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The Dream

By Carlton Watson

Reform Judaism Magazine

Spring 2004

My choice to become a Jew was not a political act, but rather the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. The search for an authentic faith has been a constant in my life since childhood. Separated from my mother and two brothers because of economic necessity, I grew up living with my grandaunt and granduncle in a Christian home in Jamaica, West Indies. My grandaunt and uncle were born-again Pentecostals who believed in all the tenets of their faith and in adhering to rigid rules on how to live their lives. I was baptized at age eight and taught that Christianity was the only path to "righteousness." Aware of other faiths, as my mother was Anglican and my grandmother was Baptist, I began to wonder: what if my grandaunt and uncle were wrong? What if, upon my death, at the moment of judgment, I discovered that Pentecostalism was not the true faith? Thinking that I would be very angry, I decided to withhold my total commitment, to wait before choosing a religion until I could fully understand the implications of that choice and thus avoid the chance of discovering later that my absolute belief might have been misplaced.

At the age of nine I immigrated to the United States to live with my grandmother. We attended church on occasion, but she was less passionate about religious practice and did not impose any demands upon me. Although I remained unsure of my religious path, I did reach two conclusions by the age of thirteen: first, I acknowledged that a greater power, one connected to the teachings of goodness and love, was essential in life; and second, that it was vital for me to be connected to something greater than myself, but at the same time to have a personal relationship with God. Growing up separated from my

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mother, and never really knowing or having a father, faith in God became my means of comforting myself during many lonely and painful moments. I recognized, too, that throughout history, worship and prayer have been at the core of the Black experience in coping with slavery, oppression, and injustice.

In 1988 I met Shelly, we fell in love, and I was married for the second time two years later. As our children grew to school age, both Shelly and I knew we wanted them to have the benefit of a religious upbringing. The question was, what religion? I still had not made peace with Christian teachings and did not wish to join a church; Shelly had not been raised with a religious background. Eventually I took them to a Baptist church Sunday school.

Several years later, a friend of Shelly's from graduate school invited us to attend a family service at Temple Emanuel in Worcester. The reception we received there, the warmth of the members, was overwhelming. As a person of color who'd had to deal with a lifetime of prejudice and bias, I did not sense even the slightest discomfort about us among the temple members. In fact, we were asked if we wanted to be on the mailing list to receive information about worship services and family events. In the coming weeks we returned several times for Shabbat worship, and even attended High Holiday services.

In the beginning I felt somewhat odd in temple. I tried to sort out a number of questions. As a person of color who had focused on issues of racial equality throughout my life, was this really my path? As the only Black worshiper in the sanctuary, did I really belong? How could Judaism speak to me as a Black? Since I then held a variety of leadership positions at organizations of color--including serving as CEO of the largest multicultural social service organization in central Massachusetts--how would continuing on this Jewish journey alter my role in the Black community? How would I feel about being defined as a Jew by others--predominantly White others?

And yet, the more I learned about Judaism, the greater was my desire to go to services and to be part of this way of life. The singing of the Shema brought tears to my eyes. I felt uplifted and connected, touched in a way that I had always desired and dreamt about. The rabbi and cantor articulated ideas and thoughts that had echoed within me since my boyhood in Jamaica: the relationship we establish with God changes and is redefined during the course of our lifetime; the biblical texts are not a rigid dogma but a sacred roadmap for life in today's world; compassion, equality, and justice are not empty terms to be preached about, but are to be actualized and modeled in the acceptance of those who are different from us. In the siddur I read words that reflected my own prayers for a better world, "a world without hate and oppression, a world of peace."

Over time, I forged real, sincere relationships within the congregation and became less of a stranger. And with every Shabbat my connection to Torah grew stronger. I now had a specific framework for my relationship with God, one that was both intellectually stimulating and spiritually uplifting.

After attending services for three years in this manner, I felt a yearning to belong, to commit to becoming Jewish. I had found the place where I could realize my lifelong

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dream--a place where I could be listened to and heard by others as part of one people, one heart, one God. I had awoken every day of my life in America carrying this dream--but never before had the experience of actualizing it. And so, with a mixture of emotions--sadness, joy, elation, and humility--I began to make my dream real. My wife and I joined Temple Emanuel.

Two years later I was ready to commit to becoming a Jew. Rabbi Sigma Coran and I met weekly for six to seven months, then bimonthly for another five months. I read, we studied, and we talked. I was comforted by her guidance and teachings, and I began to appreciate the shared experiences of the Jewish and Black communities in America. Many congregants became resources, helping me understand Jewish text, history, and current issues, and modeling their love of Judaism.

Outside of the temple's doors, I began to inform relatives and friends of my decision to become a Jew. While my family was understanding, others seemed puzzled or confused. Yet ultimately my decision did not affect any of my relationships or my effectiveness as an African American community leader. Once people realized that being Jewish did not change my character or my values, they felt no dissonance.

Following my conversion, I became more active in temple life. I served on the worship committee, joined the board, led services, and on occasion offered a d'var Torah. Asked to take on greater responsibilities to preserve the temple's financial footing, I led a visioning task group addressing Emanuel's financial health and served as vice president of finance. In June 2003 I was elected temple president. It is a humbling and sacred responsibility to be working with synagogue leaders in the effort to assure our congregation's continued vibrancy and sustainability.

Looking back on my ten years at Temple Emanuel, I am proud to say that not once, not for the briefest moment, have I experienced overt or covert mistreatment, hostility, rejection, discrimination, or prejudice. I have been treated, always, with dignity and respect, judged by the content of my character and my actions.

My impassioned love for my congregational family grows deeper every day. While much more work needs to be done--oppression is not eradicated, hate surrounds us, and I often find myself wondering why the reality I have found in my congregation cannot be the reality of the broader community--I take pride that at my temple Black families, Asian families, interracial families, interfaith families, gay and lesbian families, families with disabilities, and all others are treated with honor and respect for their contributions to our peoplehood. Judaism can provide the model for humanity. Given our history--replete with suffering, slavery, exile, oppression, and injustice--we can open our arms and our hearts to validate the spectrum of people that encompasses Diaspora Jewry and be as beacons of light to the world.

