



A group of Jewish refugees in France setting off for a new life in Australia courtesy of the American Joint Distribution Committee in the aftermath of World War II.

Joining the Jewish dots

Many of us owe our survival and our lives in Australia to The Joint Distribution Committee. Now we have the opportunity to give something back and help other Jews and communities in need.

At the end of World War II, 20,000 Holocaust survivors – desperate to leave Europe and start new lives far from the horrors they experienced – boarded ships for Australia. Some of these men and women are among my closest friends, and I shudder to think what they have become of them after the war without the help they received in getting to this part of the world.

When they share their extraordinary stories of survival, they don't talk about who provided their ship fares, or their visas, or the interest-free loans to set up their businesses. But more than a generation later, they have – with all their success – contributed to the building of a thriving and fully self-sufficient Australian Jewish community.

So what became of those people, or the organisation in particular, which helped this remnant find a new start?

The answer, surprising to many, is that it is still in business, and known today, as it was then, as The Joint (or The Joint Distribution Committee). With nearly 100 years of history to its credit, The Joint, as the world's largest Jewish humanitarian organisation, is still filling hungry Jewish bellies and inspiring Jewish souls.

In more than 70 countries around the world today, The Joint is the sole lifeline for Jews – both physically and spiritually – for survival and others in need. Providing everything from food and electricity, to shofars and apples and honey at Rosh Hashanah, The Joint works daily to fulfil the principle that all Jews are responsible for one another. Here are some global snapshots of what is happening in The Joint's world right now.

In the former Soviet Union, nearly 200,000 impoverished Jews – especially the elderly and children – need food, medicine, homecare, heating fuel, summer and winter clothing, and housing to survive. To achieve



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this, The Joint has recently provided 8.7 million hours of assistance for more than 25,000 home-bound seniors, food debit cards for close to 99,000 individuals to use in their local supermarkets, fresh food packages for nearly 32,000 people, and more than 458,000 meals on wheels. It also supplies medicines and medical consultations for thousands of sick or chronically ill Jews with no other access to medical care.

Now is our chance to become part of the global pipeline that supplies the world's poorest Jews with the resources they need to move towards a sustainable and Jewish future.

To ensure the former Soviet Union supports a renaissance of Jewish life, The Joint has set up and supports 200 Jewish community centres, synagogue programs, Jewish studies courses, and preschools, which dot the landscape from Kishinev to Odessa.

In Israel – where the income gap between rich and poor is still among the highest in the Western world – The Joint works closely with the government to provide landmark programs that train and secure employment for Israeli Charedim, and promote independence for elderly and disabled Israelis.

For small, ancient and vibrant Jewish communities – like those in Tunisia, Morocco and India – The Joint focuses on aiding the most needy and helping local communities carry on their traditions and train a new generation of Jewish leaders. In these areas, The Joint supports Jewish

schools that offer the only Jewish education available to children.

When I look at this enormous need on a global scale, I know we are lucky: we live on an island where natural disasters are relatively infrequent, where Jewish schools are plentiful, and where we have direct and frequent connections to our cultural heritage.

I have seen firsthand many times the generosity of Australian Jews – our willingness to reach out and engage with Jews across the globe.

We attend fundraisers, forums and events. We sign petitions and we march in protest whenever there is a Jewish individual or a community in trouble, at risk, or being treated unfairly.

Today we must also ask ourselves how Jewish communities and centres will flourish if they are decimated by economic crises in places like Greece and Bulgaria? And how will Israel continue to thrive if there are no big solutions to aid struggling residents? How will tiny Jewish communities feel connected globally without an injection of smart, impactful funding and on-the-ground expertise?

There is an answer: at home, we are great builders of community, and we are known as a great role model to the rest of the Jewish world. Now is our chance to become part of the global pipeline that supplies the world's poorest Jews with the resources they need to move towards a sustainable and Jewish future.

And it is securing that future I feel so passionately about – and that can only be achieved through the essential work of The Joint. This work would be impossible without the might and global influence of such a broad-reaching organisation. That reach is a reminder that while we are geographically isolated from these Jews in need, we cannot allow ourselves to be disconnected.

