



# ***World Jewish Forum***



***Herzliya Conference***  
***January 23, 2007***



# ***World Jewish Forum:***

***An initiative of the Israeli Presidency***

- **For response to the essential challenges facing the Jewish people at this time**
- **For confronting the contemporary crisis in Jewish life**



## ***Action – oriented initiative***

### **Purpose:**

- To serve as an effective instrument for mobilization and renewal

### **Aim:**

- To formulate a coherent collective strategy
- To adopt a transformative plan of action for stemming decline in Jewish life



***Despite unprecedented capacities, the Jewish world is in crisis:***

- **Demographic decline**
- **Declining Jewish literacy**
- **Weakening connection with Israel**
- **Crisis in leadership**



## ***Demographic decline:***

- **Jewish people outside of Israel decreasing numerically**
- **Intermarriage in the US and FSU over 50%**
- **Birthrates below replacement levels**
- **Other than Australia, Canada, and Germany, no Diaspora community in process of growth**
- **Long-term forecasts show deepening trend**



# Demographers' debate

## Jewish Population in the United States, 2006

STARTING WITH THIS ISSUE of the *American Jewish Year Book* (hereafter AJYB) responsibility for producing annual estimates of the Jewish population of the United States has passed from United Jewish Communities (UJC), the coordinating body for the 155 Jewish federations and 400 independent Jewish communities in the country, to Ira Sheskin of the University of Miami and Arnold Dashefsky of the University of Connecticut. UJC has remained involved by providing access to its e-mail distribution list of "federated" Jewish communities and "network communities," as well as contributing additional useful input.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike previous years when hundreds of letters were mailed to solicit information about community size, we used the Internet as the principal method to contact local Jewish communities. None of the Jewish communities that completed scientific studies since 2000 were contacted since it was highly unlikely that any of them had estimates that were more recent than those available from these studies. Of the more than 500 communities that were e-mailed, only about 30 provided responses either confirming their estimate or expressing a desire to increase or decrease it. For those communities that did not reply, estimates have been retained from previous years.

While the method for contacting Jewish communities has been significantly modified from traditional mail to e-mail, the sources for these estimates remain consistent with those of previous years. Basically, the estimates derive from two sources:

Source One: *Scientific Estimates*. Such estimates are based upon the results of some type of scientific study of a community. In almost all cases, these studies involved the use of random digit dialing (RDD) telephone surveys.

<sup>1</sup>The authors thank Dr. Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Dr. Jonathon Ament, and the UJC staff for their assistance in the collection of some of the data for this study. Both Laurence and Jonathon also provided very useful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Dr. Bruce Phillips of Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles assisted us with the San Francisco and the estimates of Jewish population in that city. Sam Richardson, a graduate student, assisted with the research, and Lorri Lafontaine, program assistant, gave technical assistance. Also, Dr. Jim Schwartz,

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## ***Declining Jewish cultural literacy:***

- **Jewish cultural literacy not adequately increasing, abroad or in Israel**
- **Less than 1/3 of American Jewish young attend Jewish day schools – and 85% of these are Orthodox**
- **Huge family financial burden of Jewish education – despite vast resources of US Jewry**
- **No adequate response to instilling Jewish cultural literacy in the Israeli state school system**
- **Weak spread of Hebrew as language of Jewish people**



## ***Weakening ties between Israel and Diaspora:***

- **Depth of ties among young Jews are increasingly weak**
- **2/3 of US Jews never visited Israel**
- **Average Israeli does not know his/her Diaspora counterpart in any deep sense.**
- **Weakening of the sense of *Klal Yisrael***





*Weakening ties between Israel and Diaspora:*

**Birthright and Masa are significant beginnings of strategic response, but not yet sufficient in themselves**



## ***Leadership Crisis:***

- **High degree of organization, but insufficient focus on critical goals**
- **Despite excellent organizational structures and sovereign state – we still lack a strategic plan**
- **“Logic of the organization” – existent frameworks lack structural motivation to engage non-affiliated**
- **No adequate leadership principle for realizing the greater logic of the Jewish people**



## ***Method:***

**The World Jewish Forum will convene under the auspices of the Israeli President in spring 2008:**

**Two hundred and fifty preeminent leaders in the communal, political, economic, cultural, intellectual and philanthropic life of Jewry**



# ***Participation***

- **Leaders of all streams of Judaism**
- **Fifty most important Jewish philanthropists**
- **Heads of major Jewish organizations**
- **Leaders of the major Diaspora communities**
- **Thinkers and intellectuals of major stature**
- **Outstanding personalities from Israel and from throughout the Jewish world**
- **Inclusion of young people and women**



# *Preparation*

**Expert working groups will prepare practical proposals of transformative potential, in the following fields:**



# ***Preparation: Jewish education***

- **What strategy will increase pervasiveness of Jewish education?**
- **How can we double the number of Jewish young in day schools and summer camps?**
- **How do we deflate the cost of Jewish education?**
- **Can we achieve universal free Jewish education?**
- **What is our grand plan as a people to achieve these goals?**



## ***Preparation: Jewish literacy***

- **What does it mean to be Jewishly literate?**
- **What initiatives are required to spread the Jewish cultural literacy needed to stem assimilation?**
- **What resources are required to make Hebrew the language of our people?**



## ***Preparation: Peoplehood***

- **How do we strengthen the sense of our being one people?**
- **What structures must we create or strengthen in order to deepen ties between Jews and communities everywhere?**





## ***Preparation: Demographic Challenge***

- **How do we increase numbers without theological rift?**
- **What initiatives will help us grow meaningfully, not only statistically?**



## ***Preliminary work:***

- **Financial plan of the Jewish people**
- **World Jewish Peace Corps**
- **Universal curriculum of Jewish literacy**



# *Partners*

- **Institute for Strategy and Policy**
- **Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
- **Jewish Agency for Israel**
- **Knesset**
- **Philanthropic foundations**



# ***Summation:***

- **The World Jewish Forum will convene in spring 2008 under the patronage of the President of Israel as a body of sufficient gravitas and imagination to effect change**
- **The Forum will produce a work plan of transformative power focused on the acute issues of contemporary Jewish life.**
- **It will reach out to non-affiliated parts of the Jewish people and will adopt a powerful and practical strategy for countering demographic and cultural decline, and for strengthening the connection between Israel and the Diaspora.**



## ***Summation:***

- **Jewry is in a state of crisis but we have faith in our inherent capabilities to achieve renewal.**
- **The convening of the World Jewish Forum will express our unity as a people and our common determination to confront the challenges of the Jewish future.**



**היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה**  
**תודה על ההקשבה**