Carlton Watson is the president of Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts; the executive director of the Henry Lee Willis Community Center in Worcester; and a diversity trainer with the National Conference for Community and Justice. He has four children; his second youngest, Michael, became a bar mitzvah on December 6, 2003.

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Help Grow the Jewish Lending Library in Nigeria

**Evan Green from Quebec Leaves for Nigeria in 10 Days: Help Donate
Jewish Religious Items
Sent by Jack Zeller of Kulanu**

Dear Kulanu friends,

Remy Ilona is starting a lending library so that we can stretch the books we send around more effectively. Many of the communities are so far apart, e.g. from one end of Abuja to another it is 50 miles, so we still need books for individual synagogues to also have libraries.

On a very positive note, Remy has a large collection thanks to Joel Levitt who celebrated his Bar Mitzvah by asking that all presents be books and Jewish ritual support so that he could help Remy get started.

He has been obtaining enormous resources from synagogues in Quebec; often synagogues collect tallit that are not new but too good to do away with and they may well be able to contribute! Evan Green is leaving in 10 days for Nigeria. He goes often for his work. I convey his message that he is eager to bring tallit, tefilin, shabbat candles and mezzuzot. If anyone wants to send him any of the above that they want to contribute please mail to:

Evan D. Green
International Project Manager and Evaluator,
Le Groupe-conseil Baastel ltee
7 PAU
Chelsea Quebec
Canada
J9B 1B4
(819) 595-1421 evan.green@baastel.ca

Update Anousim

**Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum
SAUDADE SEFARAD**

Querido Primo/a/s,

I will [try] to write about some of our special moments shared together on our journey through Portugal. It has been a time of great spiritual growth - magic and wonder ... so much so that I'm finding it difficult to express myself adequately.. I can't possibly do justice to the times when heaven touched earth (us) on our journey through Portugal, meeting our brothers and sisters and having them join us along the way.

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The two rabbi's presently in Belmonte and Lisbon have written beautiful letters of thanks and support. They send blessings and love to all Saudades members and are looking forward to many more of us visiting them again real soon.

They both sent messages saying we brought them and the communities they serve great joy and inspiration but the truth is, we left them far richer in spirit . Having met them, the Belmonte, Porto Communities as well as the growing number of Anusim fighting for recognition.... .studying and getting ready for their return home to Judaism. We are grateful for having rabbis like Rabbi's Boaz Pash and Elisha Salas who are welcoming the Anusim, going out of their way to fight for them as well as teach them.

May they be blessed in the work they are doing for our people (in spite of the many obstacles put in their way) How do I express all of this in mere words? Unfortunately, in spite of the 'good stuff" there have been problems too. We, [Saudade Sefarad] have run into a financial problem due to the disbanding of our 'Steering Committee", set up especially for the purpose of fundraising, for those who had committed themselves to helping the Anusim and Belmonte community.

Those of you who know Yosef or who were with us in Belmonte for Shabbat, who met him, danced and sang with him after Friday evening services or heard him on Shabbat morning taking the lead for part of the service... will understand how important it is for this young man to be able to continue his studies for him to return to Portugal as a rabbi. A Rabbi of our very own -someone exactly like those of us who are [or were] Anusim.

We are committed to sponsoring Yosef (Jose Joao) Mendes Rodrigo to attend the Sephardic Yeshiva in Jerusalem for a minimum of three years.... but now that the members who committed to this mitzvah reneged on their promise, we are faced with the problem of having no fundraisers. We need funds to keep our (Saudade Sefarad's) part of our commitment.

SAUDADE SEFARAD is an international, non-governmental organization assisting the Belmonte and Anusim communities of Portugal . The American Sephardi Federation serves as non-profit, 501.c.3 umbrella agency for SAUDADE SEFARAD donors and grantors, facilitating the acceptance of gifts and funds.

Anousim Gathering and Lecture in Texas

(IsraelNN.com)

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/news.php3?id=65527>

Jul 12, '04 / 23 Tammuz 5764

Tomorrow, Tuesday July 13, at 7:00pm, the Jewish Community Center of Houston, Texas, will be hosting a unique lecture event on the phenomenon of the return (to Judaism) of Hispanic people who had ancestors who were secret or hidden Jews, forced to convert to Catholicism (*conversos*) to survive the ethnic cleansing that began in Spain around the 10th and then the 15th centuries.

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Entitled *Saudades* (The Longing), the event features lectures by Bennet Greenspan, head of Family Tree DNA in Houston, and by Yaffah Batya daCosta, a "returnee" with *converso* roots and active in efforts to educate and encourage Jews regarding those with backgrounds similar to her own.

DaCosta is currently working with Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz the Av Beit Din of the CRC and other RCA organizations. The late Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Rishon LeZion and former Chief Rabbi of Israel, have already endorsed the efforts of those who help the *Anousim* return to their Jewish roots.

A Spanish translation of the lectures will be made available at the free lecture.

For more information: info@cryptounion.com <mailto:>

Or <http://www.cryptounion.com/events>

Book Review: Scattered Among the Peoples

By Allan Levine

(Overlook Press; 480 pp.; \$35)

Beginning with the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and concluding with the plight of the Jews in the Soviet Union until 1986, Allan Levine has scanned Jewish history, focusing on places and people. In *Scattered Among the Peoples*, he selected 12 cities and periods: Seville, 1492; Venice, 1516; Constantinople, 1666; Amsterdam, 1700; Vienna, 1730; Frankfurt, 1848; St. Petersburg, 1881; Paris, 1895; New York, 1913; Berlin, 1925; Vilna, 1944; and Kiev, 1967.

For each of these, he identifies important Jewish individuals who left their imprint on Jewish history. By telling their stories, Levine provides a unique approach to understanding what happened to Diaspora Jewry during these past 500 years. He begins by tracing the movement of the Abravenel family from Spain to Portugal to Italy to Turkey, bringing to life what happened to Spanish Jews as they survived persecution, expulsion and ghettoization.

