



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Sholom  
— SPECIAL EXPANDED EDITION  
IN HONOR OF ISRAEL @ 60 —

Issue Number 14  
May 2008

## ISRAEL BRINGS IN DIGNITARIES FOR ITS 60TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

**MCCAIN TOURS SDEROT WITH BARAK**  
US presidential hopeful Sen. John McCain says he understands Israel's tough response to Palestinian rocket



fire. "To live with an advance notice of 15 seconds is not the way for children to celebrate Purim", said Senator John McCain, shown inspecting rocket damage during a tour of Sderot with Israeli Defense Minister

Ehud Barak. "No nation can afford not to respond when attacked or when its citizens are attacked," McCain said. Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that Israel would continue operating against terror as long as the Kassams kept falling. Speaking to reporters, McCain declined to discuss what his Middle East policies would be as president. He said he was in Israel on a congressional fact-finding mission and it was not appropriate to discuss his campaign.

Earlier, McCain, the presumptive Republican candidate, met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who told him that the calm in the Gaza Strip was unlikely to last. At the meeting, which was also attended by senators Joseph Lieberman (Conn.) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.), Olmert said that Israel could not continue suffering the rocket fire from Gaza, and would ultimately stop it. McCain agreed with Olmert that the situation in the South was indeed intolerable.

Israel's President, Shimon Peres, announced that a May conference marking its 60th birthday will open with a tribute to Israel's staunchest ally, the United States. In attendance will be President Bush and Barbra Streisand. "After 60 years we want to stand up and say 'thank you America,'" Israeli President Shimon Peres said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Peres said the conference, focusing on Jewish and Israeli contributions to humanity, will include subjects "as varied as one can think of ... from arts and science and philosophy and medicine and ecology."

Besides Bush and Streisand other notables attending will include Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev and Rupert Murdoch.

"We are going to have probably 10 presidents from different countries, six former presidents, ministers, prime ministers, scientists, philosophers, artists," Peres said.

Streisand will sing the Hebrew prayer Avinu Malkeinu — "Our Father Our King" — which Peres described as "unbelievably beautiful."

The conference is expected to be one of the highlights of weeks of celebrations marking Israel's 60th birthday, including concerts, Holocaust remembrance events, a workshop promoting Arab-Israeli coexistence, and a 750-mile trans-Israel bicycle trail.

Peres said most of the of the conference's 2,000 participants will be Jewish, but that it will be open to people of all faiths.

The list of confirmed guests also includes Henry Kissinger, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, former Czech President Václav Havel, Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz, Google founder Sergey Brinn, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, U.S. billionaire Sheldon Adelson, and Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia, a country with no diplomatic relations with Israel.

*Mark your calendars to join Temple Beth Sholom as it celebrates "Israel @ 60" during the weekend of May 16-18. Events will include special Friday night Shabbat services and a Sunday Men's Club "Israeli" breakfast, followed by a presentation on the current state of Israel affairs by Consul Sharon Regev, of the Israeli Consulate in New York. The Hebrew School will participate in the salute though projects, workshops, and music.*

*Weekend events are sponsored by the generous support of temple member, Robert Weiss, in honor of the Bat Mitzvah ceremony of his granddaughter, Samantha Cohen.*

# INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF STATEHOOD

## AUSTRALIA HEAPS ISRAEL PRAISE

The Australian parliament has congratulated Israel on 60 years of statehood, describing it as a "robust democracy" and a "custodian of freedom" in a region abounding in autocracies and theocracies. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd praised Israel by saying "over the past 60 years Israel has preserved its robust parliamentary democracy and built a vibrant society and economy." He said it represented a "cause for hope."

Liberal Party leader Brendan Nelson said that in a region "characterized more by theocracies or autocracies the State of Israel is the custodian of the most fragile and yet most powerful of human emotions - that is hopeful belief in the freedom of man, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly." Nelson said "no Australian who believes in the dignity of man, of freedom and democratic principles, should ever allow, through neglectful indifference, to allow Israel to be a stranger. To do so would be to diminish ourselves and our own security." Prime Minister Rudd added, "if anyone wants a dictionary definition of the term robust they should spend an afternoon in the Israeli Knesset. That's where you see the definition of robust at work. By contrast, we're a pack of pussycats in here."

## SARKOZY TELLS PERES FRANCE IS ISRAEL'S TRUE FRIEND

France was and always will be Israel's true friend, French President Nicolas Sarkozy told President Shimon Peres when the two leaders met recently in Paris. "The State of Israel's right to exist securely is not debatable, and I believe that since the Holocaust the world bears the responsibility for this. I will continue to support Israel anywhere, as I did in my previous visits to Arab states," Sarkozy added.



During the visit, Peres received France's highest award, the Legion of Honor. Peres was greeted warmly by the French president, who came out to meet him at the Élysée Palace square. "It is a great honor for me to greet you here as the president of the State of Israel," Sarkozy said. He added that he was excited seeing the Israeli flag waved at the Champs-Élysées. He told Peres that he worked uncompromisingly against anti-Semitic acts and did not hesitate to jail people who had burned Israeli flags or vandalized the Israeli Embassy.

