

# MIFGASH



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## **10 YEARS OF SUCCESS MARKED BY CENTRAL AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

*by Rabbi Joel Oseran,*

*Vice President for International Development, World Union for Progressive Judaism*

The Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean (UJCL) is one of the most unusual liberal Jewish congregational associations one will ever find. It was founded 10 years ago by the determined leaders of several members of congregation B'nei Israel in San Jose, Costa Rica. However, it is clear to everyone that the unquestioned "Father" of the UJCL is Marvin Sossin, former President of B'nei Israel and veteran World Union regional leader.

Since then, the UJCL has grown and matured from an informal association of a few liberal-oriented communities into an increasingly well structured regional framework of 13 congregations from Aruba, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curacao, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas and Surinam.

Given the fact that UJCL congregations serve the Jewish religious needs of a wide spectrum of populations in their respective communities, they have had to remain truly pluralistic in approach, welcoming liberal and more traditional Jews together. This unique fabric of Jewish communal life is highlighted by the fact that even though all six ordained rabbis serving UJCL congregations are graduates of the Buenos Aires rabbinical seminary under the aegis of the Masorti (Conservative) movement, many of the congregations in the region have singular ties to the World Union. The religious mix in the UJCL is therefore quite dynamic, yet everyone – lay leaders and professionals alike – appreciates the need for patience and mutual respect.

### **Young Leaders Focus on Their Future**

A highlight of the Costa Rica conference marking the UJCL's 10th anniversary was the sixth and largest ever Youth Encounter in the region. This was an opportunity for over 50 youths and young adults, who live rather isolated Jewish lives in their respective countries, to gather together not only to reconnect with each other, but also to more formally discuss their vision and goals as a regional youth association. It was led by the most talented and experienced member of the Jerusalem-based Netzer Olami staff, Tamara Schagas, with Diego Levenson, a volunteer from congregation B'nei Israel in San Jose.

By the close of the conference, the young delegates presented a proposal to the UJCL Board indicating their desire to associate with our World Union youth programs ( Netzer Olami and TaMaR) and to begin working on a more comprehensive youth camp to take place on a regular basis. This welcome development will be fully supported by our World Union programming and staff efforts.

### **A Full Program for the Adults**

Rabbi Uri Regev, president of the World Union, and I participated fully in the conference program, as did Yad B'Yad chair, Jerry Tanenbaum. This high profile representation of World Union professional and volunteer leadership forcefully demonstrated our movement's commitment to developing the UJCL as a regional body for all the Jews of the area.

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At the start of the conference, Rabbi Regev spoke eloquently at a special Holocaust memorial program in observation of the United Nations international Holocaust Remembrance Day set for January 27. This year's commemoration, on the 62nd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, served as a powerful reminder that the personal history of many Jews in the region was integrally connected to those dark years in Jewish history, thousands of miles away. We are truly a People "scattered among the nations" yet we felt a strong sense of bonding to one another, and of course, with our Jewish homeland, Israel.

## **Poignant Comments from Many Speakers**

One of the most inspiring moments in the Holocaust Memorial Ceremony was the address by the Costa Rican second vice president, The Honorable Kevin Casas. Mr. Casas is clearly a rising star on the political scene of the country, a young, charismatic personality who had an important message to deliver. He spoke about the values represented by the Jewish People and the historic bond existing between his country and the Jewish state. The Republic of Costa Rica was one of the first countries in the United Nations to vote for recognition of Israel as an independent nation and is today one of Israel's staunchest supporters. The vice president spoke about the need to condemn any nation, including Iran, which calls out to destroy the Jewish People and state. We have to take seriously these evil words, he cautioned; we dare not let them pass with impunity or else we have failed to learn the lessons of the Holocaust itself.

Rabbi Regev also delivered the first key-note address at the conference, in which he presented the case for liberal Judaism in Israel and around the world. Highlighting the conference theme on the importance of the *kehilla* (the community), he spoke about the importance for the UJCL to see itself integrally connected to the larger Jewish world community and to Israel. In my presentation to the conference plenary I addressed the many lessons we have learned along the way regarding how to build and strengthen Jewish community life.

The conference program offered a variety of workshops and panel forums led by rabbis and volunteer leaders from around the region as well as visitors from North America, Latin America and Israel. Several international Jewish organizations also sent representatives – American Jewish Committee, World Jewish Congress, Israeli Embassy, B'nai Brith International and HIAS – in order to bring the message of Jewish solidarity and support.

## **Conference Community Worship**

Shabbat services were conducted in the lovely B'nei Israel synagogue in San Jose. David Feingold, president of B'nei Israel and a graduate of our World Union Beutel Leadership Seminar, welcomed the conference participants and noted the significance of the gathering for the maturity and "coming of age" of his own congregation. Rabbis Rami Pavolotzky and Daniela Szuster (the husband and wife team who lead the congregation) conducted the evening and morning services along with their regional colleagues.

A rather unusual arrangement was chosen for giving the sermons for the services. Instead of one rabbi delivering the sermon at each service, each of the 9 rabbis present was asked to share a two-minute *d'var Torah* – some on Friday night and some on Shabbat morning. When I received the

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invitation while still in Israel to deliver a two-minute *d'var Torah* at services in Costa Rica, I at first thought there must have been a mistake in the invitation – that the “0” of 20 minutes was left off. What rabbi in the world could deliver a two-minute sermon? (Not that such a sermon would upset the congregation, mind you!). But it was no mistake, and it turned out to be a most interesting arrangement indeed - supporting the theory that if you can't say what you want in two minutes, you certainly can't say it in 20!