The development of the Dutch Jewish community during the 18th century is told through examining the lives of Abraham Pereira and his family. A wealthy merchant, Pereira helped to organize the Jews of Amsterdam and to build the famous Portuguese synagogue, which stands to this day. Court Jews, such as Samuel Oppenheimer and Samson Wertheimer, figured significantly in the development of Hapsburg rule over Austria and surrounding territories. While they tried to improve the lot of their fellow Jews, they encountered considerable opposition and envy from both Christians and Jews.

Following chapters on the rise of the Rothschilds and the Jews of the shtetl in the Pale of Settlement, the saga of Alfred Dreyfus and of French Jewry is presented. Even though well over 100 years have passed since the anti-Semitic horrors of

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the Dreyfus case frightened Jews everywhere, Levine's effective re-creation of the story still has the power to send a chill down the spine. The last four times and places that are dealt with include American Jewry in the early part of the 20th century; pre-Nazi Germany in the 1920s; Vilna in World War II; and Soviet Jewry before the end of Communist rule.

Finally, the contemporary Diaspora is considered and the book concludes with the assertion that Jews are forever burdened with the task of "coming to terms with the Jewish condition" in every time and place. Levine has given us an exceedingly well-written survey of Jewish history since the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Some might quarrel with his starting point by arguing that the Diaspora on which he concentrates really began in 586 B.C.E. and 70 A.D. when the temples were destroyed. However, this would be quibbling in view of the author's remarkable ability to combine lively popular history with outstanding scholarship.

— Morton I. Teicher

Mexican Jews Demand an End to Wave of Kidnappings and Other Violent Crimes

By Corrie MacLaggan

JTA email Edition

June 30, 2004

Jews are joining with other Mexicans in demanding that authorities put a stop to a recent rash of crime and kidnappings. "Almost everyone has either been assaulted or kidnapped or knows someone who has," said Ari Konik, a Mexico City Jew who helped organize a march of hundreds of thousands of people Sunday down Mexico City's main boulevard. "I think we'll see the government take immediate action."

Simultaneous demonstrations took place in other Mexican cities, including Tijuana, Morelia, Torreon, Guadalajara and Puebla. "It doesn't do any good to sit at home and watch TV and say, 'What a shame,'" said Eliana Menasse, a Jew who took part in the march in the capital. "The politicians can't close their eyes to this."

The Central Jewish Committee of Mexico did not officially participate in the demonstration, the executive director of the group, Mauricio Lulka, said, but many Jews attended on their own.

"The Jewish community is a reflection of the general society," Lulka told JTA. "We believe that there have been some advances in safety, but that it's definitely not sufficient. The perception is still that crime is a serious problem."

The past month has been a time of heightened public concern here about crime, especially kidnapping. It's difficult to put the problem into numbers because many kidnappings go unreported for fear that police are involved. A new study showed that Mexico ranks behind only Colombia in the number of annual kidnappings.

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It's also difficult to say how many Jews have been victims of kidnappings, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there have been plenty. Like many people who marched on Sunday, Konik had a personal reason: His 29-year-old niece recently was kidnapped and murdered.

"She was a good girl, beautiful," he said. "When you can't trust the police, when the authorities don't do anything, something has to change."

The topic of violence has dominated Mexican political discourse since the march. President Vicente Fox applauded the demonstration. Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a 2006 presidential hopeful, accused march organizers of trying to discredit his administration.

Mexico City's police chief announced last week that the government is planning to establish a database of information on kidnappers and gangs.

Attorney General Rafael Macedo de la Concha suggested Monday that Congress should examine the possibility of reinstating the death penalty. Though that seems unlikely, Macedo de la Concha's public announcement is a sign that the march has impacted Mexico's political scene.

The Call to the Torah, Now Heeded Online

By Charles DeLaFuente

New York Times

July 1, 2004

Judaism is more than 5,000 years old. The Internet has been around for a tiny fraction of that time. But a rabbi with a specialized Web site has brought ancient tradition and modern technology together, providing conversions to Judaism in a process that is largely accomplished online.

The rabbi, Celso Cukierkorn, offers an online conversion course to anyone who wants to become Jewish. A PC and a Web connection bring the rabbi and converts from as far away as Australia and New Zealand together for online study and even the final exam. Rabbi Cukierkorn (he pronounces it COOK-your-corn) is a convert himself, of sorts, to computer technology. He grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, and recalled that students learned to use computers at his high school. But the equipment was boxy mainframe technology, probably from the 1960's, he guessed, and he did not pursue computer training beyond high school.

"Until the mid 90's, I wasn't computer-literate," said Rabbi Cukierkorn, who is 34. "But then I realized that there are different ways to touch people," and that the computer was one of them.

His ancestors, who were rabbis, "traveled from village to village to bring the message of God," he explained. "Right now it's the same thing, except I don't go to a specific place. I can do that from the computer."

Rabbi Cukierkorn also conducts in-person conversion classes at Congregation B'Nai Israel, a Reform synagogue in Hattiesburg, Miss. But modern technology, he said,

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provides him with "a wonderful way to help people who cannot find a rabbi to convert them or who live in places where they don't have a rabbi or their schedule will not allow them to convert" in more traditional ways. Most of his online students learn about his Web site, www.conversiontojudaism.org, from people who have taken his course or from rabbis, he said.

The online curriculum, which is divided into eight units, is a blend of books and online material, some of which Rabbi Cukierkorn wrote. It is customized for each student, depending on prior knowledge of Judaism. One of the units, for example, is what the rabbi calls "the life cycle of the Jewish year," beginning with Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, and proceeding through other holidays and festivals in chronological order.

