President’s Delegation to Argentina, March 1-6, 2007

Under the auspices of WCJCC (World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers) and CLAM (Latin American Maccabi Confederation)

Organized and hosted by FACCMA (Argentinean Federation of Jewish Community Centers)

In partnership with JDC and JAFI

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1. Seminar summary and conclusions:

Training of senior staff and lay leaders and connecting with JCCs worldwide were the two major requests put forward by senior leaders and staff of the Jewish Community Centers/clubs in Argentina to a WCJCC delegation from Israel, North America and the Ukraine that spent five days in Buenos Aires on an in depth visit to the JCCs/clubs.

The visit was hosted by FACCMA, an umbrella organization representing 40 JCCs in Argentina and by CLAM, an umbrella organization representing 70 JCCs in 14 countries in Latin America. We spent ample time with the leadership of the two organizations and I would specifically like to mention and thank the following people:

FACCMA
President: Guillermo Koon
Treasurer: Ernesto Brodschi
Executive Director: Jorge Rosental
Director of Pan American Games: Estela Kalinsky

CLAM
President: Victor Vaisman
Vice President: Dani Belinky
Shaliach: Alejandro Behar

Background:

The Argentine Jewish community is the largest in Latin America and, in a global perspective, represents the seventh largest Jewish community in the world after
Jewish presence in Argentina began in the 19th century and continued with large waves of immigration in the late 20s and early 30s. It reached its peak in 1960.

Jewish population in Latin America is estimated at 500,000 Jews:
- Argentina- 260,000, 85% of which live in Buenos Aires
- Brazil- 130,000
- Mexico- 50,000
- Uruguay- 20,000
- And the rest are smaller communities.

During the last fifteen years several traumatic events shook the Argentine Jewish community:
- 1992- The bombing of the Israeli embassy
- 1994- The bombing of AMIA
- 1998- The collapse of the Jewish banks
- 2000-2001- the economic crisis and the “new poor”
- 2002- 5 presidents in one week!

A recent study “The Jewish Population in Buenos Aires: Sociodemographic Survey” published by JDC and Amia (2005) one can find recent trends:
- 39% of Jews are affiliated to FACCMA institutions
- 64% of affiliated Jews belong to a sports/social organization. This implies about 40,000 members to FACCMA organizations.

The age pyramid shows a strong affiliation of 0-20 and 65 and older.

During the economic crisis 30% of Jews collapse under poverty line, whereas today only 7% are under poverty line.

Recent challenges include:
- Reaching out to non affiliated
- Maintaining the rate of affiliation in light of socio economic challenges
- Attracting the young generation to the JCCs and to leadership positions

The majority of the five-day seminar was dedicated to in depth visits to JCCs/clubs and meetings with senior leadership, staff and members of these institutions. Each visit presented a slightly different model of an institution but there was a common thread: JCCs/Clubs were at the forefront of informal education, socialization and mobilization of the Jewish community.

The JCCs/clubs visited by the delegation:
- Lamrot Hakol, a JCC/clubs that is centered on a Conservative synagogue.
- Brit Achim, a JCC/club that operates in a low-income neighborhood and concentrates on social welfare, where a unique project of building housing units to homeless Jews was implemented on the grounds of the JCC.
- Hebraica, the flagship JCC/club concentrating on Jewish culture and situated in the heart of Buenos Aires.
During each of the visits delegation members not only toured the site and saw first hand the activities that were taking place but also engaged in discussions with senior leaders and staff. It is interesting to note, that many of JCCs/clubs in Buenos Aires have two locations: an urban one for daily activities and an out of town weekend/summer location where there are not only spacious grounds and facilities but also weekend/summer houses or apartments owned or rented by the members. The common themes that were apparent in all these visits presented a strong sense of life long traditions, pride, strong identity and a keen desire to continue and prosper. There was a strong urge to connect with other JCCs around the world and feel part of a world movement and through this connection find suitable ways of further developing the local institutions.

Main Conclusions

The Jewish community of Argentina is a community with much strength, very rich history and community traditions.

The JCCs/clubs are strong, vibrant, and resourceful and service a relatively large portion of the community.

The leaders and executive staff are very talented, committed, open minded and eager to confront the challenges that lie ahead.

Lay leadership training and staff training as major areas in need of outside help. It was felt that with a relatively small investment, leadership could be better equipped to lead the JCCs/clubs through these times of change.

It was felt that FACCMA and CLAM as the umbrella organizations should lead this initiative and should work together with local and overseas partners thus receiving the best from each partner.

The strong partnership with WCJCC was reiterated and seen as an important vehicle to access untapped resources available to the JCCs/clubs.