## **The Closing Climax**

Without question, one of the highlights of the entire conference was the gala closing dinner and honors program, introduced by a lovely Havdalah ceremony on Motzei Shabbat. All the youth representatives entered the hall carrying candles and formed a huge circle. Conference participants joined the circle and the Havdalah prayers were sung in unison. The honors program which followed was conducted with typical Latin warmth and affection. Marvin Sossin was the first to be honored, given his preeminent role within the UJCL and in recognition of his long standing leadership role in the UJCL. He was presented with a unique quilt, hand-made out of numerous neckties which were sent from around the region and the world by faithful admirers.

The outgoing and incoming UJCL Boards were recognized as well. L. Jack Davidson, outgoing chair of the UJCL from El Salvador, was honored for his outstanding and dedicated leadership over the past years and Hilda ten Brink, from the local San Jose community B'nei Israel, was welcomed as incoming Chair. Hilda and her marvelous team of co-workers received a standing ovation for their incredible efforts to put on such a successful conference.

On the professional side, Rabbi Gustavo Kraselnik of Panama , who has been the executive director of the UJCL for nearly all its history, retired his position and is being succeeded by Rabbi Marcelo Bater from Aruba. Gustavo was warmly honored by everyone for his commitment to the organization and his important leadership contribution.

The UJCL as a regional *Kehilla* has most definitely come into its own over these past 10 years. It is stronger, larger, better organized and more youth oriented than ever before. Credit was extended to Martha Lichtenstein from Aruba, who has served over the past few years as head of regional communications and done a superb job with the regional newsletter. Yes, there is much more to do before the UJCL leadership can sit back and say “*Dayenu*,” but there is a terrific spirit of optimism pervading the region, which speaks very well indeed for its future.

## **A World Union-UJCL Partnership Success**

The World Union, working through the Yad B'Yad Committee and regional representative Miriam Vasserman, has made important contributions to the UJCL over the past several years, and the group openly and enthusiastically extended appreciation to us for that support. We have served as a true partner with the UJCL, helping to promote and support the youth encounters for several years now, finding resources to share for communications and programming needs, providing advice and counsel for professional issues, and lending our international authority and networking abilities when needed.

Our interest in further promoting liberal Judaism in the region will continue to grow in the years ahead. Plans are underway to help provide the rabbis in the region, isolated and far removed from collegial networking, with visiting scholars from our movement who will enrich their Jewish study and learning experiences. The World Union will also devote continued support to the youth in the region,

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helping to provide not only leadership training for local needs, but also helping to make the vital connection with Israel and educational experiences in Zion.

All of us at the World Union are proud to be sharing in the activity and growth of the UJCL and the advance of Jewish life in the region for the thousands of Jews connected to our congregations there. We salute you on your 10th anniversary and wish you continued success and accomplishments long into the future.

*Chazak Chazak, V'Nitchazake* - Be Strong and Let us Strengthen One Another!

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## **Letter to our Youth Participants in Tamar Olami in Jerusalem**

Dear Gabrielle, Ivette, Susie, Erika, Dario, Milton and Moises,

In a few days you'll be flying off to Israel to represent UJCL at the TAMAR/WUPJ meeting in Jerusalem. This is really a historic moment for our Union since this is the first time that our Youth will be represented outside our region. We are very happy about this and very proud of all of you.

Your going to Jerusalem is commitment of your time and of your families' resources. I thank all of you for placing your love of Judaism as a priority in your lives and for your desire to bring back and share with us the experiences you'll have there. I also thank Rabbi Joel Oseran, Rabbi Uri Regev, Tamara Schagas and Jerry Tanenbaum for making this trip possible.

May you have a wonderful time, may you find spiritual fulfillment and learning opportunities, and may you make new and lasting friendships.

You are on the road to become the future leaders of our Congregations and this is a great satisfaction to all of us in the UJCL.

Best wishes, Shalom,

Hilda ten Brink  
President  
Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean

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## **“A WEEK IN JERUSALEM, A LIFETIME OF FRIENDSHIP AND CONNECTIONS”**

The week of March 12 – 20<sup>th</sup> I attended the 10<sup>th</sup> annual gathering of TaMaR combined with the World Union for Progressive Judaism 33<sup>rd</sup> Conference. TaMaR is a Zionist movement for young adults within the WUPJ and its aims are to facilitate the connection of the youth all over the world with each other as well as with Eretz Israel.

As the event was combined with the WUPJ conference, from March 15 – 20<sup>th</sup>, we got to meet some of the most significant leaders in the Reform Movement in Israel, such as Rabbi Richard Hirsch, founder of WUPJ, and who today is the Honorary Life President of the WUPJ, Rabbi Joel Oseran who is Vice-President, International Development of the WUPJ, and plays a leading role in directing Progressive Judaism’s support for emerging Progressive Jewish Communities especially in the FSU (Former Soviet Union) as well as in Latin America, and Rabbi Gil’ad Kariv, Associate Director of the Israel Religious Action Center, who has a crucial part in the discussions going on in the Knesset about the creation and implementation of the Israel Constitution, which as of now does not yet exist.

After each panel with these active religious leaders, there were discussion sessions where we (the youth) were allowed to bring forth certain questions, issues and worries. Major questions amongst the youth were “What exactly is Zionism?”, “What does it mean to be a Zionist?”, “Does it mean that we all have to make Aliyah?”, “What will happen to the Diaspora if everyone makes Aliyah?” and most importantly “What if we don’t want to make Aliyah, at least not at the present moment?”