At the end of each unit, there is a quiz. The curriculum requires about 80 to 120 hours of work, which can take from three months to more than a year to complete. In addition to the online coursework, the process requires attendance at a conversion seminar. One was held recently in Beverly Hills, Calif., and another is scheduled soon in Miami Beach. Rabbi Cukierkorn said he hoped to hold one in New York at least once a year. The course is followed by a final exam, also given online, that has 100 questions. But unlike most tests, there is no predetermined passing score. The rabbi said he looks to see "how they feel and what's inside them." He reads the answers "to see a bigger picture."

"That's what this is all about," he said. "We're not looking for intellectual capabilities." The rabbi said that he generally lets the convert decide how much to pay, and that the payments have ranged from almost nothing to \$2,500. Many conversions involve someone who has married or plans to marry a Jew, but some people give other reasons, the rabbi said. One of the more unusual involved people who had seen the movie "Schindler's List" and decided individually that they wanted to become Jewish.

One of the rabbi's online students, Melissa Davimos, 38, of Boca Raton, Fla., said she wanted to convert before her daughter, Spencer, was born. She said she was unable to find a synagogue in Boca Raton that welcomed converts, so she turned to the Internet. She said she and her husband, who is Jewish, planned to join a synagogue soon and to have a baby-naming ceremony there for Spencer, who is now three months old.

Another participant, Ana Scherer, of Florianopolis, Brazil, said by e-mail that she was born a Catholic, but that at age 12 she "came to a conclusion that Catholicism was not my true call." Mrs. Scherer, 34, said she began studying online in Brazil and continued when she moved to Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., in 2000. Rabbi Cukierkorn, who was trained as an Orthodox rabbi and graduated from the Ayshel Avraham Rabbinical Seminary in Monsey, N.Y., said he had not encountered criticism that people who seek conversion online are not serious enough about their desire to become Jewish.

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, the academic and spiritual center of Conservative Judaism, said that the Conservative movement requires at least a year of study by prospective converts, including learning Hebrew, and requires "a good deal of human contact," although the process does not all have to be face-to-face.

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Rabbi Schorsch said it sounded to him like the Web site program met the second test and was "on the right track" for the first. Rabbi Cukierkorn said his process for conversion online was identical to the one he uses in his synagogue. "The only difference is that I might do the conversion interview over the phone," he said. Asked where the majority of his converts came from, the rabbi paused, then said: "I have people everywhere. They come from wherever God touches their souls."

As Syria Frets Under Sanctions, Syrian Jews Help Build Ties to U.S.

By Ron Kampeas

June 28, 2004

JTA Electronic Edition

Jack Avital speaks Arabic with Syrian inflections. He built his Brooklyn home like a Syrian villa, with a courtyard where he enjoys bitter Arabic coffee at sunset. He built his company offices -- overlooking the bustle of Ocean Parkway -- like a Syrian palace, pale pink and fronted by an ornate gate. True to his love of Syria, Avital, who is Jewish, commemorated the death in 2000 of Syria's longtime dictator, Hafez Assad, with a black-sash event attended by the Syrian ambassador to Washington. So he readily admits that visiting the country for the first time last month was an emotional experience. "There were tears in our eyes at the airport," said Avital, who led a 12-man delegation representing the Sephardic National Alliance, a group composed mainly of Syrian Jews. Such strong feelings for a country most of the delegation had never seen -- and for a dynasty reviled, among other reasons, for keeping its Jews from emigrating until the late 1980s -- is not unusual in America's Syrian-Jewish community, which is centered in Brooklyn.

Syrian Jews here have maintained a strong, insular identity as well as quiet and friendly business ties with Syria, especially since Hafez Assad allowed the Jews who emigrated to maintain their businesses and properties, and many still collect profits and rents from clients in Syria. What is unusual is the degree to which the Syrian Jews here and the government in Damascus -- neither party known for being particularly outgoing -- are willing to make the relationship public. There are clear implications to the new openness: It suggests a greater Syrian willingness to reach out to the United States, and eventually Israel, at a time when Syrian officials say recent U.S. sanctions will crimp their already troubled economy. One aim of the outreach is to reverse Syria's poor image in the United States, and to help persuade President Bush to back down from the sanctions.

The sanctions were imposed because of Syria's failure to crack down on terrorist groups and to end programs to develop weapons of mass destruction. Syria is not the first country to seek to mend fences with the United States by courting Jewish groups, long believed in the Arab world to have inordinate influence in Washington. Avital, who owns Jackie Vital, an urban fashion design house, has established ties in New York's Jewish community, and he is close to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Likud party. He arranged a meeting between Syria's ambassador to Washington, Imad Moustapha, and Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), who backed the sanctions in Congress. U.S. State

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Department officials speak approvingly of the delegation's visit to Syria and suggest it helps them assess whether Bashar Assad is trying to outgrow the legacy of his isolationist, totalitarian father. In fact, the officials confirm, they had a role in encouraging the Syrian regime to invite the Jewish delegation.

Leaders of the mainstream American Jewish community largely have been silent about the visit, though the Zionist Organization of America expressed its "disappointment" with the group. "It is wrong for American Jews or any Americans to help sanitize the Syrian regime by visiting Syria," ZOA president Morton Klein said in a statement. The delegation met with U.S. Ambassador Margaret Scobie during the visit, a meeting that was featured on the front pages of Syrian newspapers and on the television evening news. There are other, subtle signs of greater Syrian openness, though it's too soon to know how wide-ranging they are. Moustapha and other Syrian officials are reaching out to other expatriate communities, and the expression of opposition viewpoints in public in Syria no longer presents the dangers it once did. One benchmark for progress will be next month's conference of the ruling Ba'ath party. One Omani newspaper report has said the party will renounce its decades-old pledge never to negotiate with Israel.

Moustapha himself is a sign that Assad might be wresting power away from the old guard. Assad went over the head of Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa, a bulwark of Syria's old guard, to appoint Moustapha, a computer science professor known for his Western outlook. On arriving in Washington earlier this year, Moustapha immediately sought out the Syrian Jewish community of about 30,000 people. He and Avital say they bonded over a meal at Avital's house, cuisine that Moustapha recognized as "from home." Avital said he immediately "clicked" with the fast-talking ambassador.

