Five years ago, the DC Dyke March — an annual protest march and rally held by and for the lesbian community, usually the day before the larger Capital Pride celebration — faced accusations of antisemitism for banning Israeli flags and rainbow Jewish pride flags with a Jewish star in the middle. Palestinian flags were allowed to fly.

Nate Shalev, a Jewish inclusivity speaker and adviser, was an organizer of the New York City Dyke March at the time. Shalev, who uses they/them pronouns, worked with fellow New York organizers to ensure that a similar ban didn’t make its way there. They argued for acceptance of people of all national identities: “We want the Dyke March to be as inclusive as possible for as many dykes as possible,” Shalev told Jewish Insider this week.

But this year, that principle has been discarded. The theme of the Dyke Marches in Washington and New York is “Dykes Against Genocide,” a response to the war in Gaza. Shalev will not be attending that march, or any marches.

“Any large, queer gathering, queer liberation march, I know I’m not going to go to because it doesn’t feel safe to me,” Shalev said. “I know that there’s just a large amount of antisemitism, this conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism about where the line is. I know folks feel very strongly that they know where the line is, but they often don’t, based on the signs that we’ve been seeing and the violence that happens.”

As millions of LGBTQ people and their allies make plans to take part in Pride parades around the country this month, many Jewish members of the queer community are skeptical about joining the celebrations, fearful that their Jewish identity will lead them to face exclusion from a community that has for decades argued forcefully about the power of inclusion.
“I’ve been telling folks that you do what makes you feel comfortable, but know that the Jewish community is behind you, and we have each other’s backs,” said Josh Maxey, executive director of Bet Mishpachah, an LGBTQ synagogue in Washington, D.C. “This is not a moment in time where we should feel, as a Jewish community, we need to go into hiding.”

“Pride is about us coming together as members of the LGBTQ community, whether you are Jewish or not, of all faiths, and really celebrating who we are,” said Josh Maxey, executive director of Bet Mishpachah, an LGBTQ synagogue in Washington, D.C. “Being Jewish is a part of who we are, and just like we wouldn’t expect any other group to turn off parts of their identity during Pride, we shouldn’t be doing that for our Jewish folks who are participating in these Pride celebrations.”

In recent weeks, Maxey has been fielding calls from queer Jews who are afraid to participate in this weekend’s Capital Pride celebration, asking if they should take off their yarmulkes or their Stars of David, or if they should skip the festivities altogether. The concerns were significant enough that Bet Mishpachah and several other Jewish organizations wrote an open letter to the Pride community, urging Pride participants to be inclusive and welcoming of Jewish attendees.

“Trans people are less likely to attend Pride events because they don’t always feel safe. But in that case, the harm is generally coming from outside the LGBTQ community,” said Ethan Felson, executive director of A Wider Bridge, a nonprofit that builds ties between LGBTQ communities in North America and Israel. “Here the call is coming from inside the house.”

At Pride parades that have already taken place, violent anti-Israel messaging has been present. In a Pride parade in the gay enclave of West Hollywood, Calif., someone held a sign reading “Globalize the Intifada.” In nearby Long Beach, a group marched under a banner that read “No Pride in Genocide” alongside Palestinian flags. At last weekend’s parades in Philadelphia and Winnipeg, anti-Israel protesters blocked the parade routes to protest the war. “Long live the Intifada,” said one sign held by the Philadelphia protesters.

“Blocking Pride parades is homophobic, period. It’s transphobic. You don’t do that,” said Tyler Gregory, CEO of the Bay Area Jewish Community Relations Council who was the executive director of A Wider Bridge from 2018-2020.

The JCRC and the San Francisco JCC organized a large float for a Jewish bloc to march in this year’s San Francisco Pride Parade on June 30. The Jewish community has participated in the parade for years, but it’s the first time they’re “going all out with a float and dancers,” according to Gregory. “We think that marching loudly in Pride as Jews is more important this year than ever,” he added. They registered their float several months ago in anticipation of anti-Israel displays that will also appear in the parade.

The San Francisco Pride Parade, one of the largest in the country, announced on Tuesday that there would not be an Israeli float at the parade, but that pro-Palestinian groups were welcome and could join the “Resistance Contingent” — and pro-Palestinian organizations that wanted to have their own contingents could request to have the fee waived to participate in the parade.

“SF Pride values the contributions of Jewish queer individuals in advocating for peace and acknowledge their enduring efforts,” the statement reads. “SF Pride is careful not to conflate Jewish groups and Jewish people living in America with the state of Israel.”

After facing pressure from Jewish activists, the organization released a statement on Thursday clarifying that “absolutely all LGBTQ+ people and allies are welcome at San Francisco Pride, and that includes Israelis and Jewish people just as it does Palestinians and Muslims.”

In New York City, home to a major Pride parade, the Israeli Consulate has marched with a float for well over a decade. When asked whether they will do so again this year, a spokesperson for the consulate did not respond to a request for comment. A source involved with planning the parade said that in recent years, it has become harder for Israel to participate, citing anti-Israel sentiment directed at the marchers.

Two years ago, in a show of Jewish and gay pride, the Israeli float in the Manhattan parade featured an iconic image of David Ben-Gurion doing a handstand on the beach, superimposed on top of a rainbow surfboard on the float. Israeli pop star Noa Kirel performed atop the float. The following year, she represented Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest — another event that has recently sparked a wave of hostility toward Israel, including from within the LGBTQ community.

A gay bar in Brooklyn, 3 Dollar Bill, canceled a planned screening of this year’s Eurovision finals in May after facing widespread boycott calls from people who objected to Israel’s participation in the contest. (Israel has appeared in the contest for more than 50 years.) The bar caved to the pressure and canceled the event. But then, after facing a backlash by its Jewish clientele, 3 Dollar Bill backtracked and
JUNE 6, 2024

Israeli students in U.S. warn peers against studying at American campuses

Israeli students who spent the year on U.S. campuses describe it as toxic, warning future Israeli academic fellows, doctoral and postdoctoral students to stay home

By Ruth Marks Eglash

It was meant to be the most exciting year of her life, but for Amit, an Israeli student now wrapping up a yearlong fellowship at Columbia University, it was an experience that she described as "toxic" and one that she would not recommend to future applicants from her country.

“We were supposed to be these very prestigious students that the university is happy to have, they even gave me a big scholarship and so theoretically my program should have been very proud to have me,” Amit, who asked that her real name not be used for fear of retribution from the department and faculty assessing her final research paper, told Jewish Insider. “But it has not been a good experience at all, and if another Israeli applicant came to me to ask if they should do this, I would tell them not to.”

