

Anglo File

African, Israeli officials use gala event to trade veiled criticisms over relations

By Cnaan Liphshiz

In an unusual move, African and Israeli officials on Sunday went beyond pleasantries and publicly exchanged demands and veiled criticisms in Jerusalem at a belated formal reception honoring the continent. While African diplomats urged the government to improve trade and visa terms, Israel demanded they try to convince their governments to help contain the Iranian threat and exercise a balanced voting on Israel at the UN.

The direct approach may reflect a mutual desire to push agendas ahead of the tentatively planned visit by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to sub-Saharan Africa. No date is set, but his tour of the continent this summer would be the first of its kind in over 15 years, according to a former senior diplomat.

Addressing Israel's strict visa policy for African visitors, Ethiopia's ambassador to Israel, Fesseha Asghedom Tessema, said "it's crucial to examine our visa arrangements to encourage movement of African business people." Africa officials here cite the policy as an ongoing source of frustration for African officials. "Israel's trade with Africa is a minuscule part of Israel's total trade," he added in his speech. "Israeli

imports from Africa account for only 1.1 percent of the total while exports to the continent are 2.4 percent," he said. "We need to expand trade."

Ambassador Tessema spoke as head of the African diplomatic corps in Israel before some 200 guests at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem at an event replacing the traditional May 25 Africa Day ceremony, which the ministry did not hold on time this year, as reported by Anglo File.

The ambassador additionally called on the Israeli government to improve Africa's portrayal in local media. "We know impressions given by the media can make or break bilateral relations," he explained.

The most senior Israeli at the meeting, Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau, also voiced demands, telling the Africans they "must stand up to the terrorist and extreme regimes in the Middle East and oppose Iran's nuclear program." He furthermore urged Africans to "oppose the use of the African Union and the United Nations as a political instrument against Israel."

Landau told Anglo File that he hoped that the visit by Lieberman – the head of Landau's own Yisrael Beiteinu party – would "curb Iranian domination." Regarding Iran, he said, "They've been investing effort, funds and human



Graduates of the MASHAV program at the Africa Day celebration this week in Jerusalem.

resources while Israeli governments have been slashing funds for African activity. I think it's being reversed now." Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Kenya in February.

The content of the gathering in Jerusalem, according to Yaacov-Jack Revach, head of the ministry's African Division, was a prelude to the mes-

sage Lieberman will convey in Africa. He explained that the delay in holding the event was "unfortunately due to technical and agenda difficulties, but we did not give up."

The reception offered traditional African cuisine prepared by embassy chefs and a musical program by an ensemble from the Black Hebrews community of Dimona,

whose performers sang in Hebrew, English and tribal languages.

Several dozen non-diplomats also attended – visitors from 15 African countries currently undergoing training in various centers in programs by MASHAV, Israel's National Agency for International Development Cooperation, which is heav-

ily involved in Africa. "Our projects are a very effective form of diplomatic activity," head of MASHAV, Haim Divon, said. The agency has trained thousands of Africans in fields such as agriculture and public health.

But collaboration is not nearly enough, according to Zvi Mazel, a former ambassador to Sweden and Egypt who in the 1980s oversaw the restoration of diplomatic ties between Israel and several African states as head of the ministry's African Department. "I remember pleading with ministers from the 1990s on to visit Africa and develop personal relations, but they preferred London, Paris and Washington D.C.," Mazel recalled. "We've missed out on Africa for 15 years. The Chinese were there all along, sending their foreign ministers on yearly visits."

If Lieberman's visit is only ceremonial, Mazel said, "then it's a waste. But if it is an indication of intentions to broaden relations, to promote more MASHAV programs and to encourage Israeli firms to enter Africa, then we're on the right track in this mineral-rich, nearby and basically friendly continent."

African countries, a senior Foreign Ministry source added, "are in great need and they will come to anyone who will extend an arm. If we won't do it, plenty others will."