Rabbi Hirsch explained that Zionism is, simply put: “An effort to establish a Jewish State”. He further explained to us that what happens in Israel and to Israel will determine the placement of the Jewish people in the future. “The state of Israel has widened and deepened the definition of ‘what it is to be Jewish’”.

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Steven Bauman, current chairman of the WUPJ, expressed the importance of being aware of what is going on in Israel. “It is one of the World Union’s top priorities to engage young adults philosophically, socially and psychologically in order to establish what Progressive Judaism really means...community...equality...strong sense of people...*tikun olam*, repairing the world...”

Rabbi Joel Oseran and Rabbi Stanley Davids, national president of ARZA (Association of Reform Zionists of America), explained that there has been a great loss of Jewish religion within reformism; it’s become very individualistic. Rabbi Stanley stressed that it is important that a Jewish state has been established and it is even more important that it be kept and in Israel. “A Jewish state without Jewish values cannot survive”. He further explained that this does not mean picking up and moving to Israel. The word Aliyah has a multiplicity of possibilities, which establish a connection between Jews and Israel and their support of it as the Jewish state, may it be through ‘making’ Aliyah, or by buying realty or making other type of investments in Israel, or by sending your children on lengthy programs to Israel. Rabbi Oseran explained that there’s an intuitive connection between Jewish people and Israel, however it is least for Reform Jews. It is important for us as liberal Jews to orientate ourselves on what “should be done” and not so much on what “we want done”. “...it is our obligation to experience this full range of Jewish Civilization- the land, the culture, the history, HEBREW - and to choose what we incorporate into our own Judaism...”

Gil’ad Kariv along with the rest emphasized that today the word Zionism is misused, which causes it to lose its meaning. The word is used for too many things, it is used for the expression of national feelings towards Jews and Israel. “It is true that Zionism was a political movement that ended with the establishment of the state, but now that we have the state how can we use what it has to offer - its tools, its ingredients - in order to revive Jewish life in the Diaspora?” Gil’ad continued by explaining

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that today, to be a Zionist is “to believe that without an independent Jewish state, the cultural, educational and communal Jewish life in the Diaspora will cease to exist...The state of Israel is the tool, our Jewish existence is the goal...”

I have to admit that when I first arrived in Jerusalem, I felt somewhat embarrassed about my ignorance. Here I was going to this conference for Progressive Judaism, while I wasn't even quite sure about what that exactly meant. At the end of each day we would have Asefah (discussion session) to go over what we learned throughout the day, issues within our regions and within our own communities, and our opinions on certain matters. I realized that like me in the beginning, many of the young adults were not quite sure about the true definition of being a Progressive Jew. However at the end of the day we would realize that all of us had one thing in common – We were all ignorant in one way or another and that scared us and worried us about losing our Jewish identity. We put together several proposals to be presented to the World Union. As future leaders of our communities we felt an obligation to aim our movement towards securing the future of Jews in the post modern world, but to do this we need the help and support and advice of greater organizations such as the WUPJ and the World Zionist Organization. We have come to learn that Zionism isn't necessarily the most important teaching. Jewish learning is what is important. Learning to be Jewish is most important in order to revive Jewish life in the Diaspora. We need the support of the WUPJ to have more gatherings such as TaMaR and Netzer (pre-college) in order to raise awareness and revive Jewish education.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> when the 33<sup>rd</sup> WUPJ Connections conference officially started, we each proudly carried our country's flag knowing that we are the future leaders of our communities who will bring the Jewish people from the past to the present and then to the future.

Gabrielle Berlinski (Aruban Youth Representative)

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## **SUMMARY OF THE 33<sup>RD</sup> WORLD UNION** **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION**

The largest and best-attended World Union international conference – [Connections 2007](#) - wrapped up this week in Jerusalem with laughter and tears, song and inspiration, an honor for one of Israel's best-known authors, and word of the biggest Reform initiative ever – a seven to 10-year effort to raise \$100 million in order to make Progressive Judaism an undisputed reality in Israel.

The 550 registered delegates from some 30 countries on six continents, together with hundreds of day-participants, brought the total attendance at the five-day convention to well over 800. Among the delegates were some 100 teens and twenty-somethings participating on behalf of Netzer Olami and Tamar, Progressive Judaism's youth and young adult movements.

Continuing with the figures, there were 105 speakers/moderators/facilitators, 33 workshops and panel discussions, 15 field trips and study sessions, and three large events - the opening ceremony, held Thursday night at Jerusalem's historic YMCA; a Saturday night concert by Connections 2007's artist-in-residence, [Danny Maseng](#), held at Mercaz Shimshon-Beit Shmuel, the World Union's education/culture complex and headquarters, and the main convention venue; and gala closing festivities, which took place Monday night at the world-class Israel Museum.

### Impressive and Colorful Opening Ceremony

The convention officially got underway on Tuesday evening, March 15, with an opening ceremony in the theater at Jerusalem's historic YMCA, where old friends busily greeted one another and new friends became acquainted before filling the 650 seats to overflow. The program began with the blast of a shofar, which was quickly followed by an exciting video presentation on Jerusalem accompanied by music with a dramatic biblical motif featuring drum, violin and solo voice.