A graduate student in the School of Arts and Science at the Ivy League college that has been an epicenter of anti-Israel activity since the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attacks, Amit said the negative experience stemmed from “a whole dynamic of covert and overt situations.”

Those situations have ranged from threatening demonstrations on campus to hostile and ignorant peers to faculty who...
essentially erased her and her experience as an Israeli. Now that the year is over, Amit said, “I feel like the acid is leaving my system, it was just so toxic, and I am very disappointed.”

Amit is one of hundreds of Israeli students who traveled to the U.S. in the last year to enrich their academic knowledge and enhance their professional skills, but who found themselves the targets of fierce anti-Israel activists, as Israel’s war against Hamas in Gaza played out.

Beginning on Oct. 7, when thousands of Hamas-led terrorists invaded Israel from the Palestinian enclave, murdering, raping and taking hostage hundreds of people, mostly civilians, and through to the hostile anti-Israel encampments that sprung up on campuses during the spring semester, many Israelis studying in the U.S. have experienced both the pain of the attacks and the negative climate on campus.

Experiences like that of Amit, who told JI that she felt “canceled” by the director of her department and had been denied the chance to engage in open dialogue with those attacking Israel, and her, have cast a dark shadow — especially over high-level programs — giving pause to future Israeli fellows, doctoral and postdoctoral students who are considering studying in the U.S.

“I really hope that what we’ve been seeing on social media is an exaggeration,” Yana, an Israeli who is heading to the Harvard Kennedy School of Government this summer on an Israeli Policy Fellowship, told JI. She also asked that her real name not be used out of concern that it could impact her experience.

“I feel confident that the majority of the people I meet there will see me face to face and maybe we’ll have tough and challenging conversations, but I’m pretty sure that I will at least be able to talk to them,” she said, admitting that as much as she is excited about the program, she is also nervous.

“I haven’t done all the things I did to get accepted in order to be low-profile or hide at the side of the road,” said Yana, an Israeli who is heading to the Harvard Kennedy School of Government this summer on an Israeli Policy Fellowship. “It’s very easy for Israelis to say, ‘This is too hard, they hate us, they are all antisemites, so we are letting go of these platforms,’ but I think we have to keep making efforts to convince Israelis that these programs are important, they are important for us now and important for our future.”

“I hope that when I say I served in the IDF, people will not cancel me, but I’m not sure,” Yana continued, describing how she has already been deliberating whether she should stay away from studying subjects that might cause friction.

“I hope it won’t be like that, but I am still being cautious,” she said, pondering how free she will be to express herself and how her future professors might respond.

Yana said that studying at an Ivy League college in the U.S. was a long-term dream, but that she has also received a mixed response from family and friends in Israel.

“Two years ago, even one year ago, people would have been so proud of me for being accepted to Harvard,” she recounted. “But even while I was going through the application process, I got a lot of criticism. My closest friends were not pleased about it and my father was really angry with me. He said, ‘You’re going to pay them so much money and they’re against you – why would you do that?’ He did not understand why I wanted to go there.”

Her family and friends also expressed concerns for her safety on a campus that has become increasingly hostile to Jews, and Israelis in particular, she said.

“As an outspoken Israeli student who supports my country, over time, I had to deal with a level of social isolation,” said Barak Sella, who recently completed the mid-career Masters Degree in Public Administration at Harvard’s Kennedy School. “This wasn’t from antisemitism but mainly because most people just wanted to avoid the conversation.”

But, Yana added, that she would not be deterred by the anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric.

“I haven’t done all the things I did to get accepted in order to be low-profile or hide at the side of the road,” she said, adding, “It’s very easy for Israelis to say, ‘This is too hard, they hate us, they are all antisemites, so we are letting go of these platforms,’ but I think we have to keep making efforts to convince Israelis that these programs are important, they are important for us now and important for our future.”

Barak Sella, who recently completed the mid-career Masters Degree in Public Administration, also at Harvard’s Kennedy School, similarly described his experience as toxic.

“I went to Harvard to experience an international cohort and expand my network and intellectual horizons,” Sella, previously the executive director for the Reut Institute, an Israeli strategy and leadership think tank, told JI. “I aimed to gain skills and insights that would help enhance my leadership skills and impact within Israeli society.”

While he described his American campus experience up until Oct. 7 as “fantastic,” as one of around 20 Israelis in a program of some 200 students, Sella said it soon became very difficult.

“There were many sessions and protests against Israel, and being visibly Israeli was a burden,” he said, describing how the debate over Israel, its actions, and its right to exist ended up permeating into every subject – even topics that were totally unrelated to the Middle East.

Whenever he tried to speak up and defend Israel, Sella said, “I was rudely shut down.”

“As an outspoken Israeli student who supports my country, over time, I had to deal with a level of social isolation,” he continued. “This wasn’t from antisemitism but mainly because most people just wanted to avoid the conversation.”

“Most students at Harvard are not antisemitic or anti-Israel – that is just a loud but small minority – the majority of students are thoughtful and moderate people who are interested in creating relations with Israeli students,” Sella added.

While the protests were noisy, Sella said the main problem with them was that they “see Israeli identity as illegitimate … that is why Israelis must continue to apply and participate in these programs.”

“We just can’t give in to this type of behavior,” he emphasized. “We need to double down and ensure a solid and high-
quality Israeli presence on campuses.

While a new batch of Israeli students is set to arrive in the U.S. over the summer, some prestigious programs—and donors supporting these programs—have already been impacted by antisemitic and anti-Israel activities on campus and the failure by some schools to confront it.

In October, the Wexner Foundation abruptly announced the end of a 30-year relationship with Harvard and its Kennedy School, citing the university’s failure to condemn Hamas’ barbaric attacks on Israel. Its statement described an environment in which Israeli students—emerging leaders there to study a mid-career master’s degree and forge important relationships with other local and international fellows—were increasingly being marginalized.

Elad Arad, an Israeli studying for a post-doctorate in chemical engineering at Columbia, said it was critical for Israelis to remain present at top U.S. academic institutions, not only to act as ambassadors for their country, which is feeling more and more isolated, but also to ensure the future of Israeli academia and research, particularly in the field of science.

Not having the opportunity to study abroad, he noted, would contribute to a reduction in academic levels within Israel’s higher education system.

“No one will give me a faculty position without having a postdoc from an Ivy League institution or a well-known institution or university,” Arad said, explaining, “I need to be here for two reasons, the first is prestige and the second that it is much easier to get my [research] work published and make an impact, if it is coming out of a place like these universities.”

He said he had heard about other postdoctoral students rethinking the option of studying abroad, deciding that it might be best to wait until the war ends or to study in Europe, instead of the U.S.