Rank and File

◆ **SAY IT IN DUTCH:** Adults who always harbored a secret or professed desire to learn Dutch will soon have an excellent opportunity. Israel's two Dutch-language schools – one in Modi'in and the other in Tel Aviv – intend to open a beginners and intermediates class for adults in September. The coordinator of the program, Liesbeth van Oorschot, said the classes will use the same methods applied in the kingdom's version of an ulpan – Holland's learning center for new immigrants – and at Dutch Universities. The two schools, Het Kikkerlandje in Tel Aviv and the Jip and Janneke School in Modi'in, will offer a weekly two-hour beginners class for five months. Lessons will be given in small groups during the week in the evenings. For details, email dutchschoolisrael@gmail.com or call 054-442-7490. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

◆ **FROM THE WEB TO THE SHELF:** A month after Anglo File reported about a local cupcake war – when several online stores started offering the hitherto unavailable baked goods at about the same time – one group of Anglo bakers is now taking its products to a physical storefront. Starting July 2, "I Love Cupcakes," which claims to be Israel's first cupcake store, is scheduled to start selling its cupcakes at the Ramat Hahayal branch of the Tiv Ta'am supermarket chain, just outside of Tel Aviv. "We were in contact with La Farina Bakery in Tiv Ta'am," said Hayley Rabie, 28, a recent immigrant from Cape Town who launched the business together with Manchester native Danielle Levy, "and both parties were interested in testing the market's response to cupcakes." (Raphael Ahren)

◆ **BEST OF BROADWAY:** Two years after staging a show with the most well-known Andrew Lloyd Webber tunes, Israel Musicals now presents a best-of Broadway show. Starring the theater's founder Yisrael Lutnick, Shimrit Rabi and four other singers, "Broadway Showstoppers" features songs from "West Side Story," "Grease," "Phantom of the Opera," "The Lion King," "Fiddler on the Roof," "The Producers" and many other popular musicals. "Of course there are enough Broadway shows to fill five shows with," the New York-born Lutnick told Anglo File, "but we'll start with one," he added. "Our show has a light background story to give it some context. We looked at what elements are needed for a successful Broadway hit, like music, love, hope, brotherhood money, etc., and ordered the show according to these themes." "Broadway Showstoppers" opens this Sunday in Zichron Yaakov and comes to Jerusalem, Ra'anana and Haifa. For more information and tickets, visit www.israel-theatre.com or call (03) 511-7701. (Raphael Ahren)



The cast (L to R): Shimrit Rabi, Zvika Goldfeld, Rahel Jaskow, Lev Kerzhner, Yisrael Lutnick

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Guma, left, meeting with President Shimon Peres.

Fla. judge tosses out embezzlement case against NbN donor

By Raphael Ahren

American-Israeli businessman and philanthropist Guma Aguiar was cleared last week of embezzlement charges, brought before a Florida court by his uncle, who claims he misused funds because he believed he was the messiah. Aguiar, who recently made a name for himself by donating several million dollars to Nefesh B'Nefesh and other Jewish organizations, denies believing he is the messiah, calling his uncle's accusations absurd. He is currently in the United States and does not give interviews to the press.

Aguiar, 31, who was born in Brazil but commutes between the U.S. and Jerusalem, is the founder and chairman of the Lillian Jean Kaplan Foundation, to which his uncle, Thomas S. Kaplan, claims to have donated "tens of millions of dollars," according to official court documents. In the lawsuit, Kaplan challenged Aguiar's ability and right to manage the foundation, but the judge, Robert Rosenberg of the 17th Judicial Circuit Court in Broward County, Florida, threw out the case, finding Kaplan's claims had no merit.

Kaplan objected to the more than \$7 million he says his nephew spent in 2008 to advance what the lawsuit called his "claim that he is the Messiah and to promote his messianic mission," according to the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, which reported about the lawsuit when it was filed in January. According to the paper, the family feud is likely rooted in a separate lawsuit involving the two. The second case involves the company the two founded, Leor Exploration & Production, which was sold for about \$2.5 billion after discovering vast natural gas reserves in Texas,

and which is the foundation of Aguiar's newfound wealth.

"Justice has been done in Florida, the impact of which will be felt globally as Guma Kaplan Aguiar continues to support vital programs in the U.S., Israel and throughout the world," Charley Levine, Aguiar's spokesman in Jerusalem, said about last week's decision. He added that while the second lawsuit is still ongoing, "we have all the reason to believe it will end with similar results."

Aguiar, who made headlines this month about possibly purchasing the Beitar Jerusalem soccer club, is not giving his legal team much rest. Besides dealing with two lawsuits and a soccer club in financial straits, he is also going after bloggers he feels are defaming him. In May, Aguiar's lawyer Eitan Gabay wrote a letter to an American-Israeli blogger who questioned Aguiar's motives for leading a Jewish life. Aguiar has acknowledged publicly that while he was born a Jew, his parents raised him as an Evangelical Christian from the age of two.

