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Can Natan Sharansky's star power rescue the Jewish Agency?

By DINA KRAFT
JTA

FRESH in his post as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Natan Sharansky stood before the organization's leaders in the same dimly lit Jerusalem hotel ballroom where they have been gathering for years and offered up the promise of his star power and vision to help save the day.

Eschewing the usual talk of the agency's flailing budget, which is now in a deeper crisis than ever, the former Soviet dissident and Jewish world hero spoke instead of returning to the Jewish Agency's ideological roots of aliyah and Jewish identity, and bridging the Diaspora-Israel divide.

But in order to meet these lofty goals, Sharansky first must meet another challenge: the drastic downturn in funding from the Jewish Federations of North America (formerly the United Jewish Communities), which has had an especially crippling effect

on the agency's work in the former Soviet Union.

His main effort on that front, Sharansky told JTA, would be fund raising intensively among Russian-speaking Jews.

"The time has come for the Jewish community there to take responsibility for their own Jewish institutions," Sharansky said in a brief interview following his opening address to the agency's board of governors meeting.

How Sharansky, who has promised no further cuts to the 2010 budget, will achieve this is not clear.

Jewish Agency board members are hopeful Sharansky will be able to deliver on promises to meet the cut in federation funding, which is expected to reach at least \$15-million in 2010. In 2009, the federations gave the Jewish Agency \$120-million, though the initial budget allocation was \$138-million.

The situation is so dire that the Jewish Agency's treasurer

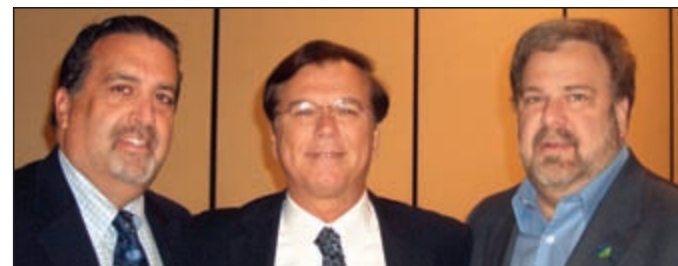
sent out an email several months ago to the board of governors suggesting the agency was in danger of going bankrupt.

Sharansky's plan is not only to turn to Russian-speaking community members in the hope that they will become the financial backbone of the agency's endeavors in the former Soviet Union, but to intensively lobby North American Jewish communities on a fund-raising drive. His

immediate plans are for a 12-city tour in North America to convince federations to restore their cuts to funding for the agency.

"The money is there and we can tap into it," said Carole Solomon, a former chair of the agency's board.

"Sharansky is a unique emissary of the Jewish people and can help redirect those funds as more and more people come to understand the validity of the Jewish Agency." ▲



JNF Southern New Jersey President Peter Fischer (left) and JNF Northeast U.S. Zone President Dr. Robert Benedon (right) meet with Efi Stenzler, world chairman of Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael at the JNF National Conference in Philadelphia.

U.S.-Israel bond unbreakable, Ambassador Oren tells JNF

By DAVID PORTNOE
Voice staff

There is an unbreakable connection between the democracy that is the United States and Israel, the democracy of the Middle East, according to Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren.

Speaking at last week's Jewish National Fund (JNF) National Conference in Philadelphia, Oren said that Israel and the United States have been able to overcome potentially divisive issues that have arisen in recent months.

Oren/Page 6

JFCS cheers on Phillies



The staff of Samost Jewish Family & Children's Service caught the Phillies fever. Gathering to celebrate the team's World Series Game One win against the Yankees were (front, from left), Rebecca Rosenau, Suzanne Fox, Melissa Bernhardt and Pam Jackson, with (rear, from left), Lisa Silverman, Staci Cedar, Jennifer Weiss, Joyce Trager, Anna Josenberger, Andi Loew, and Gail Belfer.

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