

Yad L'Achim: State Department Accusations Against Us All Wrong

By David Halevi

In its annual report on human rights and freedom of religion, the U.S. State Department sharply criticized antissionary group Yad L'Achim, accusing it of threatening and harassing missionaries, vandalizing their property, and even committing acts of violence against them. It's not a new charge, says Rabbi Sholom Dov Lipshitz, director of Yad L'Achim — but it is a complete distortion of the truth. "It's the missionaries who are acting violently against us," Rabbi Lipshitz said.

The State Department report presents a list of specific missionary facilities it says were damaged by Yad L'Achim activists, along with incidents of threats or harassments the missionaries claim Yad L'Achim activists committed against them. However, said Rabbi Lipshitz, the State Department is not to blame — because they are being misled and lied to by the missionaries, most of whom are American citizens, and whose word is given more credence than Israeli Jews' by the Americans.

In a letter to the State Department, Rabbi Lipshitz wrote that "every year, you write a report on human rights and freedom of religion in Israel, and unfortunately, you repeatedly make baseless claims against Yad L'Achim. You write that Yad L'Achim activists harass and act violently against the missionaries, but there is no basis — or proof — for this claim."

As proof, Rabbi Lipshitz wrote that despite repeated complaints to police by the missionaries, "the Israeli legal system has never accused Yad L'Achim with the behavior listed in your



(YAD L'ACHIM)

This photo shows a Yad L'Achim activist being taken to a hospital for treatment last week, after he was savagely beaten by missionaries in Rishon Letzion.

report. We fear that the information you are being given are inaccurate, doctored to support the false claims of the missionaries against us."

The reason for this disinformation, Rabbi Lipshitz wrote, is an attempt to divert attention from the real culprits — the missionaries themselves. As proof, Rabbi Lipshtiz attached a number of police reports, documents and photos that clearly highlight the missionaries' violence against Yad L'Achim activists, "stopping at nothing to push their agenda of converting Jews forward." Among the photos attached is one clearly showing a well-known American mission-

ary from Arad savagely beating a Yad L'Achim activist.

A Yad L'Achim spokesperson attributed the missionaries' attempts to defame Yad L'Achim activists to their frustration at being stopped from executing their plans time and again by Yad L'Achim. "Their latest tactic is to paint themselves as the poor victims in order to intimidate us into letting them carry on their work undisturbed." Yad L'Achim called on the State Department to remove the "defamatory inaccuracies" appearing in the report, which have caused much aggravation and damage to the organization, the Yad L'Achim spokesperson said.

TOP OF THE WEEK

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Iranian government publication has carried an expression of sympathy by an Iranian vice president toward Israelis. However, he stressed that the statement did not mean that Iran recognized Israel, or considered it a legitimate state.

In late July, Mashai made similar comments, saying: "Iran wants no war with any country, and today Iran is friend of the United States and even Israel. ... Our achievements belong to the whole world and should be used for expanding love and peace."

Whether Iran has really turned over a new leaf or not, however, Israel remains vigilant, said Defense Minister Ehud Barak in an interview with an Italian newspaper last week. Barak said that Israel was "keeping its options open" on an attack against Iran, if the current campaign to encourage Tehran to drop its nuclear program to avoid international sanctions doesn't work. "We need to keep every option open. If they provoke us, or they attack us, our army is prepared to attack and to succeed uncompromisingly. It's up to us to find the best way to get the best result with minimum damage," he said.

On a visit to China this week, President Shimon Peres appealed to Chinese President Hu Jintao for help in quelling Iran's nuclear efforts. Peres told Hu Jintao during the lengthy meeting — it continued for twice as long as the two had planned for — that Israel considered China an "important foreign policy partner."

He invited the Chinese leader to the next President's Conference, which Peres began last year, assembling world

leaders in Israel to discuss policy issues.

Peres also met with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, also visiting China, and discussed the Iran situation with him as well. Putin told Peres that in his estimation, Iran was far from being able to build nuclear weapons.

"I am not indifferent to Israel's concerns over a nuclear-armed Iran. There should be no doubt that Russia does not want a nuclear Iran," Putin reportedly told Peres. He added that Iran was still "very far from being able to build such a bomb," telling Peres that he advocated direct talks between Israel and Iran as the most practical way to allay fears over a nuclear Iran.

