President's Delegation to Mexico City, March 6-12, 2007

Under the auspices of WCJCC
(World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers)

Organized and hosted by CDI
(Centro Deportivo Israelita)

1. Seminar summary, conclusions and follow up plans.
2. Seminar program.
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1. Seminar summary and conclusions:

Hosted by CDI, one of the largest JCCs in the world, delegation members were at awe at the level of education, culture and recreation that this JCC provides for more than 20,000 Jews. The delegates were able to witness first hand a unique model of a JCC that is run by volunteers that not only contribute monetary resources but spend many hours each week at CDI. The highlight of the seminar, the Aviv Festival, was a model example of Jewish culture at its best with thousands of community members participating in the events and bringing Jewish creativity to a new level.

Special thanks go to Marcos Metta, outgoing CDI President, Dani Shor, President of the Executive Committee, Ishie Gitlin, long time leader and friend of WCJCC and Simon Neumann, incoming President for a warm, caring and generous hospitality. In addition Jane Szczupak and Freddy Gershberg were the two professionals who carried out the program and took care of all the details and of the needs of each person on the trip.

Background:

There are 40,000 Jews in Mexico, most of them live in Mexico City.

Jews came to Mexico with the large immigration waves at the beginning of the 20th century. Most immigrants arrived form Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Once they arrived, they established several separate communities that represented the various ethnic groups of their origin: Jews from Sephardic and Ashkenazi origin and within Sephardic Jews, Jews from Aleppo Syria and Damascus Syria. Each community developed its own institutions of education, culture, and philanthropy. In addition, two Conservative communities were also established. Therefore, the role of the Centro Deportivo Israelita (CDI) is crucial as it provides an umbrella organization where Jews from all the various
communities can attend and socialize. In addition, there is a central political body, the Central Committee that represents all the Jewish organizations.

The level of affiliation of Mexican Jews is astonishing and stands at more than 95%. This is also the rate of attending Jewish day schools. Intermarriage is law and stands at 7%.

There is no government funding in Mexico and all the Jewish institutions are funded by local Jews.

**Recent challenges:**

The cost of living Jewishly is rising. Jews in Mexico City affiliate with local institutions but in order to give the children Jewish education, participate in social and cultural events and affiliate one needs to pay about $4500 a month. Unemployment among Jews has risen in the 90s and is now close to 6%. CDI encountered this challenge by creating Activa, an agency that helps unemployed Jews find jobs. Average salary in Mexico City is $2500 a month.

Loosing membership because of city traffic and location. In a city of 22 million people, transportation is difficult. Moreover, new apartment complexes provide sports and culture facilities and it is more difficult to expect families to drive more than an hour each way to reach the JCC. About 12% of members are subsidized but the budget of 13 million dollars a year is paid mostly by the membership fees and participation fees.

Like in many other communities, engaging the youth is another challenge. CDI is trying to offer a wide array of activities and programs. We were impressed by the number of youth we saw at the various activities. We learned about special youth led projects that were being developed.

**In addition to CDI these institutions were visited by the delegation:**

Magen David

Atid School

Tarbut School

Sephardic Communidad

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 was apparent that a lot of emphasis is given to Jewish education. The delegates were impressed by the quality of programming and the major investment in every aspect of formal and informal education and in every aspect of Jewish life.
Main Conclusions

The Jewish community of Mexico is a unique model of a strong and vibrant community which emphasizes Jewish education and Jewish life.

The CDI is a strong and vibrant institution that services the entire Jewish community and focuses on Jewish culture and recreation.

The Jewish community in Mexico is strongly committed to Israel and the Jewish people.

We found a common ground between CDI and other JCCs worldwide.

The strong partnership with WCJCC was reiterated and seen as an important vehicle to train CDI leadership and connect with JCCs worldwide.

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.

Delegation participants added some insights at the final wrap up:

Shaul Shani- Eager to turn the good friendship into a more concrete partnership.

Danny Gechtman- Was moved by the fact that although far away, Jewish communities had similar problems. It seemed that CDI is going through times of change and it will be interesting to see how they respond to these changes. Sees the importance of exposing JCCs one to another.