Peres thanked Sarkozy for the warm reception and his great respect for the State of Israel. The Israeli president addressed the Iranian nuclear threat, saying "Iran's attempts to obtain a nuclear bomb do not only endanger Israel but the entire world. The link between nuclear weapons and terror is destructive and constitutes a great danger, which the democratic countries will not be able to deal with when the point of no return arrives." At a dinner in Peres' honor at the French presidential palace the Elysee, Sarkozy pledged "France will always be at Israel's side when its existence is thrown into question." Sarkozy reiterated that "those who scandalously call for the destruction of Israel will always find France standing in their way. "

## MERKEL PLEDGES UNWAVERING GERMAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

In recognition of the significance of the visit, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert personally greeted German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Ben Gurion Airport at her arrival; an honor only Israel's most steadfast political ally, U.S. President George W. Bush, has received. During her visit Merkel pledged Germany's continued support of Israel in a landmark speech to mark 60 years since Israel's founding. In an address to the Knesset, the first by a German head of government, Merkel said "Germany will never abandon Israel but will remain a true friend and partner." "Sixty years of Israel: that is most of all an occasion for great joy," she said. "Germany and Israel are and will always remain linked in a special way through the memory of the Holocaust," she said.

"The Holocaust fills us Germans with shame," said Merkel, the first German chancellor to be born after World War II. "I bow before the victims, I bow before the survivors, and before all those who helped them so they could survive." Chancellor Merkel drew loud applause when she opened her address in Hebrew, saying: "I thank you for the honor for allowing me to address the Knesset." But the fact she delivered the rest of her speech in German offended some and several lawmakers stayed away from the chamber in protest. Addressing the controversy, Merkel said "I thank everybody for allowing me to address you today in my mother tongue."



### GAZA GIRLS IN ISRAEL FOR HEART SURGERY

Israeli and Palestinian heart surgeons teamed up recently to operate on three young girls from the Gaza Strip under a program to save children's lives despite hostilities between the Hamas-ruled territory and the Jewish state.

Doctors said the lives of the children - aged 7, 4, and 8 months - would have been in jeopardy without the surgeries. The baby underwent open heart surgery to correct a congenital heart defect, while the older girls were treated to close holes in their hearts. The operations were successful and the girls are doing well, doctors said.

"We ignore all the politics and we are on great terms with the doctors in Gaza, despite violence and wars," said Dr. Akiva Tamir, head of cardiology at Wolfson Hospital near Tel Aviv, who performed the operations with Dr. Rula Awwad, a Palestinian surgeon from the West Bank.

Palestinians in Gaza are not allowed into Israel for security reasons but some patients with severe medical conditions are granted entry.

The doctors belong to an Israeli humanitarian group called Save A Child's Heart, which treats children suffering from heart problems in conflict zones or areas where medical facilities are not up to par. Tamir said the program has treated 250 children from Gaza in the past year. In October, the group successfully operated on two Iraqi children with heart disease who were flown to Israel for surgery. Since its founding in 1996, Save A Child's Heart has treated 900 children from Gaza and more than 1,000 from Iraq and other Arab states that have no relations with Israel, as well as countries across Africa, program director Simon Fisher said.

### EL AL BUYS 4 BOEING 777S; ISRAEL FITS CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT WITH MISSILE DEFENSE

El Al Israel Airlines has announced it had ordered four Boeing Company 777-200ER planes for \$540 million. The aircraft will be equipped with Rolls Royce engines and be used on medium- and long-haul routes. Three will be delivered in 2012 and one in January 2013.

Separately, Israel will soon begin outfitting its airliners with defense systems designed to thwart missile attacks, Israeli military officials announced.

The officials said the system fires flares that distract an incoming missile's heat-seeking mechanism. It will be installed first on planes flying to destinations considered dangerous, especially in Africa and parts of Asia.

### EGYPT TO SUPPLY GAZA WITH ELECTRICITY

Israeli defense officials say they've worked out a tentative deal for Egypt to become the main electricity supplier to the Gaza Strip. The officials say the agreement stems from Israel's desire to cut off all ties with the Gaza Strip. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but remains the area's main power supplier. The deal must still be finalized. But when it's complete, Egypt is expected to build a power line to supply 150 megawatts to Gaza. Israel has imposed a blockade on the territory in recent months in an effort to force Gaza's rulers, Hamas, to stop rocket fire into southern Israel. The Israeli sanctions include small cuts in electricity supplies.

### ISRAEL, RUSSIA TO ABOLISH MUTUAL VISA REQUIREMENTS

Israel and Russia have signed an agreement abolishing mutual visa requirements for citizens of both countries in a move set to boost tourism to Israel. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and visiting Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov signed the deal in Tel Aviv. According to the Israeli tourism ministry, the policy could almost triple the annual number of Russian tourists who visit Israel and the West Bank from an average of 80,000 to nearly 300,000.

### ISRAEL SUFFERS WORST DROUGHT IN DECADE

Israel is suffering its worst drought in a decade and will have to stop pumping from one of its main sources of drinking water, the Sea of Galilee, by the end of the summer, an official said recently. Water Authority spokesman Uri Schor said Israel must start pumping more ground water from aquifers that are already depleted. "The situation is very, very bad," Schor said. "As we pump more from the aquifers, the quality of the water will go down."

Israel's water problem stems from population growth and rising prosperity that has seen an increase in lawns and gardens, Schor said. In addition, this winter was the fourth in a row in which Israel had low rainfall. Israel's rainy season will not begin again until October.

Water is a contentious issue in the dry region, and the subject of one of the disputes between Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators. Despite the shortage, Israel will probably not reduce the amount of water supplied to Jordan according to a peace treaty between the countries. Jordan's drought is worse than Israel's, he said.

Israel has in recent weeks reduced the drinking water supplied to farmers by more than 50 percent, increasing their need for recycled water, Schor said. Going forward, water officials will discuss raising the cost of drinking water in an attempt to cut household use, he said.

Israel has two desalination plants that supply about one-third of water needed by municipalities and households, Schor said. Three other plants, scheduled to be completed by 2013, will double that amount. The next one is due to be operational next year.