

Ethiopian Jewry Newsletter, 1984

TYPE: Organizational Record **TOPICS:** Anti-Semitism
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ETHIOPIAN JEWRY NEWSLETTER

Published by the Ethiopian Jewish Community of the United States, Inc., 11 Franklin Ave., New York, NY 10013 (212) 691-1111

Vol. 5, Number 1, December, 1984

ETHIOPIA

ETHIOPIAN JEWRY NEWSLETTER

The weekly published newsletter of the Jewish community in Ethiopia is the Ethiopian Jewry Newsletter. It is published in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and is distributed to all Ethiopian Jews. The newsletter is published in Amharic and English. It contains news, articles, and information about the Jewish community in Ethiopia and the world.

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The JCC is planning to have a special issue of the newsletter in 1984. It will be devoted to the Ethiopian Jews. The newsletter will be published in Amharic and English. It will contain news, articles, and information about the Jewish community in Ethiopia and the world.

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JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL of Metropolitan Boston

111 South Street, Boston, MA 02111

Phone: (617) 552-1111

TRANSCRIPTION

ETHIOPIAN JEWRY NEWSLETTER

Published by the Ethiopian Jewry Committee of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Boston, 72 Franklin St., Boston, MA 02110 (617) 542-7525
No. 4 November, 1984

Rae M. Ginsburg, President, Jewish Community Council
Carol Stone, Chair, Ethiopian Jewry Committee
Barbara Gaffin, Editor

IN ETHIOPIA...

EMERGENCY APPEAL DRAWS RESPONSE

The widely publicized emergency appeal for funds to aid the millions of afflicted famine victims in Ethiopia has brought about an enormous response from Americans, reaching nearly \$60,000 a day to Oxfam alone.

Prompted by NBC, which is the only network to have a contractual arrangement allowing it to carry BBC's foreign reports, the severity of the famine has been reported by national and local radio and television stations and newspapers.

The Reagan Administration subsequently appropriated \$60 million for relief over the past month which includes \$6.3 million for Red Cross medicine and \$25,000 for fuel for Soviet aircraft that will airlift some of the food. According to the UN's World Food Program, 500,000 tons of grain must be sent to Ethiopia by Nov., 1985 or up to 900,000 people could starve to death.

Meanwhile, the international response continues to grow. The European Common Market will provide \$42.6 million and the Soviet Union promised transport vehicles to carry the food to various regions of Ethiopia.

The effects of the famine are compounded by the on-going war between secessionist groups and government forces in the northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigre, where the fighting has prevented food convoys from reaching the starving masses. Most of the major relief agencies must cooperate with the Ethiopian government in order to provide the much needed assistance and are therefore, for the most part, unable to reach northern areas. Boston based Oxfam-America and Grassroots International have however, succeeded to some degree in operating where others cannot.

According to a report in the Boston Globe, the Eritrea Liberation Front, the largest of the guerrilla groups, called for a truce so that emergency aid could reach famine victims in Eritrea.

Among the agencies providing relief to Ethiopia are:

Joint Distribution Committee (Ethiopia Relief) c/o Jewish Community Council, 72 Franklin St., Boston, MA 02110

Grassroots International, P.O. Box 312, Cambridge, MA 02139

Oxfam-America (Ethiopian Crisis), 115 Broadway, Boston, MA 02116

ETHIOPIA FORMALLY GOES COMMUNIST

After years of revolutionary upheaval, the Ethiopian government formally set up a Communist party on Sept. 12 to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the military coup in which Emperor Haile Selassie, a close US ally, was overthrown.

Known as the Workers Party of Ethiopia, it will be the first political party of any kind in that country's history as well as the only legal party permitted.

Lieut. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, Ethiopia's military leader, was named Chairman of the Politburo and President of the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Republic. In his 6 hour speech before a national congress, Col. Mengistu attacked "western imperialism" and proclaimed the government's new slogan: "Revolutionary Ethiopia or Death."

Despite Ethiopia's ties to the Soviets, most of its economic assistance comes from the West. It also appears that Col. Mengistu is seeking to maintain some independence from the USSR by weeding out overly pro-Soviet officials from his government.

ETHIOPIA HAS LOWEST PER CAPITA INCOME

The Ethiopian government recently conducted a census which showed a population of nearly 45 million people. This will give it the lowest per capita income in Africa and perhaps the world.

Ironically, while the famine continues to take its toll in Ethiopia, the government appears unable to finance much of its emergency grain purchase yet managed to spend almost \$200 million for the celebrations marking the 10th anniversary of the revolution.

IN BOSTON...