He invited Moustapha to a wedding, which is where Moustapha issued his invitation to the delegation to visit Syria. Both men insist that the visit was more a natural homecoming for an ancient Jewish community than a tool of statecraft. Yet they acknowledge the implications of the visit. "If both sides asked us to be a bridge, we would gladly do it," Avital said. He said that one highlight of the trip was the delegation's meeting with Assad. "The president said that when the Jews left the country, Syria became unblessed," he said. It wasn't the delegation's place to bring up political issues, Avital said, and, with one exception, the group devoted its time to seeking out sites of Jewish interest.

The exception was when delegates raised a report that Assad told Pope John Paul II in 2000 that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. Assad denied the report, Avital said, and said his remarks had been taken out of context. Otherwise, Avital and Moustapha said, the three-day visit was dedicated to reconnecting people that Moustapha describes as "expatriates" with their homeland. What most impressed the delegation, Avital said, was the pristine condition of the Jewish sites. Avital is known for his work preserving Jewish cemeteries in North Africa and Europe, and he was impressed by the state of the ancient cemeteries in Syria, producing snapshots of rows of gleaming white tombstones. Avital and Moustapha also were impressed with the warm reception the delegation received outside the palace.

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Moustapha was relieved that the visit had gone well. "In the plane, I was thinking, 'What if I'm wrong, what if people will treat them badly?'" Moustapha said. "I know that the government will treat them well, officially speaking, but what about popular reaction, what if the president is nice with them but then the people are abusing them in the street? It will undermine my whole effort." Instead, both men say, the reception was universally warm. Upon learning that the delegation was Jewish, people rushed forward to ask the group for its blessings. A Damascus restaurant went out of its way to order meat from a glatt kosher butcher. Avital singled out the mufti of Aleppo, who at a dinner for the delegation recounted tales of Jewish-Muslim cooperation and said that religious schools included in their text a legendary tale of Jewish-Muslim resistance to Persian tyranny. "'Jews are royalty,' the Mufti said, 'their word is true,'" Avital said. "With the Arabs, you give respect, and you receive respect."

Annan Presses UN On Anti-Semitism

In wake of secretary-general's 'sea change' remarks, racism envoy pushing report on worldwide hatred.

By Stewart Ain

The Jewish Week

June 25, 2004

One day after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan delivered what was seen as an historic speech in which he called upon UN bodies to develop ways to more effectively combat anti-Semitism, the UN's special representative on contemporary racism and intolerance said he planned to press for a separate report on worldwide anti-Semitism. The official, Doudou Dien, said by phone from Geneva that he would seek the approval of the High Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to write such a report "in light of what the secretary general has said."

"I need a specific resolution, but given what the secretary general said, I think it now" would be easier to get such authorization, Dien said. He added that he plans to issue a report on anti-Semitism — either as a separate study or as part of a larger report — and that it would explore whether the increase in anti-Semitism is "due to the historic European anti-Semitism, the Middle East conflict, and linkage between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism."

In his address before a daylong conference on anti-Semitism at the UN, the first such conference ever held at the international body, Annan said that just 60 years after the Holocaust "we are witnessing an alarming resurgence of this phenomenon in new forms and manifestations." "This time, the world cannot be silent," he said.

Although he did not label attacks on Israel as what some are now calling the "new anti-Semitism," Annan did say: "When we seek justice for the Palestinians — as we must — let us firmly disavow anyone who tries to use that cause to incite hatred against Jews, in Israel or elsewhere." And he called on the UN to endorse the Berlin Declaration recently adopted by the 55-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which he said "declared unambiguously that international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism."

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But Anne Bayefsky, a professor at Toronto's York University who spoke during one of three panel discussions held during the day, pointed out that the conference was being held at a time when the UN has itself "become the leading purveyor of anti-Semitism, intolerance and inequity against the Jewish people and its state." She pointed out that six of the 10 emergency sessions ever held by the General Assembly were devoted to Israel, while no emergency session was convened about the genocide that killed an estimated 1 million people in Rwanda or about the ethnic cleansing that killed tens of thousands in the former Yugoslavia or the millions in the Sudan. "That's discrimination," Bayefsky said, adding that more than one-quarter of all resolutions condemning human rights violations adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights were directed at Israel.

"As Israelis are demonized at the UN, so Palestinians and their cause are deified," she pointed out. Bayefsky also lashed into Annan, who by then had left the conference, for constantly criticizing Israel but "refusing" to name those responsible for the suicide bombings that kill indiscriminately those on Israel's streets — a practice she said that sends a "green light to strike again."

Felice Gaer, director of international relations at the American Jewish Committee, said Annan's comments were a "sea change" from those he made six years ago to mark Israel's 50th birthday. "I think he went very far," she said. "You can't find a secretary-general who has said this kind of stuff before." Gaer said that six years ago, Annan said he was aware that "for many Israelis the image of the United Nations has not lived up to its founding spirit." And he spoke of "your concerns" when pledging to usher in a new era of relations between Israel and the UN.

But in his remarks Monday, she said, Annan acknowledged "that the United Nations' record on anti-Semitism has at times fallen short of our ideals." And he said to the applause of the 600 primarily Jewish leaders and a group of students from the North Shore Hebrew Academy on Long Island: "Jews everywhere must feel that the United Nations is their home too. We must make this vision a reality while we still have survivors of the Holocaust amongst us."

There were some Jewish leaders who had hoped that Annan would go even further and call for a permanent exhibit on the Holocaust at the UN, pledge to issue an annual statement or hold annual conferences on anti-Semitism, or appoint someone at the UN to deal with this issue. But Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, insisted that there should be no "litmus test of how many points he covered that the American Jewish community would have liked him to say."

"The tone, the content, the direction he indicated he would lead the UN is very significant and we should applaud it, embrace it and watch to see how it is implemented," he said. "He committed publicly that he would use his moral suasion to put the issue on the front burner. To me, what else do you want?" Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he hopes Annan would translate his words into "a concrete, aggressive action plan. For Jews to

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feel that 'the UN is their home, too,' there must be a willingness to make fundamental changes."