After welcoming remarks by Connection 2007 co-chairs Paula Edelstein and Helene Waranch (respectively immediate past chairperson of the [Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism](#) and immediate past president of the [Women of Reform Judaism](#)), 42 young flag bearers representing each nation with a World Union constituency filed in to resounding applause and song. An opening benediction was delivered by Rabbi Ada Zavidov, spiritual leader of Israel's oldest Progressive congregation, Kehillat Har-Ei, and chairperson of MARAM, Israel's Progressive rabbinic assembly. She was followed by Steve Bauman, chairman of the World Union, who spoke of the convention's locale by saying, "We have sacred work to do for the State of Israel."

### Olmert Throws Down Gauntlet

Rabbi Uri Regev, president of the World Union, "introduced" Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who in [recorded greetings](#) thanked convention goers for coming to Israel and Jerusalem, and expressed gratitude to all of Progressive Jewry for its outpouring of support for Israel during last summer's fighting in the north.

Regev also released details from a "friendly, cordial and helpful" meeting earlier in the day between Olmert and members of the World Union Executive Board, during which the delegation declared that the World Union's commitment to the State of Israel is "unwavering." Regev said he explained to Olmert that the movement, its rabbis and the status of its conversions in Israel suffer from clear discrimination, and that there should be an effort to find

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modes of dialogue that can eliminate the existing confrontation and lead to full recognition. Olmert replied that, regarding issues important to Progressive Jewry, his hands were tied by politics, but said the way for the Progressive movement to effect change in Israel is by even greater involvement both inside and outside the country.

The opening ceremony continued with short presentations on Progressive programs in Israel for teenagers and young adults. The presenters were participants in Netzer Olami's Shnat Netzer gap year programs for high school graduates from the northern and southern hemispheres; the Eisendrath International Exchange program for North American high school students; the Carmel gap year program in Haifa; "Machon," the World Union's three-year program for community workers in the FSU, which sends second-year students to Israel; the Jerusalem campus of [Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion](#), which sends rabbinic and cantorial students for a year of study in Israel; and the mechina, the Israeli Progressive movement's gap year program that focuses on preparation for military induction, community activism and study.

## Wide Variety of Workshops, Panel Discussions, Shabbat Activities and Other Convention Programming

On Friday, Sunday and Monday there were keynote addresses by Rabbi David Ellenson, President, HUC-JIR; Rabbi David Saperstein, director and counsel of the [Religious Action Center](#) of the Union for Reform Judaism; and Professor Naomi Chazan, head of the School of Government and Society at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo. There were also daily workshops – on such subjects as leadership development, changing family dynamics, prayer and spirituality, anti-Semitism, interfaith dialogue, gays and Reform Judaism, women's issues, successful Tikkun Olam programming and more – as well as special box lunch sessions featuring presentations on subjects ranging from immigrant absorption models to successful regional programming.

On Friday evening there was home hospitality for Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat dinner. On Saturday there was Shabbat worship, featuring the presentation of two Torah scrolls from the U.S. to Progressive communities in Feodosiya, Ukraine, and Halle, Germany.

On Sunday, there were field trips and site visits to such venues as an army base, the [Israel Religious Action Center](#), a school operated by Congregation Yozma in Modi'in and a segment of Israel's controversial security barrier, as well as an update by members of the Knesset. All of these activities culminated with dinner at Mishkenot Ruth Daniel, the exciting new Progressive guesthouse and community center in Jaffa, where a mezuzah was affixed to the doorpost. This was followed by an on-site panel discussion on the Progressive movement's rabbinic future.

On Monday, the convention's last full day, the morning workshops were followed by a lunchtime presentation on the Butterfly Project, an initiative begun by World Union leader Sue Klau to memorialize the child victims of the Shoah.

Lunch also featured an address on future challenges for the world Progressive movement by Rabbi Joel Oseran, World Union vice president for international development; a special tribute to Norman and Noreen Elijah of the Jewish Religious Union of Mumbai, India; and the presentation of a shofar to Rabbi Mikhail Kapustin and Anatoly Gendin, spiritual leader and president, respectively, of the Progressive congregation in Simferopol, Ukraine.

## Launch of the Rabbi Richard and Bella Hirsch Atid (Youth Futures) Fund

To mark the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Honorary Life President Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, the World Union, along with the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, launched the Rabbi Richard and Bella Hirsch Atid (Youth Futures) Fund, aimed at promoting Progressive youth programming in Israel. "Rabbi Hirsch has devoted his life to humanity, to the Jewish people, to Israel and to the Reform Movement," it was declared of the former World Union executive

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director at a special ceremony before the concert on Saturday evening. “His passion for Jewish learning, Zionist commitment and justice is one that can inspire young Israeli Jews and equip them to face the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Connections 2007 came to a close on Monday evening, March 19, with private tours of the Israel Museum, a cocktail reception, and a rousing and, at times, emotional closing program in the museum theater. The air was electric as convention goers viewed [video highlights of the previous five days](#) and heard World Union president Steve Bauman proclaim his wonder at looking through the panoramic windows of Blaustein Hall at Mercaz Shimshon-Beit Shmuel and viewing the city of Jerusalem “with modernity all over and with tradition all over – that’s who we are.”

## Oz Receives World Union Honor

Next, Rabbi Regev introduced Amos Oz, called by many Israel’s foremost modern novelist - and by Regev, “Israel’s conscience” - to present him with the title of Maggid. The award commemorates the itinerant preacher and skilled story teller of European tradition and is the World Union’s way of recognizing prominent members of the arts whose work embodies its core Jewish values. Oz said he was “deeply moved” to receive this “great honor,” adding he believes Israel has “millions” of Progressive Jews. “They don’t call themselves Progressive Jews,” he said, “but Progressive Jews they are.” He concluded by saying that Israel’s Declaration of Independence is the “platform of Progressive Judaism,” and called on Progressive Jews everywhere to strengthen their presence in Israel.