“The main problem is that many of the postdocs already here are afraid to go back to Israel because they think that from there, they will not be able to publish any papers at all and that will end their academic career,” Arad said, adding that could have an impact not only the future of Israeli academia but also on its thriving innovation sector.

Sender Cohen, chairman of the board of the Fulbright Fellowship in Israel, told JI that all these programs were “critically important because they build academic bridges,” in both the short and long term across disciplines.

“It would be heartbreaking for Israelis to miss the opportunity to study in the U.S. and for American universities to lose the intellectual contribution that Israelis offer. We just cannot let that happen,” Professor David Schizer, who served as the dean of Columbia’s Law School from 2004-2014, told JI.

“I recognize that some Israelis may be hesitant to come to the U.S., but I would encourage them to come.”

“History has shown that a lot of the Fulbrighters have gone on to great things in universities or in government or in research institutions, and they utilize the relationships formed on the program,” he said.

“For example, those who go to military colleges, the officers get to know each other and then they become generals, they build personal relationships,” Cohen added. “It’s the same with the Fulbright fellows, you have all these brilliant academics spending time together in these departments and then they might end up leading research or becoming the president of a university or even a secretary of education.”

Professor David Schizer, who served as the dean of Columbia’s Law School from 2004-2014, told JI that “it would be heartbreaking for Israelis to miss the opportunity to study in the U.S. and for American universities to lose the intellectual contribution that Israelis offer.”

“We just cannot let that happen,” Schizer, who is now a co-chair of the university’s task force on antisemitism, said. “I recognize that some Israelis may be hesitant to come to the U.S., but I would encourage them to come.”

He said that American universities, including Columbia, needed to be doing much more to ensure that Israeli students feel “safe and welcome on their campuses.”

“Unfortunately, it has been a difficult year,” Schizer explained. “There have been a number of absolutely unacceptable instances in which Israeli students have experienced discrimination based only on their country of origin, and that problem has to be fixed.”

“Israeli students are enormously valuable as members of the Columbia community,” he said, referring to his own institution. “It’s critical that the university ensures that they have the excellent experience that they deserve.”

Schizer, who lectures in law and economics, said that this was not only “a moral obligation because Columbia is committed to the idea of not discriminating based on national origin,” but also a legal one.

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “universities that accept federal funding are not allowed to discriminate based on race, color, or national origin,” he said. “Israeli students are entitled to the same experience that any other student is entitled to have.”

Both Schizer and Cohen said there are some efforts underway to address the toxic experiences Israeli students described from the last academic year.

At Columbia, Schizer said the antisemitism task force had put together a list of recommendations for university’s leadership, including suggestions that future anti-Israel protests be contained to “a designated part of campus,” and that it “enforces its own rules more effectively.”

“We looked into why the university has, at times, failed to enforce its own rules,” he said. “We found that in most cases it was because the bureaucracy at the university was not trained to deal with a situation like the one we had and was not properly prepared, perhaps they didn’t even recognize that times have changed.”

“It can’t be solved overnight, it’s like turning a supertanker,” said Cohen, noting that some major university donors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are “pulling back in a way that is having an effect.”

He said he believed that some schools, where Israeli and Jewish students were particularly mistreated, would likely see their funding cut, while other universities and individual departments might see their funding increase.

“Tm not actually too worried about it for the long term because at a lot of these universities, the actual people who are in charge, are pragmatic centrists,” Cohen said. “And, I think, everyone realizes there’s a problem.”
In social media war against AIPAC, Rep. Mark Pocan advances antisemitic tropes

Pocan's jabs have frequently echoed or embraced a slew of antisemitic canards, including dual loyalty, control of government and even blood libel, experts say

By Marc Rod

For months since Oct. 7, Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI) has taken to social media, on a regular basis, to level barbs at the pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC, offering wide-ranging attacks on the organization’s political spending and support for Israel’s operations against Hamas in Gaza. Pocan is among the most outspoken critics of Israel in the House outside of the Squad, and he’s often been even more actively involved in the progressive battle against AIPAC than his more high-profile colleagues.

Pocan’s jabs at AIPAC — often coming in the form of X (formerly Twitter) exchanges with AIPAC, which frequently tags Pocan in its own posts — have frequently echoed or outright embraced a slew of antisemitic tropes, including dual loyalty, control of government and even blood libel, experts say.

In some of the most striking attacks, Pocan — who maintains a combative social media presence on a range of subjects — has accused supporters of AIPAC of being indifferent to, or even reveling in, the deaths of civilians in Gaza, particularly children.

Just last week, responding to a video of an Israeli bombing in Rafah, which included graphic imagery of the attack’s aftermath, Pocan declared, “This is porn for @AIPAC. Doubt they’ll show any regret.”

Accusations that AIPAC seeks and is responsible for the murder of innocents, or is unconcerned by it, are a recurring theme of Pocan’s attacks. Pocan generally cites casualty data provided by the Hamas-controlled Gaza Ministry of Health, the reliability of which has been called into question.

AIPAC’s “call for ending Hamas is code for its ok to kill Palestinian kids. 4500 so far. Pathetic,” Pocan said in November.

“All 31,000 dead, thousands being kids, not enough for you? Sorta sick,” Pocan posted on March 20.

“I’m starting to think that @AIPAC isn’t just a puppet of Netanyahu, but a partner,” Pocan said on Feb. 21. “They cover for his murdering of innocents in the course of supposedly going after Hamas & those actions aren’t getting hostages released. They seem fine with that & don’t mind the killing of kids.”

“They don’t care that a majority of the 30,000 dead in Gaza are women and children,” Pocan said on March 7.

“Stopping ‘collective punishment’ bombing means thousands of kids stay alive,” Pocan said, responding to a tweet by AIPAC about footage from the Oct. 7 attack. “How terribly unreligious of a position by @AIPAC.”

The comments parallel the blood libel, the centuries-old accusation that Jews seek the deaths of innocents, particularly children, experts in antisemitism said.

“They don’t mind the killing of kids? That is echoes of blood libel,” Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, told Jewish Insider.

“Essentially, they’re being depicted as Nazis,” Cooper continued.

Pocan’s office did not respond to a request for comment.

“That crosses all lines,” Abe Foxman, the former national director of the Anti-Defamation League said, agreeing that the comments bore similarities to blood libel.

“You can be critical of a lobbying group... and you may not like the government, but then to accuse people in Washington or New York who are lobbyists — which is a well-respected historical element in the American democratic institutional systems — as warmongers... that’s very clear antisemitism.”

Pocan’s posts have also held AIPAC and its supporters responsible for the actions of Israel and its leaders and demanded they apologize for their actions.