The conference, the first in a series titled "Unlearning Intolerance," featured a keynote address by Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, who pointed out that anti-Semitism is the "oldest collective bigotry in recorded history" and that it is senseless. "The anti-Semite doesn't know me, but he hates me," he said. "Actually, he hated me even before I was born. ... A young Israeli visiting Berlin was assaulted in the street in broad daylight yesterday. Last week, a young Jewish student was stabbed in Paris. A number of European Jews told me they live in fear."

"Under the pretext of blaming Israel's policies, which they outrageously exaggerate and demonize, their Western allies and supporters encourage hatred towards the entire Jewish people," Wiesel said. "I never thought I will have to fight anti-Semitism. Naively, I was convinced that it died in Auschwitz. Now I realize my mistake; it didn't. Only the Jews perished there. ... Thus my plea to you, Mr. Secretary General: Help us fight it; help us disarm it."

Dien, the special racism representative, said that even as he prepares his report on racism he plans to continue visiting with Jewish leaders in every country he visits. He pointed out that within the last year he has visited Jewish leaders in Canada and France. "There is an increase of anti-Semitism," Dien said. "The issue has to be dealt with directly."

Stir the Pot: Admit 'Descendants' and Foreigners

By Ruben Navarrette

The Dallas Morning News

Wednesday, June 30, 2004

If you want to whip up a batch of controversy at some of America's most selective colleges and universities, here's a sure-fire recipe: Start with the volatile issue of affirmative action. Add the sensitive subject of natives feeling pushed aside by foreigners. Mix in the legacy of racism, the sense of entitlement felt by many Americans and the pressures of competing in a global economy. Leave to boil.

Things are getting awfully hot now that black intellectuals are openly questioning whether the commitment to diversity at some of the best schools is only skin deep. The concern is that many schools are trying to diversify their campuses by admitting individuals from Africa or the West Indies in place of African-American students.

The dependably controversial Lani Guinier, now of Harvard Law School, and Henry Louis Gates, chairman of that school's African and African-American studies department, addressed the issue at a recent gathering of black Harvard alumni. Perhaps as few as a third of the school's 500 or so black undergraduates come from families where all four grandparents were born in this country, the academics informed the alumni. The American-born students have begun to notice the trend and have taken to calling themselves "the descendants" – as in the U.S.-born descendants of slaves.

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The fact that so many of the students are foreign-born worries Professors Guinier and Gates. First, it's a safe bet that this isn't exactly what the proponents of affirmative action had in mind when they conceived of racial preferences to somehow compensate for the negative effects of decades of institutional racism and discrimination.

And, second, some observers of higher education think that Harvard and other elite schools may be trying to pull a fast one, admitting high-achieving foreign students as an easy way to meet diversity goals. Could be. When I was a Harvard undergraduate in the late 1980s, I could never shake the feeling that the institution was forever pretending to be more inclusive than it really was. It would carefully admit a sprinkling of African-American and Hispanic students.

Working in the admissions office – first as a file clerk and later as a recruiter – I could see that those admitted were often the cream of the crop. They may have had 1400 SAT scores, or been high school valedictorians or student body presidents. This wasn't affirmative action. It was just the latest example of what Harvard has long done: acknowledge excellence.

There was precious little risk taking. Few of my classmates came from small farm towns or barrio high schools. The idea back then seemed to be to achieve diversity while still playing it safe. These days, it could be that the safe route is to admit high-performing foreign students.

But it's the first complaint that I have the most trouble with: the idea that admitting foreign students to meet diversity goals runs counter to the reason that affirmative action came about in the first place, namely to compensate for some past injustice. I don't know about you, but – even as someone who can be persuaded into supporting some of the more benign forms of affirmative action, such as outreach efforts – I never bought that line. In fact, of all the justifications for race-conscious admissions policies, the "past injustice" argument is about the silliest and most problematic.

For one thing, it's not like any society could ever fully compensate for the horrors of slavery or the injustice of land-grabs that stripped Native Americans and Mexican-Americans of their rightful holdings. Besides, even if it could make up for something like that, how do you get there by admitting a bunch of mostly middle-class high achievers into elite colleges and universities?

We need to either get rid of affirmative action or come up with a better rationale for keeping it.

Here's one: Racial or ethnic diversity only enhances the college or university experience. If you want to train young men and young women for leadership roles in a rapidly changing society, you have to start by changing the composition of the student body. You should never lower standards, and everyone who is admitted had better be able to do the work.

But being exposed to diverse life experiences and points of view has an intrinsic value. You can achieve it by admitting the descendants of sharecroppers. But you also can get

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there by welcoming in immigrants and the children of immigrants. This whole controversy should provide a lesson for Americans – of all colors. It's a complicated and competitive world. Whatever it is you think you offer, chances are that someone else offers something similar. So work hard and offer as much as possible.

Ruben Navarrette is an editorial columnist for The Dallas Morning News. His e-mail address is rnavarrette@dallasnews.com.

Jewish Groups Step up Efforts to Stop Crisis Developing in Sudan

By Peter Ephross

July 6, 2004

JTA Email Edition

It seems the phrase “never again” isn’t just for the Holocaust anymore. In recent weeks, Jewish groups have stepped up their efforts to stop the government-sponsored killing of tens of thousands of black Muslims in Sudan. The efforts have come as world attention begins to focus on the crisis in Sudan, where hundreds of thousands of black Africans have fled their homes to escape violence.

Late last month, President Bush made available up to \$34 million for special refugee needs in Sudan and neighboring Chad, as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and the U.N.’s secretary-general, Kofi Annan, visited the Sudan refugee camps last week. After the visits, Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir promised he would reign in government-backed Arab militias and allow human rights observers into the disputed region of Darfur.