Oz was followed by Isaac Herzog, Israel’s minister of Diaspora affairs, as well as its outgoing tourism minister and incoming minister of social affairs. “The entry of the Reform movement into all echelons of the Zionist arena is important,” said Herzog. “The social challenges on our plate are enormous...this is a golden opportunity for your movement [to get involved].” He also appealed to the Progressive movement to further promote tourism to Israel among its ranks.

## Major New Initiative Announced

Following Herzog came exciting news of the Israel Development Commission (IDC), a mammoth initiative already being called the biggest ever for the Reform movement. The objective, said Stanley P. Gold, CEO of Shamrock Holdings and a former chairman of HUC-JIR’s Board of Governors, is to raise \$100 million over the next seven to 10 years in order to strengthen Progressive Judaism in Israel and raise its profile for the large segment of Israelis who identify with its tenets but have as yet had little access to its congregations and institutions.

The goal of the new initiative, he said, is to attain “an accelerated expansion of the Reform movement in Israel.” To do this, the IDC will seek to:

- Enhance access to Progressive Judaism for Israelis
- Encourage the use of Progressive programs and activities by the Israeli school system
- Make the Progressive movement a leading proponent of Israeli social change
- Strengthen the Israeli Progressive movement’s rabbinic and professional leadership corps
- Reinforce the Israeli movement’s ties with Reform and Progressive movements around the world
- Establish an Israeli Progressive fundraising mechanism.

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“We are the authentic Judaism, and we need to start proving it here in Israel,” proclaimed Gold to rousing applause. “I believe this is do-able.”

“Closing Kesharim – Connections 2007,” says World Union chairman Steve Bauman, “I was struck by how many lives we were affecting around the world, and that we are truly a movement – of so many languages, cultures and nations – united by our pluralistic, egalitarian values, beliefs, and by our Jewish traditions. The sense of family was palpable as we listened to our young leaders describe how their lives had been impacted by Netzer, Tamar and mechina. The experiences that the delegates shared belie the assertion that our Reform movement will result in the assimilation of our people. Quite the opposite – as evidenced by vibrancy of the Judaism practiced at the convention.”

“At this best-attended WUPJ convention ever,” he continued, “we focused on making real the Israeli Declaration of Independence as we unite Jewish religious tradition, inclusiveness, gender equality and individual autonomy in an Israel that is a democratic and pluralistic Jewish state.”

*(If you want to read the complete article, please visit our web site: [www.ujcl.org](http://www.ujcl.org))*

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## **Aruba's Jewish Community noisily celebrates Purim**

*by Rosalie Klein*

On Saturday, March 3, members of the congregation of the Temple Beth Israel, led by Rabbi Marcelo Bater, celebrated the festive holiday of Purim, joined by many island visitors that attended the temple for the occasion.

Purim takes place on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, the twelfth month on the Jewish calendar. It starts at sundown on the first secular day. It is the most joyous and fun of Jewish holidays, devoted to humor and games in celebration of being Jewish. Like many Jewish holidays, the Purim celebration can be summed up with the phrase, “They tried to kill us; we survived, let’s eat”....

This year, quite a few island visitors joined temple members for the Purim services, and were invited to the *bimah* to assist in the reading of the Megillah, either in English or Hebrew. Afterwards, they joined in the social hall with the community for a sweet treat of *Hammantashan*, traditionally served on Purim. These triangular cakes filled with either poppy seeds or jam symbolize Haman’s ear, from which all the celebrants can take a bite.

Other traditions of this festive holiday include wearing costumes and using a noisemaker, every time the name of Haman is mentioned during the reading of the Megillah. Attendees of all ages took part in the fun, including the youngest member of the congregation, Rabbi Bater’s daughter Gali, who insisted on joining him on the dais, learning to use her grogger for the first time.

Another holiday tradition of Purim is to help the less fortunate, and each year the members collect clothes and food to donate to the foundation Ambiente Feliz.

*Editor’s Note: This article was published by THE NEWS (Aruban newspaper) on March 8, 2007.*

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## PURIM 5767 AT B'NEI ISRAEL

We held a very pleasant and enjoyable Purim celebration at B'nei Israel.

On Saturday night we prayed *Arvit* with a group of about fifty people. Then each of the youth members of the community read a different chapter of Megillat Esther until we completed its reading. We all paid attention while at the same time had fun and we had a very good time. It could not happen any other way: after the emotional Havdalah ceremony we ate together.

On Saturday afternoon no less than eighty people gathered at the family Lev's home to celebrate Purim with a traditional party. There was music, songs, lunch with casher meat, a costume contest and *rikudim* with our *moreh* Diego Levinson. Furthermore, the *Chesed* group of our school( 6-7 years old) prepared a play on the history of Purim, while the youth group organized some games for the children to have fun. The proceedings of the event were fully destined to scholarships to defray the cost of upcoming trips for the youth.

If you would like to see some pictures of the party please go to the following link: [http:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxQi1p-Xzy0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxQi1p-Xzy0), where you will find the video that was filmed on that day by Ken Kahn, one of our members, who kindly shared it with us.

In short, we had two moments of great joy during Purim at B'nei Israel, and we are already thinking of next year's costumes.

*Chag Sameach* to all!

*Rabbis Daniela Szuster and Rami Pavolotzky*

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## **PURIM GREASE 2007 IN SALVADOR**

**It was here, and we had a super time!**

Purim celebrations were excellent, as it could not be otherwise at the Jewish Community of El Salvador. The entire Grease Super Party came out according to our plans. There were many weeks of preparation and rehearsals, and several weeks to think out the Purim party for 2007.