EJC MEETS WITH ISRAELI CONSUL

The EJC held an off-the-record meeting with Herzl Inbar, NY's Deputy Consul General of Israel on Nov. 1. Mr. Inbar, who was accompanied by Boston's Israeli Consul General Michael Shiloh and Israeli Consul Arthur Avnon, has long been involved with the situation facing Ethiopian Jews and spoke candidly about the problems and successes of the movement to help them. For information on numbers in 1984, please contact Barbara Gaffin at the Council, 542-7525.

EJC HEARS UPDATE

The EJC heard an update on the plight of Ethiopian Jewry in the Horn of Africa and in Israel from Barry Weise, Director of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), at its meeting on Sept. 20.

In prefacing his remarks, Mr. Weise mentioned that much of what he had to say would be off-the-record. He indicated however, that one can only speculate that there are approximately 7-10,000 Jews left in Ethiopia, with perhaps as many as 10,000 currently in the refugee camps.

As for those remaining in Ethiopia, reports suggest that marauders prey on the vulnerable Jews. While this has not been substantiated, it appears that the situation has worsened for those left unprotected.

Another factor effecting the recent surge into the refugee camps, is the growing strength of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front. The Tigreans, who are seeking autonomy, are coordinating their efforts with the Eritreans, who likewise are fighting for independence. Together, the two groups control much of the northwestern region of Ethiopia, an area which had previously been subject to government patrols. This has all been to the benefit of the Falashas, who have been helped by the secessionists because, unlike the government, the secessionists are not opposed to emigration.

It is unknown how many people in the refugee camps are dying. Last summer during the epidemic of the rainy season, the conditions were horrendous and a number of arrivals in Israel went directly to hospitals. Now, there seems to be fewer new immigrants needing hospitalization. It is also unclear as to whether people are

still leaving Ethiopia. It is possible that the remaining Jews in Ethiopia are discouraged from leaving because word has reached them of the backlog in the camps.

Mr. Weise also discussed his experience visiting 12 absorption centers and 2 youth aliyah villages in Israel this past summer. He was impressed by the social workers and the commitment exhibited by those working with the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. The 500% inflation facing Israel has put limits on the absorption budget but no on rescue missions.

Other points of interest included: Ethiopian Jews who serve in the Israeli army receive 3 month preliminary training and some communities are encouraging outreach programs to Israeli residents so as to facilitate integration.

ELLIOT ABRAMS COMES TO BOSTON

Elliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, recently addressed the JCCouncil on human rights issues.

Mr. Abrams complemented Israel for its rescue efforts of Ethiopian Jews and stressed the importance of continued public awareness and contact with White House congressional leaders.

BOSTONIANS PICKET

About twenty Jews picketed the former offices of the Israeli Consulate in Boston in Oct., and called on the Israeli government to airlift all Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Participants at the demonstration were unknown to EJC members, who expressed surprise at the group's tactics and misinformation.

EJC PLANS TRIP TO ISRAEL

The EJC is planning an 8 day trip to Israel the first week in Jan. to study the absorption process of Ethiopian Jews. Meetings will be held with Jewish Agency and government officials, as well as recent and veteran Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. Those interested in further details should contact Barbara Gaffin at the JCCouncil or return the form on page 4.

REP. FRANK AWARDED

Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) was awarded for his commitment to Ethiopian Jews at an American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) benefit concert featuring Safam at Brandeis University. Rep. Frank gave a well-received presentation in which he complimented the JCCouncil for their tireless efforts on behalf of Ethiopian Jews.

ISRAELI COUPLE DISCUSSES ABSORPTION

An Israeli couple who have long worked with the absorption of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, were the guest speakers at an EJC meeting in May. Yitzhak Avraham (a pseudonym), who was born in Ethiopia and was one of the original Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel, works for the Jewish Agency as the liaison between the government and new Ethiopian Jewish arrivals. His American born wife, Nancy, works at an absorption center for Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Kiryat Gat.

NEW CHAIR FOR EJC

Carol Stone, a member of the EJC and Board of Trustees of the JCCouncil, was appointed the new chair of the EJC for the 1984-85 season. EJC members applauded out-going chair, Bernice Chefitz, whose commitment, dedication, and hard work have been behind the success and strength of the committee.

UPDATED FACT & ACTION SHEETS AVAILABLE

Updated fact and action sheets on the plight of Ethiopian Jews are available at the JCCouncil for community use. Those interested in obtaining the November editions should call 542-7525.

IN WASHINGTON...

H. CON. RES. 107 PASSES HOUSE

House Concurrent Resolution 107 passed the House of Representatives on Sept. 11 by a voice vote. Two members of the Mass. Congressional Delegation, Rep. Barney Frank, an original cosponsor of the bill, and Rep. Jim Shannon, were among those who submitted statements to the Congressional Record. The resolution, as passed, was an amended version of the one which the EJC supported over the past two years and expresses concern for Ethiopians of other religions in addition to the Falashas. The Senate version, which the EJC had asked Sen. Tsongas to introduce, passed the Senate in Nov., 1983. A heartfelt thanks goes to those who wrote letters or called their congressmen urging them to cosponsor H. Con. Res. 107.