But most observers are skeptical that the government will make good on its promises, and pressure on the Khartoum government is mounting. Most Jewish fund raising focuses on internal Jewish issues, such as support for Israel, Israeli victims of terrorism, local social services and the needs of Jewish communities around the world.

But Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, who for several years has been trying to place the Sudan violence on the public agenda, said there’s no reason Jews shouldn’t focus on other people’s problems too. “I do it as a Jew because I think Jews should be sensitive to other peoples as well,” Wiesel said. “I cannot just live isolated.” Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service, agrees.

“We’re capable of taking positions and, frankly, we’re capable of raising money for more than just one issue,” Messinger said. These positions on Sudan increasingly are becoming public.

This week, the Washington-area Jewish Community Council is hosting an interfaith vigil to protest the killings in Sudan. That comes on the heels of a protest last week at the Sudanese Embassy in Washington, co-sponsored by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. “When genocidal activity is going on, Jews need to be at the forefront,” Rabbi David Saperstein, the center’s director, told JTA at the rally. “We’ve been the quintessential victims.”

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Part of the motivation seems to be the feeling that Jewish groups didn't do enough the last time questions of genocide were raised, in Rwanda in 1994. "During both the Holocaust and Rwanda genocide, warnings were received and ignored," Jerry Fowler, staff director of the Committee on Conscience at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, wrote in an Op-Ed for The Washington Post after visiting a Sudanese refugee camp in Chad.

"Today we say 'never again.' The question now is whether we will ignore warnings while the Africans of Darfur perish and then — once again — say 'never again,'" he said. On June 24, the Holocaust museum stopped all its activities for 30 minutes to draw attention to the Sudan crisis. The museum now features information about the situation in Sudan on its Internet home page.

Some may be surprised that the Holocaust museum is involved in drawing attention to other mass killings, but it's part of the museum's mission, Fowler said in an interview. "One way that we honor the memory that we're preserving is by trying to have an effect on the world that we live in," he said. As public efforts have stepped up, so have behind-the-scenes moves aimed at humanitarian relief.

The Jewish Disaster Relief Coalition, made up of some 45 Jewish groups across the political and religious spectrum, set up a mailbox for humanitarian relief for Sudanese facing homelessness and starvation in the camps, after they were chased from their homes by Arab Muslim marauders armed by the government.

The coalition's efforts were spurred by the American Jewish World Service, which convened a meeting of the coalition a few months ago. The World Service supports humanitarian and economic projects, mainly in the developing world. At that time, coalition members weren't ready to take a stand on the issue, Messinger said.

Part of the problem may have been lack of understanding about the complex situation in Sudan. The country has been in upheaval for two decades as a result of civil war between Muslims in the north and Christians and animists in the south. An estimated 2 million people died in the fighting, which began in 1983 and subsided a bit only earlier this year.

Last year, more violence broke out after the Sudanese government exploited ethnic tensions in Darfur, a western region of the country. Nomadic Arab tribes long have been in conflict with their African farming neighbors over Darfur's water and arable land. The tensions exploded after two African rebel groups took up arms against the government in February 2003 over what they regarded as unjust government treatment in their struggle with Arab countrymen.

At least 30,000 people have been killed in the revolt, which has precipitated a refugee problem.

The government denies that it has supplied arms and encouraged violence, but there are widespread reports by witnesses of government airplanes and helicopter gunships backing the militias, known as janjaweed, or horsemen.

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After members of the Jewish disaster relief coalition learned more about Sudan — in part from increased media attention — they decided to take action. In addition to what some individual groups had collected, the coalition, through its mailbox at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, had collected \$11,000 as of last week. The amount raised is minuscule compared to the sums raised for emergency campaigns for Israel. But those involved in the Sudan campaign say the issue shouldn't be ignored.

"If the message of the Holocaust is 'never again' when it comes to genocide, it means 'never again,'" said Reva Price, Washington director for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization for local community relations councils. "We have to get that right."

Money for Sudanese refugees can be sent via the Internet at www.jcdr.org or by mail to JDC: Jewish Coalition for Sudan Relief, Box 321, 847A Second Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

JTA intern Justin Bosch in Washington contributed to this report.

David Brody, ADL Lobbyist, Fought for Civil Rights and Against Boycott

By Justin Bosch

JTA Online

June 30, 2004

David Brody, an Anti-Defamation League lobbyist who for four decades helped lead the fight in Washington for Jewish interests and civil rights, has died. His widow, Beatrice, told JTA that Brody died Saturday in Washington of unknown causes. He was 88.

As chief lobbyist at the ADL from 1965 through 1989, Brody nurtured relationships with legislators from both parties and earned the affectionate title "101st senator" because of his ubiquity on Capitol Hill. Brody's tenure dwarfed the careers of even the longest-serving politicians. He started with the ADL -- then known as ADL-B'nai B'rith -- in 1949, and ultimately rose to hold the top Washington post.

Brody is best known for his stewardship of civil rights initiatives and anti-boycott legislation that diminished the impact of the Arab boycott of Israel, but it was his private persona that distinguished and endeared him, said his ADL successor, Jess Hordes. "It was not about going through the motions for doing things; it was about following a set of principles to do a job and working to see that they got implemented," Hordes said.

A consummate lobbyist, the gregarious Brody developed networks of contacts and close friends. "A pro's pro," is how Ken Jacobson, the ADL's associate national director, described him. Friendly with much of the Washington crowd, Brody hosted diplomats and key figures at dinner parties in his Washington home, Jacobson said.

His ability to forge friendships across party lines did not stop Brody from staking out unpopular positions. His support for civil rights was unflinching long before the

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watershed procession of legislation in the 1960s finally shifted the status quo to his side. "He was with the issues early on and he stayed with them long after others did," Jacobson said. "He had a long and consistent record on civil rights."

Brody was among dozens of hostages held for 39 hours when fanatical Muslims seized the B'nai B'rith building in 1977. According to the Washington Post, Brody -- released on the day of his 34th wedding anniversary -- went home, napped and was ready by evening for his anniversary dinner. Brody is survived by his wife, Beatrice, of Washington; son Michael Brody, of Reston, Va.; daughter Ann Brody, of Port Jefferson, N.Y.; a brother, and three grandsons.