"Written material in the blog is evidence of a serious violation of the prohibition of 'lashon harah' (libel) and harassment," stated the letter, which was posted on the Web and confirmed by Aguiar's spokesman, adding that some statements on the site "border on defamation" and "infringement of privacy." The letter continued by stating that Aguiar considering filing a police complaint and a lawsuit if the blogger didn't immediately delete the contentious posts.

The blogger, an Orthodox rabbi, reacted by quickly deleting all entries dealing with Aguiar's past. "I am simply not in the position that I can afford to be hounded by a billionaire," he told Anglo File last month.

New academic course at IDC teaches diplomats a thing or two about Israel

By Cnaan Liphshiz

Pleading with students to "show understanding for the dreams and aspiration of the Jewish people" is hardly characteristic of lectures by Professor Uriel Reichman, a top jurist and president of the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. But that's exactly what Reichman did last week, in speaking to an unusual group of 50 IDC graduates, who were all foreign diplomats. They had come to IDC on Friday to receive certificates after graduating from Israel's first academic introductory course on Israel for foreign envoys.

"The story of the Jewish people's return and constant presence in the Land of Israel is unlike any other," Reichman told the participants in explaining why Israel's case merits special consideration. "And so I think it's not out of order to end the course with a plea for some understanding for the core, the dreams and the aspiration of our people."

The graduation ceremony came at the end of an English-language, ten session program on Israeli society. The program, taught at IDC's Lauder School of Government



Cameroon's Ambassador Etoundi Essomba, left, last Friday with IDC's Alex Mintz and the foreign ministry's Yitzhak Eldan.

by prominent public figures such as Aharon Barak, Shlomo Ben-Ami, Amnon Rubinstein and Uzi Arad, aims to provide diplomats with background information on Israeli history, politics and legal system.

"In some countries, the foreign ministry offers introductory courses for diplomats," said Alex Mintz, dean of the Lauder school. "Israel doesn't have this, and that's what the program is meant to address." The fact that the program is academic and not official, according to Mintz, "makes dip-

lomats much more open to it." Belgian Ambassador and course graduate Benedicte Frankinet concurs. "The graduation ceremony was actually the first time in the course that we've heard anything like what Reichman said. The course itself was very matter-of-fact and academic, which made students more receptive."

The course taught envoys from Venezuela, Greece, Albania, Costa Rica, Turkey, Croatia, Canada, Belgium, El Salvador, Czech Republic, Chile and Singapore, as well as Denmark,

the U.K., the U.S. and France. However, no graduates from the four latter countries attended the graduation.

Avoiding an Israel advocacy-type curriculum was especially important for the man behind the course, the foreign ministry's chief of protocol Yitzhak Eldan. "The idea took shape one year ago at a reception for the Nigerian ambassador," recalled Eldan, the former head of the foreign ministry's diplomat training unit. He discussed the idea with Mintz, and they approached Etoundi Essomba, Cameroon's ambassador to Israel and dean of the diplomatic corps, to get other envoys onboard.

"I knew foreign diplomats will have more confidence in an academic course than a course by the ministry," said Eldan. "So I delegated the mission to the IDC, but I'm not influencing content. I'm also keeping a low profile here. No speeches, no nothing."

Eldan also insisted IDC charge payment from ambassadors instead of subsidizing the program. "When people pay, they feel more obligated to follow through," he added. The next class of diplomats will begin next February.

All Jewgether now

New Web service aims to facilitate international hosting for members of the tribe

By Cnaan Liphshiz

As of this month, budget travelers have a new reason to smile – that is, if they're Jewish. That's because a group of Israeli students this month launched the world's first web-based hospitality project for Jews, allowing members of the tribe from all over the world to meet online and then stay at each other's houses instead of going to a hotel.

The model of the new website – www.Jewgether.org – is based on the Couch-Surfing Project, the world's largest free, Internet-based, international hospitality exchange network. Jewgether allows travelers to get in touch with people who registered themselves on the site as willing to host Jewish tourists. The site contains information about the level of religious observance of each prospective host.