“These deeply hurtful and toxic comments by Rep. Pocan are not only divisive but potentially dangerous. He is effectively accusing supporters of AIPAC of dual loyalty, whose true allegiance is to Israel,” Julie Fishman Rayman, the American Jewish Committee’s managing director of policy and political affairs, said in a statement to JI. “This is a centuries-old bigoted trope that has led to the harassment, marginalization, oppression, and even murder of Jewish people.”

As recently as Monday, Pocan said, “Hey @AIPAC, seems your ‘leader’ doesn’t like the idea of stopping the killing of Palestinians. Comment?” referring to a statement by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s on a cease-fire proposal outlined by President Joe Biden and approved by the Israeli government.

That post was Pocan’s first, and so far only, direct response to the cease-fire plan.

Pocan’s rhetoric, observers say, invokes dual loyalty tropes claiming that Jews’ true allegiance is to Israel, rather than the nations of which they are citizens.

“These deeply hurtful and toxic comments by Rep. Pocan are not only divisive but potentially dangerous. He is effectively accusing supporters of AIPAC of dual loyalty, whose true allegiance is to Israel,” Julie Fishman Rayman, the
American Jewish Committee’s managing director of policy and political affairs, said in a statement to JI. “This is a centuries-old bigoted trope that has led to the harassment, marginalization, oppression, and even murder of Jewish people.”

“This is a time for constructive dialogue on a difficult topic,” Fishman Rayman continued. “This is not a time for character assassination of those who support Israel and its right to defend itself against an enemy bent on its destruction and the annihilation of the world’s Jews.”

The Wisconsin congressman, who represents the state’s progressive center of Madison, has often focused his attacks on AIPAC’s political fundraising and spending, regularly describing AIPAC donations and outside spending as “toxic” to American democracy and the candidates who receive them, and repeatedly describing the group as a “Trojan horse” interfering in Democratic politics.

He has argued on numerous occasions that AIPAC is distinct from and more sinister than other issue PACs that raise money from and spend money in races on both sides of the aisle.

The “singling out [of] AIPAC as a lobbying group without singling out any other groups — and there are a lot of lobbying institutions, or governments — this is an antisemitic trope... you're talking about Jewish power and Jewish influence in the United States,” Abe Foxman, the former national director of the Anti-Defamation League said.


Pocan has called candidates who take AIPAC money “bought and paid for” and “monkey[s]” who are “purchased by conservative groups like you” and would otherwise be “free” to express opinions that differ from AIPAC’s.

Cooper said that Pocan’s posts, in aggregate, read like a “checklist of the tropes — Jewish power and all the rest.”

He said Pocan’s comments echo antisemitic tropes that Jews are serving as puppet masters in American politics — “they’re not just puppet [masters], they’re actually partnering in what? In murder.”

Foxman said that this “singling out [of] AIPAC as a lobbying group without singling out any other groups — and there are a lot of lobbying institutions, or governments — this is an antisemitic trope... you're talking about Jewish power and Jewish influence in the United States.”

He argued that the implication of Pocan’s comments has been that AIPAC’s spending is uniquely harmful “because it’s Jewish and it’s Israel.”

Foxman, who wrote a book in 2007 whose subtitle was “the Israel lobby and the myth of Jewish control,” noted that such sentiments are hardly new, but Pocan is "latching on to it."

AIPAC spokesperson Marshall Wittmann told JI that Pocan “traffic[s] in the most despicable tropes about America’s ally that reflect his extremist views about Israel and its fight against Iranian terrorist proxies. His fringe views are far outside the mainstream of American support for the Jewish state.”

David Kopstein, a retired rabbi who has lived in Madison for the past decade and described himself as an AIPAC supporter, said he’s “really shocked” at Pocan’s comments. “My god, he doesn’t relent, does he?”

“It’s awful. I'm embarrassed that he represents this town,” Kopstein said, calling the comments “astonishing.”

Jeremy Tunis, a member of the executive committee of the Jewish Federation of Madison, said he’s been in touch with Pocan and his staff for several years, and met with them on numerous occasions.

“At the very least, it’s juvenile. It seems beneath the dignity of somebody who's in elected office, to get into that kind of public — to use polite language — spitting match,” Loeb said. “It looks like the vitriol we see on Facebook and other social media between either emotional or uninformed commenters.”

He added that, even setting that aside, “how is it helpful? How does it promote any point of view that would be helpful?”

“I would like my representative to be focused on solutions to problems,” Loeb said.

Loeb described himself as “no defender of AIPAC,” adding that he views the group as not necessarily productive to the cause of peace, but said that, “I find [Pocan’s] comments about AIPAC more alienating. They’re not nuanced in the least.”

Loeb said that he shares some of Pocan's
criticisms of Israel, but Pocan’s recent comments “make me question even more, where does his criticism end? Even though he claims to support Israel’s right to exist, it’s starting to ring a little bit hollow for me, because he says that as if it’s a major concession... as if somehow he’s doing the Jewish community a favor.”

Foxman and Cooper said they’re also concerned about the broader trends behind Pocan’s comments.

Cooper said that the rhetoric that Pocan is using, "dehumanization, ‘monkeys,’ and ‘Israelis are murderers,’ and ‘they can’t kill enough children’ and on and on and on — once upon a time, that put you on the fringes of American politics. Now, I don’t see any price.”

Cooper also said it’s concerning that some lawmakers seem to view antisemitism as a politically useful tool for fundraising and advancing their own careers.

Foxman warned that a lawmaker using these antisemitic tropes “legitimizes it,” to potentially worrisome effects.

“A crackpot who does it — OK. But this is a person elected to represent that constituency, and he continues to spew this hatred, this vitriol, this antisemitism, it makes it more legitimate, it makes it more that it’s OK,” he said. “If a congressman can do it... they're not the kooks out in the street.”

Inside the fierce debate over aid to Gaza

A scientific study into the quality and quantity of food that has entered Gaza in recent months found that it meets international nutritional standards – and it should adequately provide for the territory’s entire population

By Ruth Marks Eglash

For months, international aid agencies and governments around the world, including close allies of Israel, have accused the Jewish state of not doing enough to ensure Palestinian civilians in Gaza are receiving basic food supplies and other crucial aid. There have been predictions and projections that the dire situation on the ground is already causing severe malnutrition, which could soon become an all-out famine across the Strip.

But since the early days of the war with Hamas, Israel has insisted that it is doing everything it can – given the constraints of the battlefield – to facilitate the entry of aid sent by multiple countries and international groups into the Palestinian enclave.

In recent weeks, COGAT, the Israeli army unit responsible for coordinating civilian matters with the Palestinians, has stated that most of the land crossings into Gaza are open, hundreds of trucks filled with aid and commercial goods enter every day, along with airdrops by the Jordanian and Egyptian militaries and a floating pier – opened recently by the U.S. Central Command – to receive aid ships arriving from Cyprus.