After heated discussions we decided it would be a thematic Purim. That is when the project of transforming the Jewish Community of El Salvador into the stage for the movie Grease started. It was not an easy job but pretty soon several families adopted the idea and brought it forth.

The result was a beautiful party, with reading of Megillat Esther, dance with all the music from DJ Reynaldo R, that was great, and the songs from Grease, Village People and all that musical period that we almost don't remember, not because nobody listens to it but because our age is a little bit more advanced. The choreography of the children and youth of Noar Shelanu was fantastic, likewise the one from the Oriental adults (a *rikud* that the adults offered, promising it would be the last time.) The thematic costumes were very special, in the John Travolta and Olivia Newton John style.

We really had a good time, thanks to all the people who made it possible. They decorated the community for several hours and prepared the scenography several weeks in advance so that everything would be just like in the film Grease. The rest was full dance and banquet, and paraphrasing Megillat Esther: "*Vehayir San Salvador Tzaala Vesamecha.*" And the city of San Salvador was filled with delight and joy.

***Rabbi Pablo Berman***

## **P U R I M Comunidad Hebrea de Guadalajara**

This year the Hebrew Community of Guadalajara celebrated Purim in a very special way. In addition to the reading of the Megillah and the costumes that characterize this festival we organized a dinner to participate in the joy of getting together as an extended family in shared unity.

Besides, Purim meant to us the beginning of the construction project of our permanent site. Inspired by the biblical and rabbinic ritual of the half shekel (I invite you to read Ex. 30:11-13, and the beginning of Shekalim in the Mishna) we got together to take a census, join in and commit ourselves so that our dreams and hopes materialize into concrete and definite actions.

We saw with great joy that a great percentage of the Kehillah members got involved in the initiative and attended the ceremony of commitment to the community that took place at the end of the Shacharit service of Purim.

With their presence we have ensured the first stone of our future building, and we are hopeful that we will be able to go on with the same degree of participation and responsibility.

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At Kol Shearit Israel we celebrated Purim in a big way. After Havdalah and the reading of Meguillat Esther we had a spectacular party. Here is our report:

## **PURIM PARTY AT KOL SHEARIT ISRAEL**

Hi, how are you doing? I'm Darí o Grinspan, from KSI Panama.

The Purim party in Panama was organized by the youth movement Noar Panama.

It was held at KSI and it consisted of an amusement fair in which each Noar Madrich<sup>1</sup> was responsible for a stand where one could play a game with a coupon that could be obtained by paying a contribution. Then, according to how much they scored the players could get a prize.

The different games were related to Purim and its protagonists: Esther, Haman, etc.

It was a very enjoyable evening. Every one who attended the Purim party had to wear a costume. If you came without one you had to pay a small fine.

We accomplished what we wanted: everyone had a very good time, our goals were fulfilled. It was nice to see all the members of the different families wearing costumes and after a long vacation we were able to bring together the *chanichim*<sup>2</sup>.

### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> youth leader

<sup>2</sup> the members of the group that the *madrich* leads.

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## **SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LATIN AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS ON THE 40<sup>TH</sup>. ANNIVERSARY OF THE CAIV**

*source: Latin American Jewish Congress*

The President of the LJC Jack Terpins headed this session. Present at the solemn opening ceremony were Matthew Bronfman, President of the Finance and Budgets Committee of the World Jewish Congress. Stephen E. Herbitz, General Secretary of the WJC, Pierre Besnainou, President of the European Jewish Congress, Pinchas Shapiro, vice General Secretary of the WJC, for the LJC Saul Gilvich, General Secretary, Claudio Epelman, Assistant Director, Roberto Brzostowski, Organizational Director, as well as local hosts Freddy Pressner, Director of the CAIV, Abraham Levi Benshimol, vice President of the LJC, and Elí as Farache, President of the Jewish Association of Venezuela, where this meeting took place. A host of Jewish leaders of the country and abroad were also present, as well as organizations like B'nai Brith Latin America and Jewish organizations from the United States.

In his speech Matthew Bronfman declared that the Venezuelan Jewish community is evidently not alone, as evidenced by the presence of sister communities of Latin America, the United States, Europe and Israel.

He also reminded the participants of the words of his father, Edgar M. Bronfman, President of the WJC, during the struggle to liberate the oppressed Jewish communities of the USSR: It was not sufficient to evoke the biblical words: "Let my people go!" we also needed another motto: "Let my people live!" He continued to say that from Caracas we proclaim for the whole world to hear: "Let my people live in respect, peace and safety."

Stephen E. Herbits underscored the mission and the importance of community participation in the action plan of the international Jewish organization and presented the topic "The Iranian Threat" with the coordination of Saul Gilvich.

Pierre Besnainou, President of the European Jewish Congress, brought a message of solidarity of the Jews of this continent with the Venezuelan Jews and renewed a call for unified purpose in the face of the changing challenges to its future faced by the Jewish people, particularly the one coming from Ahmadinejad, who wants a world without the Jewish state. He affirmed that "when it is time to consider our future, all the Jewish communities of the world and all the members of the WJC will be united."

Another topic that was discussed was "The New Generations, the LJC and the WJC", with Peleg Reshev, Director of New Generations of the WJC, Adam Koffler, President of the Diplomatic Corps of Young Professionals of the WJC, and the Director of New Generations of the LJC, Ariel Isaak, as well as youth delegates from countries in the region and in Canada in attendance.