A closer connection with JCCs around the world was important to the JCCs/clubs since networking was seen as a valuable asset both on ideological and practical levels.

Positioning the JCCs/clubs as a focal point of the Jewish community can compensate for the lack of an overall vision for the Jewish community.

It was felt that the above conclusions were relevant, to a greater extent, to other JCCs/clubs in Latin in America.

This successful study seminar was implemented by Guillermo Koon, Ernesto Brodschi, Estella Kalinksy, Jorge Rosenthal, Victor Vaissman and Daniel Belinky who put together a comprehensive and thought
provoking program. All the segments fit into a larger picture that was supplemented by their personal involvement. The warm hospitality, care and attention to detail left a strong impression on the delegation members.

Follow up:

1. WCJCC will make an effort to continue providing leadership training and find ways of expanding this important program.
2. WCJCC will further expand the JCC to JCC and Tri Center relationships with special attention to JCCs in the south of Buenos Aires and in the interior.
3. WCJCC will help open doors to access help for the School of Madrichimn program.
4. WCJCC will encourage participating in the December Pan American games.
5. IACC and IFCC will play a more central role in all of the above.
2. Seminar program

Objectives:

An insider’s visit to community centers/clubs in Argentina

Understand recent achievements and challenges

Discuss possibilities for cooperation and collaboration with WCJCC and JCCs around the world

Meet and interact with lay and professional leadership

During the visit three community centers, out of the twenty in Buenos Aires, will be visited. Participants will view programs, meet with staff, members, volunteers and lay leaders. The participants will see how the values of the community centers are implemented through a variety of programs: education, Judaism, Israel, sports, cultural programs, social program and pluralism.

Thursday, March 1  
Welcome to Buenos Aires
Taanit Esther (Esther’s fast)

Arrival in Buenos Aires at different times
Check into hotel
6:00 p.m.  Transfer from hotel to FACCMA
7:00 p.m.   Reception. Program presentation.
8:30 p.m.  Opening dinner with FACCMA Steering Committee

Friday, March 2  
Understanding the Realities of Jewish Life in Argentina

9:30 a.m.  Opening lecture and discussion with local journalist: Sergio Kienman who will address several topics: The relationship between the Jewish community and the government, the impact of Middle East conflict on the region, the relationship between Jews and Christians and the impact of the economic situation.

12:30 p.m.  Lunch at Sociedad Hebraica Argentina

1:30 p.m.  Sightseeing in Buenos Aires: Recoleta Neighborhood and Palermo Parks

5:00 p.m.  Return to hotel

7:00 p.m.  Transfer to Lamrot Hakol
7:40 p.m.  Shabbat services at Lamrot Hakol JCC/Synagogue, a partner in the WCJCC Tri Center Project

9:00 p.m.  Shabbat Dinner hosted by Lamrot Hakol at the home of Rabbi Fabian Skornik

Shabbat, March 3      Shabbat- Happy Purim!
Parashat Tezave / Shabbat Zachor

10:00 a.m. Depart for a visit to the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina club/community center suburbia branch. View activities and meet with leadership and staff to discuss their mission and ways of confronting recent trends.

Lunch at Hebraica

3:00 p.m.  Return to hotel

7:00       Depart to Lamrot Hakol
7:40 p.m.  Megilah reading and Purim celebration at Lamrot Hakol
(Please come in costume)
Dinner (free time)

Sunday, March 4    JCCs Addressing Changing Realities

10:00 a.m. Depart for a visit to the Brit Ajim club/community center. Meet with leadership and stuff to discuss how the JCC addresses the special needs of the community. This JCC specifically addresses the needs of the poor and homeless.

Lunch with the leadership of Brit Achim

Visit to the neighborhoods of San Telemo and La Boca

3:00 p.m.  Return to hotel

7:30 p.m.  Depart for an Evening of Tango and dinner: “La Esquina de Carlos Gardel”

Monday, March 5  Coming Closer to JCCs Worldwide

8:30 a.m.  Meet with CLAM and Partners: JDC and JAFI to discuss how CLAM addresses Jewish needs across the continent and plans for the future. How can we better collaborate with community centers worldwide?
10:00 a.m.  Visit to JDC and the Ariel Job Center

12:00 p.m.  Visit to JAFI at BAMA and lunch

2:30 p.m.  Townhouse meeting with executive directors of FACCMA affiliate organization to get an understanding of the challenges facing community centers confronting the recent realities of life in Argentina. Presenting worldwide JCCs to the hosts.

Meeting with college age students counselors and leaders in Maccabi youth movement.