COGAT says that the main barrier preventing aid from reaching Palestinian civilians is the poor distribution system and scant manpower of the United Nations and other aid agencies working inside Gaza, as well as cynical efforts by the Iranian-backed terror groups – Hamas and others – to thwart humanitarian efforts and divert the aid to their own pockets.

It’s a paradigmatic debate with each side claiming it is the responsibility of the other to ensure that aid reaches those who most need it. Yet, after nearly eight months of war, the unresolved matter continues to cause hardships for Gazans and has opened Israel, particularly its leaders, to accusations of using starvation as a weapon of war and genocide.

“In terms of the concept of a right to food, apart from being a fundamental human need, one of the development goals that the United Nation holds and one that we also believe in is having a world free from hunger.” Aron Troen, a professor of agriculture, food and environment at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Jewish Insider.

Troen is one of several top Israeli academics and public health officials who carried out a recent study into the quality and quantity of food that has entered Gaza in recent months that found that the aid currently going inside does, at least numerically, meet international nutritional standards.

Based on data provided by COGAT, the study found that the quantity and nutritional composition of the food that was delivered between January and April this year even exceeded the Sphere standards, an internationally recognized benchmark for humanitarian response, and that it should have adequately provided for the territory’s entire population of around 2.4 million.

“The question of what happens with food in times of war is not my expertise – that is a legal question that relates to the conduct of the war and of what is and isn’t reasonable or expected or possible during a war,” Troen continued. “However, there is an international convention and legal obligation of combatants to not deliberately starve or use food as a weapon – each side has an obligation to ensure that, to the best extent possible, aid is transferred and food is not denied so that the non-combat civilian population isn't harmed.”

The study looked at all food aid shipments that entered Gaza via the Kerem Shalom and Nitzana land crossings, as well as the daily airdrops. It categorized and quantified each food item, and the nutrient compositions were assessed based on existing food composition databases. The researchers then calculated the total energy...
(kcal), protein (grams), fat (grams), and iron (mg) content of all shipments and divided the total by the estimated population size reported by the Gaza Central Bureau of Statistics. The daily per capita supply was then compared to Sphere standards.

Troen told JI that the research was prompted by inaccuracies in the data being published by U.N. aid agencies and other international bodies, such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Organization, that monitor and analyze food security around the world.

“The reports were based on flawed and limited data,” he said, adding, “the predictions of famine were based on worst-case scenarios.”

The “quantity and quality of food delivered by the international donors through Israel to Gaza has steadily improved since January and the study’s findings suggest that the current food supply contains sufficient energy and protein for the population’s needs,” said Dorit Nitzan, a professor at the School of Public Health at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva who has served as the World Health Organization’s coordinator of health and emergencies.

Despite questionable data and methods, Troen noted that the declarations were quickly repeated by the media, and “used by those hostile Israel to make claims of deliberate starvation, genocide and war crimes.”

Last month, the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, said he would seek arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including “the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war.”

“There is a large gap between the harms of war and the claim that Israelis are deliberately starving Palestinians,” Troen said, cautioning, however, that there is undoubtedly suffering in Gaza. He also highlighted that the study did not look at what happened to the aid after it entered the enclave or how it was distributed.

Dorit Nitzan, a professor at the School of Public Health at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva who has served as the World Health Organization’s coordinator of health and emergencies, oversaw the study together with Troen.

She said that the “quantity and quality of food delivered by the international donors through Israel to Gaza has steadily improved since January and the study’s findings suggest that the current food supply contains sufficient energy and protein for the population’s needs.”

“The research paper does not really alter the assessment of severe food insecurity across Gaza and famine conditions in some of the worst hit areas,” Jeremy Konyndyk, president of the U.S.-based Refugees International, told JI, noting that the study covered the period in the first quarter of this year and not the last three months of 2023.

However, Nitzan added, “further studies are needed to investigate food distribution and population access to humanitarian aid.”

In early May, Cindy McCain, the executive director of the World Food Programme, one of the U.N. agencies currently working inside the Gaza Strip, told NBC News that there is already a full-blown famine in the northern part of Palestinian territory. Her statements were based on the IPC’s estimates, a spokesperson for the WFP said, referring JI to the IPC for further clarification. A spokesperson for the IPC said that its current report, which is based on figures between October and December, would be updated in the coming weeks to reflect the current situation on the ground.

Jeremy Konyndyk, president of the U.S.-based Refugees International, told JI that assessing aid deliveries based on caloric volumes was at best “a math exercise” and not really “an indication of the actual household level consumption by people in Gaza.”

“The research paper does not really alter the assessment of severe food insecurity across Gaza and famine conditions in some of the worst hit areas,” he said, noting also that the study covered the period in the first quarter of this year and not the last three months of 2023.

“Almost no food was entering Gaza during the early months of the war,” Konyndyk said. “The Oct-Dec period was when major food deficits first emerged, and that is what prompted the original famine warnings.”

While the amount of aid entering might have increased, he said that distribution and safe aid access still “remain the biggest challenges in terms of combating famine.”

He also said that Israeli claims that Hamas was interfering with aid operations were inaccurate.

“Most of the last-mile distribution challenges relate to IDF conduct and obstacles from the Israeli government,” Konyndyk said.

Eri Kaneko, spokesperson for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also highlighted distribution problems she said were caused primarily by the Israeli military.

“Every third humanitarian mission coordinated with the Israeli authorities in southern Gaza in recent weeks was either impeded following an initial approval or denied access altogether,” she said in a statement.

“Humanitarian workers and volunteers spare no effort, often risking their lives, to support civilians in Gaza amid active hostilities,” Kaneko continued. “Mounting an effective humanitarian operation in a war zone requires security assurances for aid workers and unimpeded passage to distribute assistance at scale.”

She said that OCHA has stressed to Israel that its “responsibility does not end when supplies are dropped off at the border — as that alone does not guarantee aid workers’ access to safely pick them up, let alone distribute them to those in need inside Gaza.”

“Almost no food was entering Gaza during the early months of the war,” Konyndyk said. “The Oct-Dec period was when major food deficits first emerged, and that is what prompted the original famine warnings.”

While the amount of aid entering might have increased, he said that distribution and safe aid access still “remain the biggest challenges in terms of combating famine.”

He also said that Israeli claims that Hamas was interfering with aid operations were inaccurate.

“Most of the last-mile distribution challenges relate to IDF conduct and obstacles from the Israeli government,” Konyndyk said.

Eri Kaneko, spokesperson for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also highlighted distribution problems she said were caused primarily by the Israeli military.

