplicate it," said Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), a co-sponsor of the legislation and the ranking Democrat on the U.S. House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee. "With this legislation, we are fostering that cooperation so that we can jointly produce the best technology available."

The bill creates a new office and grant program in the Homeland Security Department that would foster cooperation between research and development communities in the United States and countries like Israel. Also mentioned are the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Singapore. The bill was introduced by Thompson and Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, as well as the chairman and ranking Democrat on the subcommittee on emergency preparedness, science and technology, Reps. Dave Reichert (R-Wash.) and Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-N.J.). It was unanimously approved by the subcommittee last month.

The legislation has been supported by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which in recent years has worked to promote U.S.-Israeli partnerships in homeland security to highlight the value of the bilateral relationship. "We believe its passage will contribute to a safer United States, a safer Israel and better safety for all other American allies in the war against terrorism who participate in international cooperative programs through the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate," AIPAC's executive director, Howard Kohr, and deputy director for policy and government affairs, David Cohen, wrote to King last month. The bill also is being backed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Sheriffs' Association.

Visits to Israel have been frequent since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, but there has been little partnership between the two countries, even as many states and municipalities have set up similar programs, analysts said. "With DHS, it's a little more complicated because it's a new organization," said Gen. Simon Perry, the Israeli police attache to North America. "We are trying to establish cooperation, and there is a beginning."



American law enforcement officials visit the Jerusalem Police Command and Control Center in 2005. Credit: Security Solutions International.

While high-level officials toured Israel, Homeland Security staffers responsible for many programs did not. The department already has an international affairs office, but people with knowledge of the department said it had little input on policy matters or operational decisions. One analyst described the office as a "mini-State

Department within Homeland Security."

By contrast, designers of the new office hope people will bring suggestions about international cooperation for a wide range of policy matters and technology development. Barry Bogue, director of the Maryland/Israel Development Center, said U.S. officials mainly have been taking from Israel a new way of thinking about handling crises.

"The word I keep hearing about is a different doctrine," he said. "The U.S. has experience with crime and with car accidents, but not with bombs going off in the streets and mass-casualty incidents."

For example, Israelis have taught U.S. officials to treat the injured from terrorist attacks on the scene, rather than bringing them immediately to a hospital. Now, advocates said, the two countries can work together on technology and products that can be used in those scenarios.

"The United States is very strong in research and development, as well as Israel," Perry said. "We need the same tools, so it doesn't make sense that each country should develop its own tools."

Thompson said the United States would be able to provide seed money for many projects.

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND TO HONOR PREMIER GARY DOER AT NEGEV GALA 2006

Graham Dixon, President, Jewish National Fund of Canada (JNF), Prairie Region, is pleased to announce that Mr. Gary Doer, Premier of Manitoba, is the honoree for Negev Gala 2006. This year's Negev Gala is set for Tuesday, June 13, 2006, 8:00 p.m. at the Centennial Concert Hall.



GARY DOER

"Israel has a partner and friend in Premier Gary Doer," said Dixon. "Time and again he has displayed support for the State of Israel and its people. The JNF is delighted to recognize the Premier's commitment to Israel and to Manitoba," added Dixon. JNF's Israel Emissary, Rami Kleinmann, says that the JNF and the Province of Manitoba have been working on a partnership focusing on forestry and water innovation and improving the environment. "Mr. Doer has shown leadership in developing a relationship between the JNF and the Province of Manitoba," said Kleinmann. "Water is a precious resource for both Manitoba and Israel. This partnership will establish links to share information, expertise, and best practices related to the environment," added Kleinmann. Gary Doer was re-elected Premier of Manitoba on June 3, 2003 and was first elected in September 1999 as the province's 20th Premier. Under Mr. Doer's leadership, the Manitoba Government has focused on supporting education, improving health care, making communities safer, keeping Manitoba an affordable place to live, and investing in alternative and clean energy.

support the JNF-Province of Manitoba initiative on environmental projects.

Headlining the Negev Gala entertainment is the world premiere of The Voices of Israel, five internationally acclaimed vocalists, all women, based in Israel. Accompanied by five talented musicians also from Israel, The Voices of Israel blends the best of Jewish and international classics for an unforgettable performance. The Negev Gala is the Jewish community's single largest fundraising event.

The Jewish National Fund has assembled a strong organizing committee for the Gala, lead by Co-Chairs Bob Silver, Publisher, Winnipeg Free Press and successful Israeli businessman, Nathan Jacobson.

The Negev Gala honors outstanding community leaders and significant events in Jewish life and in so doing, gathers support for development of the Negev desert region, which constitutes 60% of all land area of Israel. The Negev Gala is the single most important fundraising event of the year for the JNF. The event combines world-class entertainment with awards recognition and celebrations. Proceeds from the Gala go to support the JNF-Province of Manitoba initiative on environmental projects.

The Jewish National Fund of Canada is a non-profit organization founded in 1901 to serve as a caretaker for the land of Israel. Over the past century, the organization has planted over 220 million trees, built over 150 reservoirs and dams, developed over 250,000 acres of land, created more than 400 parks, and established five research and development farms. The JNF is also an official United Nations non-governmental organization.

For more information about Negev Gala 2006 or to order tickets, phone the JNF office at the number in the ad on the back page of this issue or online - www.jnf-winnipeg.org