The Venezuelan political analyst Aní bal Romero analyzed in detail the local political situation.

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David Bachenheimer, General Secretary of the CAIV gave a commemorative medal coined by the Venezuelan Jewish community on the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of CAIV and the 40<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem to Manuel Tenenbaum, Director of the LJC, that was received on his behalf by its President, Jack Terpins.

At the end of this memorable event, the LJC issued the following declaration:

## THE CARACAS DECLARATION

The Latin American Jewish Congress, together with the leaders of the World Jewish Congress, European Jewish Congress, and the communities of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, the United States, France, Israel, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, delegations from the Department of New Generations of the Latin American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith International, CLAM, WIZO, World Sephardic Federation and FESELA in attendance were welcome by the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela to hold together a special session in Caracas on Thursday, March 22.

The participating delegations brought a message of brotherhood, solidarity and congratulations on the 40<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of fruitful institutional life of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela.

Under the present circumstances the Latin American Jewish Congress urges the Latin American society, in its complex diversity, to preserve the spirit that allowed our ancestors to be received fraternally in this continent.

We reaffirm our commitment to the State of Israel, center of Jewish life, and to each of the Jewish communities of the world.

We consider each denial of the Holocaust a crime against the ethical memory and an attempt to bring back Mankind to its darkest moment. We condemn the world leaders that promote this denial and ignore the United Nations resolutions reaffirming that Anti Semitism is a form of racism and condemn attempts to distort history denying the Holocaust. We are convinced of the importance of education as a way to bequeath to the new generations the ethical principles, democratic values and the validity of human rights, suggesting to the governments to incorporate to their formal education curricula the history of the Holocaust, in accordance with the United Nations resolution. We recommend to our members to cooperate with the authorities of their respective countries so that this resolution be implemented.

The action of the Argentine justice and Interpol's unanimous resolution to achieve the arrest that will make possible to bring to justice the Iranians that are suspected of being the perpetrators of the attack against AMIA, center of the Argentine Jewish community, brings a light of hope in the fight against international terrorism.

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The 21<sup>st</sup>. century finds Latin America in the midst of a process of re-formulation that has as a goal to realize its old aspirations of creating a democratic society that is more just, and is preserved and enriched by social, cultural and religious diversity.

In Caracas, capital of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,

Signed by: Jack Terpins  
President

Saúl Gilvich  
General Secretary

*(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)*

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## **WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS ENCOUNTER**

*By Mark Moel*

An Encounter of the World Jewish Congress North American Region took place from March 25 to 27 in Mexico City, DF. This region includes the Jewish communities of Canada, Mexico and the United States, represented by the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the Central Committee of the Jewish Community of Mexico ( *Comité* and the World Jewish Congress ( American Section). The UJCL as well as the Jewish Community of Guadalajara were also invited to attend. Thus I had the opportunity to attend and share a little about what is a “small community” and what it does.

We discussed extremely important topics for the Jewish world and for our region such as mechanisms to fight anti-Semitism, interfaith dialogue, diplomatic lobbying, youth leadership and small communities. In addition there were lectures on topics as diverse as the economic development of the region and commerce among our countries.

Among the participants were leaders from the different Jewish institutions of Mexico and persons of such high standing as Evelyn Sommer, President of the North American Jewish Congress, Adam Koffler (World Jewish Congress YPDC) Peleg Reshef (Director, World Jewish Congress YPDC) Claudio Epelman, (Associate Director of the Latin American Jewish Congress), Shai Franklin (Executive Director WJC American Section), Rabbi Marc Shneier (Chairman, WJC American Section), Manuel Prutschi (National Executive Vice President, Canadian Jewish Congress) Arlene Perly Rae (National Vice President of the Canadian Jewish Congress) and Stephen E. Herbits ( Secretary General World Jewish Congress), as well as important guests

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such as Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, the head of Government of the city of Mexico, Marcelo Ebrad, Reverend Clinton Mooney and political analyst Alfonso Zarate.

The mission of the North American section of the World Jewish Congress is to promote unity and solidarity among the communities of the region and among Jews in general, to support the mission of the World Jewish Congress, to strengthen the ties between the Diaspora and the State of Israel, center of Jewish life and its future, to guarantee the human rights of all Jews and of all members of society, to promote mutual respect and understanding among the different religions and ethnic groups, to reject any anti Semitic action, to coordinate regional and global lobbying to direct the challenges and opportunities faced by the Jewish communities of the world and to develop upcoming generations of leaders that will participate in all aspects of Jewish life.

Faced with this task the World Jewish Congress is concerned about the development and future of communities like ours, with a small number of members. They asked me to share with them what a community like ours does and how it survives. Although there are many differences between a community like Panama or Jamaica or between Guadalajara and Aruba, we all have one thing in common: we are ready to do everything to keep the flame of Judaism burning in our countries.

When I spoke to them about the effort we make in the UJCL affiliated communities, how we were able to feel as ours their successes, and how we have avoided deceptions and frustration thanks to the experience of other communities, the participants empathized with us and they made a decision: to support the UJCL communities through the Central Committee. Their aim is to keep in touch with all of us in order to understand the specific needs of each community and to be able to find mechanisms and means to implement our projects.

I think this is a gigantic step: we are not alone in the region anymore, our problem of lack of recognition by other religious tendencies is no longer at the forefront, we have achieved recognition and support by the World Jewish Congress. Now our challenge is to detect our real needs, eliminating personal ambition so that our projects will be really achievable and our community life will be strengthened in all its aspects.