“Every third humanitarian mission coordinated with the Israeli authorities in southern Gaza in recent weeks was either impeded following an initial approval or denied access altogether,” she said in a statement.

“Humanitarian workers and volunteers spare no effort, often risking their lives, to support civilians in Gaza amid active hostilities,” Kaneko continued. “Mounting an effective humanitarian operation in a war zone requires security assurances for aid workers and unimpeded passage to distribute assistance at scale.”

She said that OCHA has stressed to Israel that its “responsibility does not end when supplies are dropped off at the border — as that alone does not guarantee aid workers’ access to safely pick them up, let alone distribute them to those in need inside Gaza.”

“In order to understand why they have a distribution challenge you first have to look at their trucks,” Col. Elad Goren, who heads the civil department of COGAT, said. “There is a limited number of trucks inside Gaza and we have asked the U.N. and other agencies to purchase more trucks and bring them into Gaza. Unfortunately, we are eight months into this war and only around 15 new trucks have entered Gaza.”

However, Col. Elad Goren, who heads the civil department of COGAT, told JI that
it was the responsibility of U.N. agencies and other international humanitarian organizations to ensure that aid reached the civilian population.

“From our side, everything is open,” he said. “If they want to bring in 700 trucks a day then we can facilitate it, there is no problem.”

Goren said that one of the biggest problems was the U.N.’s poor distribution system and its lack of manpower.

“In order to understand why they have a distribution challenge you first have to look at their trucks,” he said. “There is a limited number of trucks inside Gaza and we have asked the U.N. and other agencies to purchase more trucks and bring them into Gaza. Unfortunately, we are eight months into this war and only around 15 new trucks have entered Gaza.”

“For such a large logistical operation, I was hoping that we would see at least 150 new trucks going in,” Goren continued. “We also have a lot of criticisms of the international organizations because they do not have enough manpower.”

“If we compare their work here to other places around the world, such as Yemen, Iraq or even Ukraine, they brought in thousands of people from international organizations to take part in the humanitarian effort,” he said. “Here we are only seeing around 60 people and that is a very low number.”

“Of course, Gaza is a war zone, it’s small, it’s highly populated and it is very crowded,” Goren added. “Also, Hamas is fully embedded with the civilian population, and they are sabotaging humanitarian efforts so they can criticize Israel and force us to end this war.”

JUNE 5, 2024

AI startups test the waters in Saudi Arabia’s tech push

Saudi Arabia’s artificial intelligence companies could contribute $135 billion to the economy by 2030, exceeding government forecasts

By Nour El-Shaeri

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

ured by generous housing allowances, free office space and potential government partnerships, startup founders are increasingly looking at Saudi Arabia as a home for their emerging artificial intelligence companies.

DXwand, a Cairo-based startup that uses conversational AI to help businesses automate customer service, is taking full advantage of Saudi largesse and now operates out of an office in Riyadh. SambaNova, a Palo Alto, Calif.-based chipmaker, is still testing the waters, recently sending two employees to scout potential commercial partnerships and land deals.

The incentives are especially attractive for larger companies such as Vast Data, a $9.5 billion maker of software to manage AI’s massive data storage demands. Having already established a strong presence in the Middle East market, Vast Data is moving its regional headquarters from Dubai to Riyadh – and reaping dividends.

“Our relocation wasn’t just about moving offices; it signified a strategic shift,” Abdullah Al Gallaf, Vast Data’s Country Manager in Saudi Arabia told The Circuit.

He pointed to Saudi Arabia’s ambitious Vision 2030 and strong commitment to funding technological advancement as key drivers for the change of HQ.

Vast Data is part of a wave of companies moving to the kingdom to expand their business, a phenomenon that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is banking on as the government pours billions of dollars into efforts to make them happy.

The campaign to attract international businesses carries a carrot and a stick. Large companies that do not establish a regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia are barred from receiving government contracts under a law that took effect at the beginning of this year. Goldman Sachs last month became the first Wall Street investment bank to obtain a license to set up a Riyadh HQ.

Incentives for promising startups are spelled out in the kingdom’s National Strategy for Data & AI, which aims to create a $20 billion AI sector through private and government investments by 2030. Alat, a new Saudi tech fund backed by the Public Investment Fund, has pledged to invest $100 billion to develop partnerships and build advanced manufacturing capabilities in the AI sector.

“By establishing our headquarters in Saudi Arabia, we’re not just moving offices, we’re moving closer to the action,” Al Gallaf said. “This physical presence allows us to foster partnerships and actively contribute to the kingdom’s vision for the future.”

Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Investment offers a smorgasbord of inducements for foreign companies with its new Regional Headquarters (RHQ) program. Those include unlimited visas for employees, a 10-year exemption from so-called Saudization requirements that encourage hiring local employees, exemption from professional accreditation for employees with valid home-country accreditations, a zero-percent corporate income tax, and a withholding tax rate for 30 years after the RHQ licence is issued.

“Streamlined business regulations and strong support for research and development have been a major driver,” Al Gallaf said.

AI-driven companies are particularly sought by the kingdom, which offers comfortable housing allowances and free office space as bait. New government-
Anti-Israel activists bring lots of noise but little substance to state Democratic conventions

Democratic Party gatherings in Minnesota and North Carolina hint at messy path for the party in Chicago

By Gabby Deutch

As Democrats brace for a messy convention in Chicago in August, with the party bitterly divided over the war in Gaza, state-level party activists are starting to meet for their quadrennial conventions, offering an early look at the tension points Democrats will face later this summer.

Amid the bureaucratic business of electing party delegates and approving changes to party rules, the Democrats gathering in places such as Duluth, Minn.; Bangor, Maine; and Jamestown, N.C., are also being asked to weigh in on hefty questions related to the war in Gaza. So far, anti-Israel activists have generated a lot of noise but very little substance when it comes to having an impact on official party positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

People entering the Duluth Convention Center in Minnesota to attend the state Democratic-Farmer-Labor party convention last weekend had to walk past hundreds of anti-Israel protesters waving Palestinian flags and holding signs accusing President Joe Biden and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), whom the party endorsed for reelection, of supporting “genocide” in Gaza. Not all the attendees in the room were die-hard Biden supporters; 18% of Minnesota Democrats voted “uncommitted” in the state’s March primary in protest of Biden’s support for Israel, meaning that faction will now send delegates to the Democratic National Convention.

Once inside, attendees heard speeches from top state activists who issued a plea for unity in a pivotal election year.

“We’re a big tent, y’all, and it can get real messy in here,” Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, a member of the DFL party, said in a speech. “Some of you voted uncommitted in the primary, and that’s OK because we believe in democracy here. We can be ourselves and express our concerns and come together in a good way and move forward.”