According to analysts quoted by news agencies, Israel is building up its strike capabilities amid growing anxiety over Iran's nuclear ambitions and appears confident that a military attack would cripple Tehran's atomic program, even if it can't destroy it.

According to foreign media reports, Israeli intelligence is active inside Iranian territory.

Israel believes Tehran will have enriched enough uranium for a nuclear bomb by next year or 2010 at the latest. The United States has trimmed its estimate that Iran is several years or as much as a decade away from being able to field a bomb, but has not been precise about a timetable.

In general, U.S. officials think Iran isn't as close to a bomb as Israel claims, but are concerned that Iran is working faster than anticipated to add centrifuges, the workhorses of uranium enrichment.

The Iranian leader has in the past called for Israel's elimination.

(Compiled from reports by Hamodia staff and news agencies)

health fund members' ability to switch funds, by allowing them to switch via computer.

Currently, to switch health funds a member must show up in person at a post office branch, and it can only be done four times a year.

According to the new plan, a member will only need to access the government portal to switch, and the number of times it can be done will be increased from four to six per year.

According to backers of the plan, the requirement to show up in person at a post office branch is a major barrier to switching between funds, and a major obstacle to competition in the industry.

Currently, only 1% of the public — 70,000 people — per year switch between health funds.

Average Salary Rose in May

The average gross salary rose to NIS 8,072 in May, NIS 16 more than in April, an annualized 1.2% rise in March to May, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported last week.

Interestingly enough, the employees of the Israel Electric Corporation and Mekorot lost their ranking as the top-paid employees. Their average salary was NIS 18,559, compared with the average salary of NIS 22,373 in the

financial sector.

The Central Bureau of Statistics did not explain the reason for this, but it may have been because of vacation pay and bonuses for 2007 paid to some bank workers in May.

The average salary in public administration was in third place, at NIS 12,518.

There were 2.78 million Israeli salaried employees in May.

Super-Luxury Homes Still Sell Well

While there has been somewhat of a slowdown in the luxury home market this year, realtors report that the super-luxury home market has actually been flourishing, with several recent deals involving incredible amounts.

The number of homes sold for \$5m-\$6m. or more has jumped from between 10 and 15 in 2006 and 2007 to between 40 and 45 so far this year, *Globes* reported. These properties usually involve very large apartments covering an entire floor, buildings slated for preservation, and large lots.

Today, there are Israelis who are no longer satisfied with luxury 200-to-300-square-meter apartments. Developers are now marketing apartments of 500 to 1,000 square meters and even larger.

In the past, the super-rich would buy two apartments and

consolidate them; now, developers of luxury high-rises are building huge apartments covering an entire floor.

For seafront properties or old, historic homes, prices can reach \$80,000 per square meter.

Globes reported that 70% of buyers of luxury homes, penthouses, apartments, and houses are Israelis, and 30% are foreign residents. However, foreign residents account for at least 40% of the purchases of seafront residences.

Reserve Soldiers in Active Service to Be Exempt From License Fee

Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz has submitted an amendment to the Knesset Finance Committee under which all active reserve soldiers would be exempt from paying the fee to renew their driver's license.

The current fee for renewing a license that will be valid for 10 years is NIS 367, but reserve soldiers would only have to pay NIS 10 to cover costs.

The new benefit will apply to all reserve soldiers who have served at least 10 days in the year prior to their renewal application.

(Compiled from reports by Hamodia staff and news agencies)

PATH TO STABILITY

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The responses to any questions you ask people about your product should be written down. Later, you can review these responses and use them to estimate the demand for your product and decide on a price that is neither too expensive nor too cheap.

If your market trial shows promising results, you can begin approaching store managers once again — this time, equipped with samples of your product, the results of your market trial, and the confidence that you have a product that not only can sell but has already sold.

If your trial is not successful, then you have lost very little. You can still try to improve the idea, fine-tune the business plan, and introduce it to other potential entrepreneurs.

Do not be discouraged by failure or lack of enthusiasm; if you think you have a good idea, keep on looking for ways to bring it to fruition. At the same time, however, do not risk your family's financial stability by pouring significant amounts of money into an idea that has not yet proven itself.

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