Join me in taking on this task. Join the work of The Joint, and become part of a mighty and powerful movement to combat Jewish poverty and build Jewish life, wherever Jews in need may be.

Eva Fischl is the president of The Joint Australia. For further information, visit www.thejointaustralia.org.

A global whitewash

Affording Iran legitimacy on the international stage has eerie echoes of the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany

WHEN world leaders converge on New York this month, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be present. The occasion is the opening of the United Nations General Assembly session. This time, though, Ahmadinejad comes with enhanced diplomatic credentials. He is no longer just head of Iran; he also chairs the 120-member strong Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Countries in the NAM constitute nearly two-thirds of the UN membership and they gathered last month in Tehran for the movement's summit. It wasn't just lower-level diplomats present, but also 24 presidents, three kings, eight vice-presidents and 50 foreign ministers. And they unanimously endorsed Iranian policies, many of which are acts of defiance against international norms.

One would have to go back to the 1936 Nazi Olympics to find a more blatant international whitewash of a rogue regime. Adolf Hitler had ruled Germany for three years. Publicly committed to overturning the results of World War I and combating what it deemed the menace of world Jewry, his regime had outlawed dissent, tortured and killed thousands of political opponents, begun a rearmament program, occupied the Rhineland in violation of treaty obligations, and enacted the Nuremberg Laws depriving Jews of citizenship. Nevertheless, no nation boycotted the Berlin Olympics, and Hitler used the spectacle to cement his international legitimacy.

Fast-forward to the present. Iran's leadership, intent on becoming the leading regional power, has denied the Holocaust and publicly committed itself to wiping Israel off the map. It has outlawed dissent; imprisoned, tortured and killed political opponents, religious minorities and gays; and is developing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons in defiance of the UN and in the teeth of economic sanctions levied by the US, the European Union and others. This record is crystal clear. Yet, no NAM member boycotted the Tehran summit, which the Iranian leadership used to cement its international legitimacy.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon participated, against the advice of many who felt his presence would lend undue credibility to the regime. To his credit, in his address he criticised Iran for human rights abuses and threats against Israel, and urged to comply with UN resolutions. But he was a lone voice and it was ignored.

The assembled delegates sat quietly as Iranian speakers reiterated the old charges against the US and Israel. And the 120-member summit rubberstamped a 680-point document that seems likely to sow the seeds of further trouble.

Three points in the text are particularly menacing.

First, Israel was condemned for its nuclear program, whereas Iran's

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nuclear program, falsely described as being for peaceful uses only, was pronounced to be Tehran's "inalienable right". Thus a healthy majority of UN General Assembly nations have undermined the sanctions regime backed by the UN Security Council and encouraged the Iranian nuclear gambit, which the International Atomic Energy Agency reports is close to fruition.

Second, the summit condemned terrorism but declared that "the legitimate struggle of peoples under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation" was not terrorism. Thus, two-thirds of the General Assembly approved of the Iranian-supported Hezbollah, since it is ostensibly aimed at the Israeli "occupiers".

A healthy majority of UN General Assembly nations have undermined the sanctions regime backed by the UN Security Council.

And third, Israeli occupation is identified as the primary cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict and ending it as the proper means to end peace in the region. For good measure, the document accuses Israel of mass torture and of efforts to eradicate the historic Islamic heritage in Jerusalem. The Palestinian refusal to negotiate a two-state solution or to acknowledge the profound Jewish connection to Jerusalem is absent.

NAM members pledged support for renewed Palestinian efforts to secure UN recognition, a decision that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas immediately cited in announcing his plans to demand upgraded UN status when he addresses the General Assembly on September 27.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei called the Tehran summit a great success for Iran and a "humiliating defeat" for its enemies. He even claimed that the event showcased the superiority of the Iranian system over Western democracy. That's eerily similar to what Hitler thought the Nazi Olympics achieved for his regime.

The parallels are frightening. Canada has now severed diplomatic ties with Tehran. Its foreign minister described Iran unambiguously as "the most significant threat to global peace and security in the world today".

As Iran moves closer to a nuclear bomb, suppresses democracy and continues to threaten Israel, much depends on whether the international community – set to gather this month at the UN – remains in thrall to the movement's approach or emulates Canadian courage.

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