"Our project seeks to connect Jewish communities, but especially young Jews," says Boaz Albaranes, a student of the Technion in Haifa who launched the site together with three of his friends, all in their 20s. "Small and medium Diaspora communities have a problem in retaining the younger generation's Jewish identity," explains Albaranes about the rationale driving him to create Jew-

gether along with Doron Samish, Tamir Einy and Anna Davelman. "Being in constant and intimate touch with other Jews will help with that."

The project, which began last year as the work of 16 graduates of the fellowship program of the U.S.-based Israel advocacy group StandwithUs, has so far attracted 150 registered users from 13 countries, including Ecuador, Austria and even China. The organizers say it's probably too early for any of the users to have taken a hosting opportunity, but even so they would not know about it because they do not track the conversations the site generates.

Albaranes says Jewgether focuses more on smaller communities. "Everyone has family in New York and London," he asserts. "Jewgether is especially important when you're in Cleveland or Austria on Passover Eve, and you get that feeling that you want to be with your people. You don't want to be alone for the Seder."

To illustrate his point, Albaranes recalls his experiences when he traveled. "Take Nepal, for example. Every Rosh Hashana you get hundreds of secular, young Israelis flocking to Kathmandu's Chabad House to dine together. It's not a matter of religious or secular. It's

linked to wanting to feel connected to something for a few hours."

Put together on a shoestring budget, Jewgether received sponsorship and endorsement from the Jewish Agency and the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

The site contains a "tips" page which advises guests to avoid overstaying their welcome, behave politely, return borrowed objects in better shape than they were, show consideration for the other's schedule and political beliefs and to be sure to know how kosher or Shabbat observant the host or guest are.

As a very basic means of making sure that Jewgether's clientele is strictly Jewish, people wishing to register have to answer three multiple-choice questions which, according to the Jewgether team, every Jew should know, such as the Hebrew word for synagogue, the direction one faces when praying in one, and the name of the Israeli army. In order to address user's security concerns lest the site be abused by anyone bent on attacking Jews, Albaranes says his team screens each registration request. "But of course users need to be careful and use common sense," he stresses. "Asking to see a copy of the passport of the host or the traveler is always a good idea."

Cornell finishes first, but Columbia wins Ivy regatta

By Raphael Ahren

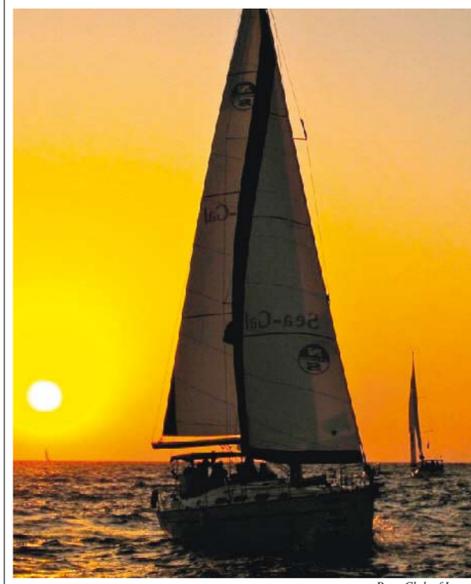
It took several days before a winner of the second Ivy League Yacht regatta, held last Thursday by the Herzliya marina, was declared. "Columbia won," head organizer Dov Hoch declared days after the race, explaining that Cornell actually crossed the finish line first but was penalized for circling a buoy from the wrong side.

"Both Cornell and Columbia were awarded the maximum three points for winning, which are added to the historical tally," he added. Princeton and Brown, who shared a boat, came in third, followed by Penn. Yale, the winner of the inaugural Ivy League regatta in 2007, had technical problems and could not finish the race with the others. Harvard, which last

time came in a close second, finished last.

Some 120 alumni and friends gathered at Herzliya's Sea Gal club for a post-race reception, hours after the sails had been struck. All Ivy League universities plus MIT and Oxford participated in the event, which was organized by the Penn Club of Israel, but the complicated rules made it difficult to immediately determine a winner.

"We really won? On a technicality? That's amazing!" said Ari Gardner, 24, who grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, graduated from Columbia and currently studies at IDC in Herzliya. Gardner added he wasn't sure whether he preferred winning by "the sweat of our brow" or the technicality, "but the fact that Yale didn't win also makes me pretty happy."



The Cornell yacht sailing toward the finish line last Thursday.