I really hope that we be able to accept the challenge and ensure that the World Jewish Congress assumes it too.

*(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)*

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## A MARRANO' PESACH

Today is the 14<sup>th</sup>. day of the March new moon. The sunrise shepherd is still high above, the night sounds are just whispers that will explode at sunrise. I, Don José Manuel de la Santa Trinidad Rojas and Mejí a contemplate the night giving birth to the day of the Hebrew Passover.

My name is not a coincidence, since it includes the names imposed to the New Christians, plus the Rojas, that is an inversion of "Sajor" (black in Hebrew) and Mejí a, derived from "Messiah", but this is something very occult and very private. Otherwise disgrace would befall on me and my beloved family.

I belong to the so called "marranos" by the holy church and I must do everything possible to show my Christian devotion. As a matter of fact my brother Brother Pedro Apóstol Rojas and Mejí a is a sacristan, and the one that has made the greatest sacrifice since he not only must live a life of hypocrisy and denial of his faith, but also has doomed himself to be a trunk without branches nor seed for the "honor" of his church.

Today he will have to attend mass with my family and I will see my brother when he places the wafer in our mouths, knowing that we are forced to do it by circumstances, because our life is at risk otherwise.

Later on, will ride his donkey to our farm and, together at the river shore we will beat the waters with willow branches, remembering our patriarch Moses in the desert. I don't know very well why I do this but there is something very deep in me that makes me do it. Perhaps it is out of respect for my elders. But no. It is something that comes up for me more than for them, out of love more than obligation.

I have a farm where I salt and tan hides. Since I require much staff I regularly attend slave auctions. There my assistant, Lucas the mulatto, of whom no one would suspect *marrano* roots (he really does not have them), approaches the poor unfortunate ones and pretending he is inspecting their mouths and ears whispers to them the "Shma Israel" (Listen, Israel) to which many respond astonished and overcome by emotion. These are slaves that I buy for my ranch; in particular the ones brought from Portugal and Brazil respond positively to my password.

Tonight, Pesach evening, all those "slaves" that work with me know that they will be liberated from all obligations, because after telling the story of our slavery in Egypt we will say: "We are now free!" although I know that we are not yet.

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I also “buy” groups that the pirates sell without going through any market, and these are the ones suspected of Judaizing that were on their way to appear in front of the Holy Tribunal of Spain<sup>2</sup>, and the corsairs captured in the high seas.

In order to be able to afford these “purchases” I get help from the family Sacerdote ( Spanish for Cohen) and Viel ( an inversion of the letters of “Levi”) who are in my same condition.

During the week we burn much flour in the ovens so that nobody will suspect that we will not eat bread. My wife “ sneaked” among so many batches a few portions of “thin bread” that she recovered without being seen and zealously kept in the house cellar so that we would have *matzah* ( unleavened bread) for the evening.

I personally take care of the slaughter of lambs for which I choose animals without blemish, take knives without dents and after I cut them in portions I immerse the meat in salted water without forgetting to sprinkle “ absent mindedly” the bleeding knives on the door jambs, like my ancestors did. I would like to accompany these with the appropriate blessings but I never learned them. I hope my supplications will be heard just the same.

It is getting close to dinnertime. Pedro searches in the false bottom of the chapel for a very old book that I don’t know how to read, but my brother does, and at the same time I teach my son to do it. I send Lucas to the water cistern and, with the pretext of throwing lime he goes down with the hammock to the second wedge where there is a hidden engraved cup, a prayer shawl and small *kippot* with the Star of David. Likewise a piece of parchment that I found in an old family trunk and because I think it is written in Hebrew I hid until someone would translate it for me.

I go down to the cellar. The strong smell of the hides and the “charqui”<sup>3</sup> invades my nostrils. The salting table is covered by a white linen tablecloth, the shiny cup is full of wine and the bread of affliction is in front of the chair at the head of the table.

We are all afraid and anxious. My brother Pedro is transformed, his teary eyes shine, my eldest son with a red skullcap looks at me with love and fear.

Oh, son! If I could protect you from the risk I’m exposing you to. But I know that I can’t, which makes me feel guilty. Yet the guilt fades away when I hear words that I do not understand with a melody that awakens in me memories of experiences that I did not live.

My son gets up and sings a few lines in a language that is strange to me and my guests. However, we all start crying when we hear them. My brother, who today is not wearing a crucifix,

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seems to be liberated from an oppressive yoke. He gets up, covers me with the old striped shawl that I have no idea whom it belonged to.

But when he wraps me in it I feel a strange warmth in my whole being.

Almighty G-d, why can't we feel this always?

Why do we have to lie daily about our faith? How many of us will follow your path and how many will forever stray away from it?

I wish I could see a future full of brothers who freely manifest themselves as Jews, children of Your chosen people.

The silence invades us. We all cry at this party, that should be marked by joy for the achieved freedom. I ask my brother the sacristan to translate the old parchment. He unfolds it and reads with difficulty the letters that time erases. But its content stands out and he reads out loud:

*Avadim haiinu veata b'nei chorim,  
baruch atah adonai eloheinu, she heechianu,  
vekimanu vehigianu lazman hazeh.  
We were slaves but now we are free,  
blessed are You who gave us life,  
sustained us and allowed us to reach this moment.*

May it be G-d's will that in a not so far future my children and their children be able to experience a Passover in freedom, just as heartfelt as this "our Marrano Pesach".

*(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)*

## **(Footnotes)**

<sup>3</sup> the Inquisition

<sup>3</sup> jerked beef