The party’s official platform takes an old-school Democratic approach to the Middle East, supporting “Israel’s right to exist within secure borders, Palestinian rights to self-determination, and continued peace efforts in the Middle East.” Several resolutions that came to the floor attempted to push the party left on the issue but did not pass, although they garnered significant support.

Party activists voted down a resolution calling for Israel to release “unjustly held political prisoners” and another calling for the resumption of funding to the United

Saudia Arabia’s AI sector has the potential to contribute $135 billion to the Saudi economy by 2030, exceeding the Vision 2030 forecast, according to global professional services firm PwC.

“We see immense potential to contribute to the kingdom’s technological leap, particularly in sectors like healthcare, finance, and logistics, where AI-driven solutions can significantly improve efficiency and outcomes,” Al Gallaf said.

The company’s partnerships with local entities like MBUZZ, a Saudi distributor of tech tools and software, and collaborations with Nvidia, Google Cloud, AWS and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, “significantly expanded our footprint” across the kingdom, Al Gallaf said.

That includes partnering with public institutions such universities and government agencies, which, based on the new headquarters law, are only open to Vast Data because of its move to Saudi Arabia.

DXwand founder and CEO Ahmed Mahmoud told The Circuit he opened the office in Saudi Arabia to gain “strategic advantage, access to a burgeoning market, and the opportunity to contribute significantly to the region’s transformative vision.”

Mahmoud said the company already has partners in the kingdom such as insurer BUPA Arabia and is aiming to multiply its client base with the establishment of a local office in Riyadh by mid-year, employing 4 out of its 44 employees. DXwand raised $4 million in January to fuel its expansion.

“Saudi Arabia is developing several innovation hubs and tech cities, such as NEOM and King Abdullah Economic City, which attract top talent and foster a culture of innovation,” he said. “DXwand can benefit from access to a skilled workforce and a vibrant ecosystem for research and development.”

SambaNova has strong reasons for building up operations in Saudi Arabia, even if it hasn’t established a headquarters in the kingdom yet. Senior Vice President of Product Marshall Choy told The Circuit.

“We are making a strategic investment in Saudi Arabia because the region – like the U.S. – believes AI is a strategic imperative to fuel its economic growth and become a global hub for knowledge-based innovation,” he said.
Nations Relief and Works Agency, the U.N. organization that supports the Palestinians, which the U.S. halted due to its ties to Hamas and employees’ involvement in the Oct. 7 terror attacks. Another resolution that called for the recognition of a Palestinian state earned 50% of the vote, but it still failed, since measures require 60% of the vote to pass.

Meanwhile, party activists agreed on a resolution that supports the “immediate release of hostages, and prisoners held without trial, immediate humanitarian aid, and an immediate cease-fire through continued peace efforts in Gaza.” The original version of that resolution also included a line expressing support for “a two-state solution that affirms the rights of both the Israeli and Palestinian people each to have their own states within safe and secure borders,” but that was cut out of the final version.

A spokesperson for the party told Jewish Insider that the DFL’s support for Israel remains unchanged. “Israel’s right to exist is still in the DFL’s party platform, and nothing about this weekend’s convention changed that. Our party and its leadership support a two-state solution and unequivocally condemn antisemitism,” said Darwin Forsyth, DFL’s communications director.

The only resolution that pro-Israel advocates viewed as a major “loss” was one that condemned antisemitism “in all its forms,” because it was amended to remove a line that described “denial of the right of the state of Israel to exist” as a form of antisemitism.

“That was, I would say, would be the loss that we really saw at the convention this week, is being really able to hammer home that we can’t delegitimize the state of Israel,” said Manny Houle, a pro-Israel activist and former Democratic organizer in Minneapolis.

In North Carolina, too, activists proposed competing resolutions about the Israel-Hamas war. The state Democratic Party’s resolutions committee sought to head off the inevitable disagreements by releasing just one resolution on the war — a resolution that drew direct and inaccurate comparisons between both parties, including a call for the immediate release of “all Israeli hostages taken by Hamas” and “Palestinian hostages taken by Israel.” (Israel has not taken hostages in the war.) The resolution called for “a comprehensive and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that respects the rights and aspirations of all parties,” but it did not explicitly call for a two-state solution.

The resolution was sent back to be considered by the committee that had authored it after party delegates didn’t have time to consider it. The committee is not slated to meet again until after the election, essentially killing the resolution.

One Democratic activist who attended the convention told JI the resolution had several divisive “poison pills” that diverged from the party’s longstanding policy on Israel. North Carolina Democrats’ 2022 platform called for diplomacy in the Middle East “with the goal of guaranteeing security for Israel, establishing peace in the region and restoring full human rights for the Palestinian populations, including the right to self-determination.”

Democrats in Maine also voted against adopting any resolutions on the war in Gaza, including one that called for ending U.S. aid for Israel until Israel declares a permanent cease-fire and withdraws from Palestinian territories. Like in Minnesota, anti-Israel protesters made a scene at the convention, apparently to little effect on policy.

The national Democratic platform committee has not yet begun to hold meetings, which are slated to start soon. Some states don’t release their own platforms and instead adopt the platform authored by the DNC. In many others, foreign policy doesn’t appear at all, or only as a small portion — compared to the national party platform, which weighs in on major national security issues.

Democrats are bracing for protests at the Chicago convention, and the Democratic National Committee announced in May that delegates will nominate Biden via a “virtual roll call” rather than the traditional ceremonial roll call on the convention floor. The reason they’re doing so is to avoid a ballot snafu in Ohio, but Democratic activists also acknowledge it minimizes potential disruptions from Uncommitted delegates.
The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The number of Holocaust survivors — approximately 1 million of whom live in the United States — are known as “3Gs,” short for third generation. In most cases, they will be the last to have grown up on first-person survivor stories.

As the number of survivors dwindles, more than 13 3G groups have made it their mission to ensure that their grandparents’ Holocaust testimonies continue to be told. Now the individual groups are collaborating as a community, through a program called Living Links.

Last month, the USC Shoah Foundation — the organization founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994 to preserve the memory of the Holocaust — announced it was partnering with Living Links, which it said would enable it to increase the number of 3G affiliates nationwide and expand their speaker training program, which has already trained some 500 speakers and reached 60,000 students.

Together, the organizations are broadening the platform for 3Gs to share family stories in schools and with community groups to counter antisemitism, bigotry and hate.

Living Links, which launched about a year ago, serves as an umbrella group for 14 3G groups in North America (13 in the U.S. and one in Toronto) that offer grandchildren of Holocaust survivors social, educational and advocacy opportunities among others like themselves. Its co-founders, David Wachs and Jennifer Loew Mendelson, told eJewishPhilanthropy that they expected there to be 18 3G groups in North America by the end of the year.