Controlling China: The U.S. Congress Should not Fund State-mandated Abortions

By Harry Wu

National Review on Line

July 09, 2004

Today, we expect the U.S. Congress to vote on an amendment to restore funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This would, in turn, restore U.S. funding to UNFPA programs in China, where women are not allowed to freely give birth and are subjected to forced abortion and sterilization. This one-child policy is the most pervasive human-rights violation in China today: It should not be sponsored, and cannot be encouraged, by the United States.

The UNFPA argues that it must cooperate with the Chinese government to help improve the reproductive health of Chinese women and children. But as published, China's newly promulgated State Family Planning Law is a violation of human rights as outlined by the U.N. Charter, UNCHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and the Cairo Declaration, to all of which China is a signatory. Each of these documents clearly states that family planning should be the responsibility of individuals.

Family planning, in the true sense of the term, should be encouraged the way that family planning is universally accepted throughout the international community. Its concept, defined in the World Population Plan of Action as adopted at the United Nations Bucharest Session, is: "All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so." In contrast, family planning enforced in China is actually "State-Controlled Mechanized Reproduction of Children": "Individuals" and "husbands and wives" are replaced with "the state," and "family planning" becomes "the state decides how many children a family may have, and at spacing in accordance with economic development."

According to the Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China, "Under China's family-planning policy each couple may have only one child; in rural areas a couple may have a second child if the first child happens to be a girl; a national minority couple may have two children. All births must be approved in advance, with the state allotting birth quotas in a unified way; children in all areas of the nation should be

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borne by the quotas allotted for the given year; offenders shall be punished." This Chinese version of family planning — thoroughly manipulated by the state — deprives Chinese citizens of fundamental rights.

In China, with few exceptions, only married couples who obtain advance approval — i.e., a birth permit — may legally have a child, even if it is their first child. A majority of Chinese women are forced to use intrauterine devices (IUDs). Violators, if discovered to be pregnant, are often forced to have abortions. Most violators of the one-child policy are forced to undergo sterilization. Doctors who do not perform IUD insertion or sterilization, or who fake these operations, are jailed. Family members of violators are often jailed if they do not reveal a violator's whereabouts. Other common "punishments" of violators include heavy fines and the destruction of property, and even infanticide. Despite relaxation of certain aspects of China's family-planning regulations, enforcement of the one-child policy continues to be coercive.

Every year, the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) receives thousands of applications for asylum from victims of China's coercive population-control measures. Congress views China's one-child policy as a form of persecution and mandated that the BCIS set aside 1,000 visas per year specifically for its victims. China is the only nation whose citizens are eligible for asylum based on population-control-related persecution.

The UNFPA states that birth targets and quotas were lifted in the 32 Chinese counties supported by its programs. It also notes a "shift from an administrative family planning approach to an integrated, client-oriented reproductive health approach in the project counties." We have heard charges that the UNFPA has provided computers and vehicles to the Chinese government to enforce China's family-planning policy. Regardless of what has taken place in the 32 counties the UNFPA operates in, they constitute only about one percent of China's more than 3,000 counties. There is no major change taking place in China, and these 32 counties are being used as a showcase by the Chinese government. By cooperating with Beijing, the UNFPA is allowing itself to be used as a model example, when what is being carried out throughout the rest of China is a draconian policy infringing on the rights of the individual.

A typical example of the continued implementation of harsh family-planning measures throughout China involves the case of Jieshi Township in Guangdong Province. After the introduction of the "Population and Birth Control Law" on September 1, 2002, Chinese authorities declared that all family-planning violators would be fined a so-called "social alimony" fee instead of being subjected to other punishments. There have been various unwritten rules for how family-planning violators should be punished, as described above. The implementation of these different forms of punishment has varied in locations throughout China. While each location has attempted to carry out measures in the spirit of the central government's policy, each has had its own measures to prevent "illegal births."

The Laogai Research Foundation recently obtained a document — "Document No. 43" — from Jieshi. It shows how the local government has harshly implemented China's family-planning law. Jieshi, located in the northern part of Lufeng City, has an area of

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124 km and a population of 200,000. The document (issued on August 26, 2003) gave orders that "the fall 2003 family planning assignment should begin on August 26, and within 35 days (ending on September 30), certain goals must be achieved: to sterilize 1,369, fit 818 with an IUD, induce labor for 108, and carry out 163 abortions. During this period, each five days there should be a count and each ten days there should be an evaluation, and there must be a 100 percent success rate. Party secretaries and village heads who failed to fulfill this task would have their salaries cut by half, and other responsible cadres would suffer the withholding of their entire salary."

One regulation in Document No. 43 stipulates: "Sterilized women will be compensated with 50 yuan, and women who undergo late-term abortions will be compensated with 300 yuan." The document also demands "in the countryside, sterilization for all women with two girls, and induced labor for late-term pregnancy. Overcome difficulties with creativity, so that all fall actions can be implemented successfully, and the ground can be set for yearly population control planning." In the spirit of the document, the leaders of the township asked all villagers to be vigilant and to denounce all "unlawful" pregnancies and births.

Even after the supposedly more moderate "Population and Birth Control Law" was promulgated in 2002, it is clear from this Jieshi document that harsh family-planning-implementation methods have not changed.

China's coercive population control — approved and celebrated by the UNFPA — is too terrible to be ignored, and we must not turn a blind eye to this problem. Denying the UNFPA congressional funding may encourage the U.N. to stand by its stated principles and to tell the Chinese government to end its coercive family-planning policies.

It is true that the UNFPA has implemented some positive programs in developing countries throughout the world that benefit women and their families. However, we must stand on the side of the millions of Chinese women who lack the fundamental human right to freely bear children. If Congress and the UNFPA are truly forces for voluntarism, human rights, and progress in China, they will do the same.

Harry Wu is the executive director of the Laogai Research Foundation.

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