



# WORLD CONGRESS **DIGEST**

Newsletter of the World Congress of Gay & Lesbian Jewish Organizations  
Post Office Box 23379 • Washington, DC 20026-3379 U.S.A.  
BM World Congress • London WC1N 3XX United Kingdom  
Phone/Fax +44-181-809-0877

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## Where will you be when the World comes to Dallas???

The world will converge on Dallas, Texas this July, as the 15th World Conference of Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Jews takes place July 4-6, 1997 at Dallas' 5-star Fairmont Hotel. The focus of this year's conference will be how each of us can make *A World of Difference* in our lives and the lives of others.

The final conference agenda is due out this spring, but plans are well underway for an exciting weekend. A "Welcome to Dallas" reception is being planned on the evening of Thursday, July 3 for attendees arriving early, and the conference will officially begin on Friday.

Registration materials have been sent to all World Congress member organizations for distribution to their members, and an additional mailing of materials was made in January to nearly 1000 past international and regional conference attendees.

This conference promises to be a weekend of special events, an appropriate backdrop for the first World Conference to be held in the southwestern United States. Three World Congress member organizations will celebrate their 25th anniversary this year, and host

organization Congregation Beth El Binah of Dallas will celebrate its Bat Mitzvah year during the weekend.

Dallas is a city world-renowned for its hospitality and warmth. The conference planning committee has an exciting weekend in store for attendees, offering a variety of workshops, seminars, tours of Dallas sites of interest, including the John F. Kennedy assassination site and museum, and social events. It's a weekend you won't want to miss!

If you are interested in attending the conference and have not received registration information, or if you are interested in conducting a workshop or seminar at the conference, you may contact the conference planning committee at: 15th World Conference, P.O. Box 191188, Dallas, Texas 75219 USA, or by telephone at +1-214-497-1591.

Registration information may also be obtained by e-mail by contacting the registration coordinator at [TantaP@aol.com](mailto:TantaP@aol.com). If you are e-mailing about leading a workshop, please contact the programming chairperson at [GRifkin@aol.com](mailto:GRifkin@aol.com). You may also download registration materials from our world wide web internet site at: [www.global.org/beth.el.binah/](http://www.global.org/beth.el.binah/).

## World Congress embraces every Jewish federation in North America

The WCGLJO has launched "Embracing Klal Yisrael," a survey examining how Jewish community services throughout North America meet the needs of gay and lesbian Jews, their families and organizations. As WCGLJO President Jack Gilbert declared, "The behind-the-scenes work of the past several years developing links within North American Jewish community structures has started to bear fruit."

Ringed endorsements of the survey, highlighting the need for more work in this field, came during the well-attended launch reception at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations of North America — the annual meeting of North American Jewish communal service known for short as the GA. Speakers included: Michelle Rosen, President, Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle;

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Left to right: Avi Soffer, Deborah Rustin, Jack Gilbert, Lee Walzer, Merle Richlen, and Jeff Scheckner.

## World Congress embraces every Jewish federation *(continued from page 1)*

Bert Goldberg, Executive Vice President, Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies; and Seattle Deputy Mayor Anne Levinson. Congregation Tikvah Chadashah, the WCGLJO member organisation in Seattle co-sponsored the event. In an extremely warm welcome, Michelle Rosen pledged to help build a much closer relationship with CTC, and to develop projects within family services which were complementary to it. Explaining the thinking behind the initiative, Jack noted, "In recent years, we have become increasingly aware of a wide variety of program initiatives directed at gay and lesbian Jews and their organizations and concerns. We believe that the time is now right to bring together the experiences already gleaned and to offer the opportunity for all Federations and agencies to consider how they may develop their work in this field."

Made all the more significant by the strong public backing of both the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies and the Jewish Community Center Association of North America, this survey is being distributed to all North American Jewish federations, family service agencies and community centers — over five hundred institutions.

As WCGLJO Vice President Lee Walzer made clear, the primary goal is to establish a baseline for future developments.

"We recognize, given the newness of our dialogue, that many federations may not have initiated programming and services aimed at meeting the specific needs of gay and lesbian Jews, their partners, children and relatives — or even considered how best to market existing services to us. We seek their response to this survey in order to establish a foundation for future dialogue, cooperation and programming."