CONGRESSMEN CORRESPOND WITH ISRAELIS

Since the summer, a series of letters have been sent to Israeli officials from U.S. Congressmen, including Rep. Barney Frank, regarding the severity of the situation of Ethiopian Jews in refugee camps.

SPECIAL ORDER REQUESTED IN THE HOUSE OF REPS.

Reps. Barney Frank, Steve Solarz (D-NY), Gary Ackerman (D-NY), and Tom Lantos (D-CA) requested a special order on June 28 so that members of the House of Reps. could pay tribute to Ethiopian Jews. Twenty-four congressmen from all over the country rose in support of the special order by submitting statements to the Congressional Record. To find out if your representative was among those who expressed solidarity with Ethiopian Jews, contact Barbara Gaffin at the JCCouncil.

IN ISRAEL...

INFORMATION CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED BY ISRAEL

A five-day information campaign on Ethiopian Jewry was set up by the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption in June. The activities, which were held in absorption centers, schools, factories, army camps, shopping areas and sports centers, were organized to teach the general Israeli community about the background, culture and traditions of Ethiopian Jews.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS DEMONSTRATE IN JERUSALEM

Nearly a thousand Ethiopian Jews demonstrated in Jerusalem in June against what they termed government inaction in assisting their relatives immigrate to Israel. Many of the demonstrators waited outside the Prime Minister's office for six hours until an official promised that then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir would meet a delegation of the group the following week.

ELSEWHERE...

ETHIOPIAN JEWS AGAIN HIT *NYTIMES* PAGES

A recent op ed piece in the New York Times accused the Israeli government and world Jewish community of doing little to save the Jews of Ethiopia. Written by Simcha Jacobovici, the article drew an immediate response from NJCRAC, which maintained that the 7,000 Ethiopian Jews which Israel has rescued and absorbed is a miracle which happened despite difficult conditions in the Horn of Africa. (Copies of the reply are available at the JCCouncil office.)

****UPCOMING****

YAEL ROM

Co-chair, Israel
Public Council for Ethiopian Jews

Tuesday, November 13, 1984

8:00 p.m.

117 Gardner Road, Brookline

R.S.V.P. 542-7525

In addition to her role as Co-chair of the National Public Council, which is an official non-government body comprised of Knesset members, academics, Ethiopian Jews and other activists, Ms. Rom worked for 20 years in education research and student counseling at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. She is the first woman to be trained and commissioned as a flying officer and military pilot by the Israeli Air Force. Ms. Rom graduated second in her class and flew for the IAF for 10 years as Captain of the C-47. Additionally, she was co-pilot of the lead plane in 1956 which dropped paratroopers over the Mitla Pass in the Sinai Campaign. She later flew Arkia Airlines as a commercial pilot.

Ms. Rom is a member of the City Council of Haifa and Central Committee of the Herut Party.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jews lived in Ethiopia for centuries, referring to themselves as *Beita Yisrael*, House of Israel. Other Ethiopians used the term *falasha* which means exiled or one who does not own land in Amharic, their ancient language. Due to persecution and prohibitions against land ownership, the number of Jews in the country had dropped considerably by the start of the twentieth century. The Socialist revolution of 1974 resulted in even harsher conditions, as Jews found themselves caught between the pro-Soviet government, the rebels, and the counter-revolutionaries. They remained poor tenant farmers, forbidden to emigrate although many desired to live in Israel.

The Soviet regime did not single out the Ethiopian Jews as targets, but the governor of the Gondar province, where most Ethiopian Jews lived, was known for his anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. He closed Jewish villages to outsiders and imprisoned and tortured religious leaders. The first Jewish mission to Ethiopia, in October 1981, raised international awareness of the plight of Ethiopian Jews, while activists such as Barbara Gaffin alerted American lawmakers to their problems. In 1984, the Israeli government took direct action and airlifted approximately 7,500 people to Israel in Operation Moses. Between 1985 and 1991, Israeli agents brought thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Addis Ababa in preparation for their emigration to Israel. In May 1991, as the regime of the Ethiopian ruler Mengista collapsed, Israel (with the help of the US) flew over 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Today, virtually no Jews remain in the country.

For more information about work with Ethiopian Jews, go to JWA's *Women Who Dared* exhibit at <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wwd/jsp/bio.jsp?personID=pbgaffin>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What topics does this newsletter cover? Why does it emphasize these points?

2. Why does the newsletter report on activities in so many different locations?
3. Which article moved you the most?
4. Is there a problem in our time that you feel is equal to that of the Ethiopian Jews?