Living Links defines “Holocaust survivor” as anyone who was affected through Nazi persecution, including anyone who was displaced, partisans and members of the resistance, people who were in camps or ghettos, or who survived in hiding and other experiences.

The organization aims to provide a supportive environment where members can explore their shared, complex legacies, the co-founders said. Loew Mendelson and Wachs interviewed the existing 3G groups over the course of a year to understand their needs; their findings spurred them to create starter tool kits for recently founded groups, and deepen the knowledge for more established groups — like those in New York, DC, Miami and Philadelphia — by helping them learn about grants, board development and other processes.

So far, more than $1 million has been raised toward the Living Links program budget of $5 million over the next three years. One primary expense will be the addition of three staff members to work with the program, the co-founders said, and growing the speaker training program to a national scale will also add to the budget needed.

“We’re hoping for people to donate, to support us, but over a multiyear period, to give us stability,” she said.

Living Links is also developing an affiliate council, an advisory committee comprising representatives from the 14 affiliated 3G organizations that will meet monthly to discuss progress and engage in professional development. The council will also serve as a sounding board to ensure that Living Links is providing the assistance that the 3G community needs.

“We really want people to dive deeper and learn more and to be better at speaking” [about their family histories], Wachs told eJJP. “We want to give them the education and the practice to do so.”

“Our whole goal is to get the stories out there to show what happens when society becomes intolerant, or we lose our democracy, or you don’t stand up to antisemitism or hate or bigotry. And all of these stories really are like that. They help shine a light on what we can all do better,” Loew Mendelson said.

Over the past 18 months, the foundation, whose archive contains recorded testimony from more than 55,000 survivors, has been preparing for its 30th anniversary by considering its future and the future of Holocaust testimonies as survivors die off, Jenna Leventhal, its senior director of administration, told eJJP.

“We’re an organization deeply rooted in the past, rooted in story, and we wanted to be very thoughtful about going forward and the type of audiences that we’re cultivating,” Leventhal said.

The foundation has been aware of the 3G organizations, particularly 3GNY, which was founded in 2005. Leventhal said she felt it was the “perfect time” to support the creation of “a strong, dedicated network of descendants that are working together in concert across the country to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust continue to be shared with new generations... and become the future Jewish leaders in our world.”

The idea of grandchildren carrying on their grandparents’ stories is integral to the USC Shoah Foundation’s operations and is even built into the foundation’s archive of testimonies, Leventhal said. When possible, in the last frames of each survivor’s testimony, often, their children, grandchildren and sometimes great-grandchildren join them on-screen. “That intergenerational interconnectedness has been front and center and everything that we do really since we were founded 30 years ago,” she said.
The feeling of intergenerational connection is also true of the Living Links founders: Wachs has paternal grandparents who were Holocaust survivors. Loew Mendelson, a founding staff member at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., told eJP she was “on the young side of 2Gs” — her father was a Holocaust survivor — and credited the passion of 3Gs she had met for inspiring her in this work. “Every single one of them that I met, every single one had been so shaped by this history that it shaped their identity, and in some cases, their career choices. And it just wasn’t recognized by any institution. These are important vital stakeholders in preserving this memory and sharing this history and making the world a better place,” Loew Mendelson said.

She added that Living Links “couldn’t be launched at a better time, to combat antisemitism and Holocaust distortion,” in light of the rise in global antisemitism after Oct. 7, adding that the organization aims to install a component in which 3G speakers would visit college students for conversation.

The USC Shoah Foundation is still collecting Holocaust narratives, and after Oct. 7, added a commitment to collecting and documenting stories from the 2023 attacks on the south of Israel. “There’s a power in letting these survivors tell their story and showing how antisemitism continues to be an invasive and troubling, harmful challenge,” Leventhal said.

Building Living Links as a startup supported by the more established Shoah Foundation means that the foundation would incubate or facilitate the growth of the newer organization toward becoming self-sustaining. Leventhal said.

“Pooling our collective energies into making something greater than ourselves is unique in our space,” she continued. “There’s a lot of appetite, need [and] interest in Holocaust issues, as antisemitism continues to rise in a post-1945 world.”

“We don’t have many survivors left and need to keep telling their stories, and use them for good, use them in education, use them to promote tolerance,” Wachs said. “We are the last living link to know the survivors. We’re telling their story from our personal side.”

---

**JUNE 4, 2024**

**IsraAid sends team to Papua New Guinea landslide, its first emergency mission since Oct. 7**

*Israeli humanitarian response group sends 5-person team to country hit by landslide suspected of killing thousands*

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

IsraAid humanitarian response group IsraAid dispatched a five-person team from Israel to Papua New Guinea on Friday after the country was hit by a deadly landslide that destroyed entire villages and buried an estimated 2,000 people under rubble, the organization said. This was the first emergency aid delegation to be sent abroad since the Oct. 7 terror attacks.

“We continue responding to the crisis at home and supporting displaced communities in Israel, we are proud to be dispatching an emergency response team to this devastating landslide in Papua New Guinea,” IsraAid CEO Yotam Polizer told eJewishPhilanthropy.

“We remain committed to our mission of supporting disaster-affected communities wherever they are, however long it takes. Throughout this time, our global teams have continued their long-term humanitarian work in 11 countries around the world, and our emergency response team remains poised to respond to new emergencies as they arise,” Polizer said.

The landslide occurred on May 24 in the country’s Enga Province, covering over 100,000 square yards in debris. The still unstable ground has severely hampered rescue efforts as large mechanical excavators have been unable to safely reach and operate in the area, leaving much of the work left to rescue workers and villagers using hand tools. A dispute between local residents and a nearby gold mine has also complicated the situation.

The landslide has displaced thousands of Papua New Guineans and damaged local sources of clean water, raising concerns of malnutrition and disease outbreaks.

“IsraAid’s emergency response team — composed of experts in emergency aid, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene [WASH] and mental health — will conduct rapid needs assessment upon arrival and will tailor and adapt its response in collaboration with the partners,” the organization said in a statement.

All five members of the team have, until now, been involved in the organization’s aid efforts within Israel following the Oct. 7 attacks. The team set out on Friday and arrived in the island nation, which is located just north of Australia, on Monday.

“As humanitarian aid workers, it’s our job to provide aid to disaster-affected communities. If there’s a significant crisis and we have added value to support, we’re proud to be able to do so despite difficulties at home,” Idan Markovich, IsraAid’s senior emergency programs officer, told eJP through a spokesperson.

“On a personal note, I see it as an additional sign of resilience that even though we are experiencing war, we are still professionals and we still have something to offer,” Markovich said.