The results of the survey will be published later in the year and will form the basis for planning this aspect of the World Congress' work. Copies of the survey are available upon request. The survey also contains questions relating to employment policies.

Today in North America, ensuring Jewish continuity is a top priority. This project will contribute to efforts to strengthen Klal Yisrael — the entire Jewish community. The WCGLJO believes that strengthening the ties between existing Jewish gay and lesbian organizations and wider Jewish community organizations can only be of benefit to both. Several member organizations of the World Congress were formed under the auspices of an existing communal body, whether this be a federation, family service, JCC, social action group, student body or synagogue.

## Two significant developments for the gay and lesbian community in Israel

December and January saw two major turnarounds in the cause of gay and lesbian rights in Israel.

On January 9, a joint Tel Aviv District Court/Military Appeals Panel decreed that Adir Steiner, the surviving spouse of Brigadier-General Doron Maisel z"l, should be recognised as an "Alman Tzahal," an IDF widower, under the Military Service Law (Chok Sherut ha-Keva). Gays are not excluded from the military in Israel, and civilian employers must offer gay or lesbian partners the same rights/benefits they offer heterosexual spouses. Steiner had been battling the military for several years to recognise him as an IDF widower.

The couple socialised over the years with Israel's top military brass and Steiner had to undergo security clearances when Maisel was being considered for the post of IDF medical officer. The IDF was well aware of Steiner's relationship with Maisel; at trial, in fact, Maisel at one point had threatened to call Yitzhak Rabin z"l to testify since the couple had socialised on several occasions with the Rabins.

Steiner called the victory "revolutionary" and said it was a "great day for the State of Israel." His attorney said Steiner will be entitled to an IDF pension.

The second turnaround began on Friday, December 20 when Israel's President Ezer Weizman drew laughter from high school students by using a mincing, high-pitched voice to punctuate an attack on homosexuality in the northern city of Haifa.

Weizman said that he despised gays and lesbians. He noted that "there's a debate if this subject is natural or deviant, or if

it's linked to a psychological or a mental problem." The President said that it was difficult for him to conclude that the phenomenon is natural; he went on to describe it as a "deviant social phenomenon" and clearly stated that "the law should determine how to deal with homosexuals," viewing as exaggerated the case for legal protection.

Turning to the student who asked him the question he reminded the teenager that there are laws in the Bible against sodomy. He asked the student, "Are you for sodomy?" When the student answered no, the president said, "Good, I'm glad." Weizman revealed to the students that in his youth, this phenomenon — according to him — did not exist and that he had never encountered it as a boy scout — but during his service in the British army, he had come across a few deviant phenomena among soldiers who had been away from home for years.

Weizman expressed opposition to a proposal by which it would be possible for two men to marry. "If I was a Knesset member, I personally would vote against such a law," he said, adding, "I like a man to be a man, and a woman to be a woman, and I don't like for a man to want to be a woman and a woman to want to be a man. So I personally do not accept this business of coming out of the closet. It seems to me to be weird." There were those who tolerated homosexuality, he declared. "[But] I see someone and know exactly what he is." In his view, there were times when homosexuals could be considered a security risk, "just like with drug addicts."

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The SPPR and the WCGLJO worked quickly. In Jerusalem the next evening a spontaneous demonstration outside the President's house attracted over 300 people who chanted for Weizman's resignation. MKs Yael Dayan and Naomi Chazan called for Weizman to resign. "He has proved too many times that he cannot carry out his task of being President of all the citizens," said Chazan. Yossi Sarid, head of the Meretz bloc intervened directly with Weizman.

However, there was praise from the chairman of the Knesset foreign affairs and defence committee, Likud MK Uzi Landau. "Hats off to Weizman," he was quoted as saying by Israeli media. "I want to kiss this Jew. He says what others are thinking but dare not say." The Sephardi chief rabbi also backed Weizman.