6:00 p.m.  Wrap up session and evaluation

8:30 p.m.  Farewell dinner.
3. Additional information on program segments:

**Lamrot Hakol- synagogue and JCCs/club.**
President: Marcelo Taussik
Executive Director: Rabbi Fabian Skornik

The delegation attended Shabbat services, Friday night dinner and Purim celebrations. This community is very active and growing. It provides food, medicine and social services to 600 families in need. The delegation was impressed by the level of engagement of the members. As a partner in the Tri Center project, discussions on the future of the project took place.

**Brit Achim- A JCC /club in the south of Buenos Aires**
President: Marcelo Ellberger

This is a JCC/club had to deal directly with the 2002 economic crisis as it services the underprivileged population. One of the unique things it did is building 12 housing units for Jews who lost their homes. The JCC/club is characterized by young leadership and very active members.

**Hebraica**
President: Lazaro Bergman
Executive Director: Sergio Kuchevasky

The flagship of JCCs/clubs in Argentina was founded 75 years ago and is operating out of a 14 story high building in the center of Buenos Aires. Jewish culture speaks from every wall. Featuring an outstanding variety of activities in all forms of Jewish culture in theater, dance, music, plastic arts, literature and any form of creativity. Coming out of the economic crisis the institution formed a foundation and is seeking ways to grow and improve. We also visited the out of town site and learned about the wide range of activities and programs provided there.

**JJDC**
Diego Freedman

JDC has been operating in Latin America since 1918. Its main areas of operation are: welfare, community building, leadership training, conferences and visits. It helps strengthen the local organizations. The delegation met with Diego Freedman and heard a very interesting presentation that explained many aspects of Jewish life.

**Ariel Job Center-**

**The Ariel Job Center**
A JDC sponsored center that helps professionals find employment. The building is nicely decorated and gives an atmosphere of a business center where people are happy to come and spend time. The center helps write and distribute resumes, connect with companies, train, and mentor. It provides a weeklong
seminar on how to look for a job in today’s market. The success rate of the center is very high.

**JAFI- BAMA**

Central Shaliach: Eliahu Shaul  
BAMA Director: Yudit Zadunaisky

The delegation visited JAFI offices and BAMA (an institution that has been created by the Jewish Education Department of the Jewish Agency as a central address to Jewish education in the community.) The goal is to reach the entire Jewish community and provide Jewish education resources and programs. It is estimated that about 40-50% of the Jewish population is not affiliated. The support comes from American Jewry via UJC and from Israel via the Ministry of Education. BAMA would like to break the inner religious tensions and to create a new partnership. By educating the children and youth, bringing Jewish education to the home. An interesting observation was that in Argentina the Jewish community is not united under an umbrella like a Federation in North America. Thus, there are many important institutions but each one of them has its own ideology and therefore sees the institution as the most important body. Thus, there aren’t many opportunities to raise community wide issues that are not political.

Eliahu Shaul spoke about Masa and urged WCJCC and its affiliate organization to join the program.

**CLAM**

220,000 members in 15 countries. Major trends effecting Latin America at large: political instability in several countries, immigration, economic difficulties and assimilation. During the visit we learned about the JCC/clubs in Mexico, Venezuela, Uruguay and other countries.

**FACCMA**

Representing all the JCCs/clubs in Argentina, FACCMA has about 40 affiliates. This specific seminar concentrated on Buenos Aires, where 85% of Argentinean Jews live. However, there are also several Jewish communities in the interior in places such as Kordova, Tukuman, FACCMA also serves these communities who have a hard time maintaining the Jewish community in these far away places. This year FACCMA is heavily engaged in the Pan American games which will bring thousands of Jewish athletes and their families to Buenos Aires to participate in sports games, socialize and study thus enhancing Jewish education.
4. Seminar participants

Evelyn and Jerry Makowsky, Memphis, Tennessee, USA

Jerry is the President of the World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers. An umbrella organization representing more than 1,100 Jewish Community Centers worldwide.

Formerly, President of JCC Association of North America, President of Memphis Foundation and other numerous positions.

Andrea Solow, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Board Member, WCJCC
Andrea is also the chair of the Chicago Jewish Federation Partnership 2000 project. (Andrea's husband Alan, is currently the chair of JCC Association of North America.)

Yair Geller, Ramat Hasharon, Israel

Vice President, WCJCC
Executive Director, Israel Association of Community Centers
A governmental company that runs 200 community centers all over Israel.

Gaby Bar Zakai, Maaleh Edumim, Israel

Board member of IACC and deputy mayor of Maaleh Edumim

Pini Goldberg, Ramat Gan, Israel

Executive Director, Ramat Hashikma Community Center

Danny Gechtman, Kiev, Ukraine

JDC representative of Central and Western Ukraine

Smadar Bar-Akiva, Jerusalem, Israel

Executive Director, WCJCC

Smadar Bar-Akiva
April 1, 2007