On the Sunday, the Steering Committee co-ordinated diplomatic activity with Diaspora member organisations to ensure that strong messages were sent through Canadian, Dutch, French and United States embassies. Most importantly, senior Israeli diplomats in London ensured that an open official WCGLJO letter went directly into the Israeli President's Office. The letter, widely reported in Jewish, gay and Israeli media and available on the World Congress website, dubbed President Weizman's remarks "unbecoming" and "abusive." "Can you imagine what the response would be if another head of state had said he "despised" Jews, choosing to speak in a fake Jewish accent as he paraded his own unvarnished prejudices?" Signed by the WCGLJO President Jack Gilbert and vice president Lee Walzer — it said the attack could "further weaken" Israel's image internationally. The President's remarks could also encourage anti-gay violence, they argued. "Do you recognise this danger? Are you not President for all Israelis?"

Also on Sunday, a working day in Israel, the *Jerusalem Post* (normally seen as right wing politically) and *Maariv* both published highly critical editorials.

On Monday afternoon, December 23, less than three-and-a-half days since the affair had erupted, there was an hour long face-to-face meeting between the President, his wife Reuma at his side, and representatives of the Society for the Protection of Personal Rights, led by Dr. Uzi Even and Avi Soffer. They were accompanied by MKs Yael Dayan and Ofer Pines of Labour, and Meretz leader MK Yossi Sarid and MK Naomi Chazan.

"The president sees legislation which discriminates as undermining the foundations of democracy, the rules of natural justice, and the dignity and freedom of man, and he has no intention of encouraging legislation which leads to discrimination between citizens of the state regardless of origin, religion, sex or sexual orientation," a statement released after the meeting said. "The president says that any deed or expression in which people are publicly humiliated — or deeds which can be interpreted as such — should be regretted," the statement continued. "The dignity, rights and well-being of all the citizens of Israel must be upheld."

At the subsequent press conference, the SPPR delegation made clear they were "satisfied with what we achieved. We

had a chance to express our deep hurt over the president's remarks... We understand that he is ready to accept now that things are not the way they were when he was a youngster. The atmosphere was one of reconciliation. There is now an attempt to prevent further damage and the dialogue will be continued."

"It was not an easy meeting but it was most helpful," Sarid (Meretz leader) said later. "The President saw that gays are human beings without horns, exemplary citizens. If he had known this before, he would not have made the remarks."

Yael Dayan, who is Weizman's niece, felt that the President had "not said enough after he said too much. This has been an expensive lesson for the [gay] community. I hope the president won't slip up again in the future," she said, expressing her fear that the earlier remarks could still lead to violence against them.

## New World Congress Addresses

Dear friends,

In the last few weeks an advanced addressing system for the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations has been tested and is operational.

The concept of this addressing system is that everyone within and outside the WCGLJO can reach officers at any time regardless the name of the actual person holding the position.

The entire world can reach a number of officers through pre-defined addresses (see below). These addresses are also published in the WCGLJO internet site.

president@wcgljo.org

vice.president@wcgljo.org

secretary@wcgljo.org

treasurer@wcgljo.org

steering.committee@wcgljo.org (all members of the steering committee having an e-mail address)

executive.director@wcgljo.org

eastern.development@wcgljo.org (development director eastern hemisphere)

western.development@wcgljo.org (development director western hemisphere)

conferences@wcgljo.org (conference liaison officer)

digest@wcgljo.org (the editor of the WC-digest)

webmaster@wcgljo.org (the webmaster of the WC-internet site)

info@wcgljo.org (a general information address; the webmaster will forward messages to the appropriate officer)

Until a few months after the Dallas conference, the next address will be available:

dallas@wcgljo.org (the organization for the 1997 Dallas conference)

## Reports from member-organizations

### Shalom Amigos (Mexico)

Well, we had a great 1996, among the highlights were: our second anniversary celebration, the visit of rabbi Greg Kanter from congregation Etz Chaim just before the High Holidays. He has helped to change the mind of many who didn't think it possible to be speaking to a real life gay rabbi in Mexico! A women's group got started in the second half of the year and in October we started advertising the group in the gay press (the group's official tel. number is: 264-6888). Very big steps for a country where we thought we would live forever in the closet. We have made private outreach with many of the main institutions of the Mexican Jewish Community, and things are going slowly but surely.

On a Latin American level, we facilitated a conference for LatAM University Jewish Students in Costa Rica where a well-known Jewish gay Costa Rican activist gave a stirring presentation, and established contact with several people in that country and Guatemala. In 1997 we plan to have three events per month, two traditional and one social.

**Congregation Tikvah Chadashah located in Seattle, Washington**, is the only World Congress affiliated group in the Pacific Northwest of the United States region. Seattle is located directly south of British Columbia, Canada. This past year CTC has sponsored two Shabbat services a month, monthly book group, Hebrew classes and guest rabbis, in addition to observances of the major holidays. We had our booth and marched in Seattle's annual lesbian and gay pride parade. In 1996, and continuing on into 1997 our focus will be to strengthen our ties with the larger Jewish community.

One of the biggest events happened in mid-November, at the Jewish Federations General Assembly. At the General Assembly, for the first time, the World Congress and CTC sponsored a reception for gay and lesbian delegates. Approximately thirty people attended this successful event. Deborah Rustin, CTC's World Congress representative, with the assistance of Priscilla Golding, is exploring developing a World Congress affiliated group in Portland, Oregon, 188 miles to the south of Seattle. She also hopes to help revive the group in Vancouver, British Columbia.

**Bet Mishpachah Plans Historic Move to D.C. Jewish Community Center.** Congregation Bet Mishpachah, the Gay and Lesbian Synagogue of Washington, DC, is very pleased to announce its impending move to the Washington D.C. Jewish Community Center. The Center is completing a multimillion dollar renovation of its headquarters at 16th and Q Streets, N.W., in the city's Dupont Circle neighborhood. Bet Mishpachah was invited to rent space within the building and plans to move there in March, 1997.

The move places Bet Mishpachah in the heart of the city's Jewish community. After 22 years, the synagogue will at last have a "Jewish space" to call its home, after enjoying the hospitality of two churches in Washington over more than two decades.

**San Francisco's Congregation Sha'ar Zahav has purchased a new home**, three times larger than its current location in the city's Castro District. The need for larger quarters reflects the Congregation's growth to its current membership of 500 adults and 130 children. When structural and cosmetic renovations are finished, the facility will boast a sanctuary holding 250 people, as well as separate meeting rooms, educational facilities, administrative offices, and a spacious rabbi's study.

A capital building campaign of \$1.3 million is being undertaken to finance the needed renovations and the congregation hopes to occupy its new quarters by Rosh Hashanah. The building is the former Cominsky Roche funeral home at 16 Street and Dolores, adjacent to San Francisco's Mission Dolores (a major tourist attraction), site of the city's first European settlement, and 2 blocks from Dolores Park, former site of a Jewish cemetery. (All cemeteries were relocated outside city limits many decades ago.) Sha'ar Zahav's presence in the neighborhood will reestablish a Jewish presence in what was once an active Jewish working-class district. The Mission District location today is primarily Latino, but also borders the primarily gay Castro district to the west. The new site is only four blocks from a major Bay Area Rapid Transit station.

The congregation is also still in the process of selecting a new rabbi to replace Rabbi Yoel Kahn who resigned last year to devote more time to his family and to continue his doctoral studies. Rabbi Martha Bergadine, a recent graduate of Hebrew Union College, is presently serving as interim rabbi.

### Yachad Deutschland: "We are here!"

The story of Yachad Germany is a story of success! Sounds good, eh? At our first meeting, in Cologne, in June 1995, there were six people. Six people so absolutely different in our past and present background that it was hard to believe we had anything in common. But we could easily recognize the bonds between us, and we still do.

Today we have more than 50 members, with meetings every month and on holidays (Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Gay Pride...), and many more activities, including Christopher Street Days in Cologne, and, of course, Oktoberfest in Munich. We have appeared in articles in the Jewish and general press. We also have our own newsletter, whose title, taken from a Yiddish song sung by the partisan resistance during the Holocaust, proudly announces "Mir sajnen do!": "We are here!"

Of course there is still a lot to do, in large part because the situation in Germany is different from that in many other places. First of all, our members are spread over a large geographical area with no single metropolitan hub, so most of us have to travel several hours from Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin etc. to reach a common meeting place. However, we have addressed that problem by starting local groups in Hamburg

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