Gaby Bar Zakay- Would like to promote relationships with IACC. To see more exchange projects. It is important for Israel that Jews will have strong communities all around the world.

Pini Goldberg- It was interesting for him to see the difference between Argentina and Mexico. He learned from the visit how much we need each other. How important it is to get to know each other. Also learned a lot of new things about community life in the Diaspora.

Tikva Schmid- Was moved by the Jewish community and by their strong connection and commitment to Israel. They were proud to be Jewish and she felt thankful to them for being such committed Jews.

Hillel Schmid- Suggested that next time we add a session with an historian to get a larger perspective of the community. He also suggested conducting more thorough workshops to discuss issues and exchange views and go beyond the superficial level of a first visit. He would have liked to meet more professionals and executive directors and engage in dialogue with Israeli peers.
Yair Geller- Was intrigued by the question of how a JCC becomes the center of the community. How it builds partnerships with other institutions. Was very impressed by the community and the warm hospitality. Learned that there is a lot to share and give each other.

Jerry Spitzer- Said it was clear that we are all part of one Jewish nation and we feel a strong bond to each other. We have common problems and we all share the centrality of Israel.

Linda Spitzer- Said it was impressive to see the level of achievement and the cohesiveness of the community.

Jerry Makowksy- Said it was important to visit Mexico not only to “show the flag” and come but to understand first hand the JCC and the community. Jerry was intrigued by the issue of what will be next and how can WCCC respond to their needs and serve them better.

Follow up:

1. WCJCC and CDI will continue the fruitful partnership and develop it.
2. WCJCC will continue to provide Training Seminars in Israel for the senior leadership of CDI. A request was put forward to bring the CDI board to Israel.
3. WCJCC will continue helping connect CDI with community centers in Israel. The relationship with Ramat Gan will continue.
4. IACC and IFCC will play a more central role in all of the above.
2. Seminar program

Objectives:

An insider’s visit to the Jewish community in Mexico City
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

Tuesday March 6th, 2007

Separate arrivals throughout the day
Hotel check-in
20:00-22:30 Informal dinner in a restaurant in the Polanco area with some CDI Directives

Wednesday March 7th, 2007

08:00-09:30 Breakfast & briefing at the hotel with Marcos Metta, Danny Shor and other directives with the subject “Introduction to the Jewish Community in Mexico”
10:00-11:00 Visit the Magen David Community Center and Atid School
11:15-12:15 Visit Tarbut Hebrew School
12:30-15:00 Visit and lunch at the Sephardic Community Center with CDI directives
15:30-18:30 Guided tour at the Anthropology & History Museum
18:30-19:00 Transport to the “Bellas Artes” Palace
19:30-20:15 Dinner at the “Café del Palacio” restaurant
20:30-22:30 Folkloric Ballet of Mexico Show at the Bellas Artes Palace. Back to hotel after the show.

Thursday March 8th, 2007

09:00 Leave hotel
09:30-13:30 Guided tour at the City Center - “The Jewish presence in downtown Mexico City”. (Stop at the hotel after the tour to freshen up, from 13:30 to 14:00)
14:30 Lunch at the CDI with the Board of Directors
16:00-18:00 Tour of the CDI facilities and working session with CDI directives
18:30 Back to hotel
20:00 Aviv Festival (informal dinner at CDI)
Friday March 9th, 2007

09:00 Leave hotel
10:30-14:00 Trip to the Teotihuacan Pyramids
14:00-15:00 Lunch at the Villa Arqueologica Hotel in Teotihuacan
16:30 Back to hotel
19:30-20:45 Kabalat Shabat at Bet-El Synagogue
21:00 Shabat dinner at Simon Neumann’s house

Saturday March 10th, 2007

09:30 Leave hotel
10:00-11:30 Meeting with the Executive Committee at CDI
12:30-18:00 Visit Frida Kahlo Museum, Saturday's Bazaar, lunch at the bazaar’s restaurant.
18:30 Back to hotel
20:00 Dinner at the “Villa María” restaurant.

Sunday March 11th, 2007

09:00 Leave hotel
10:00-13:30 Arrival to Xochimilco and sailing in a carrier boat
14:00-15:30 Lunch at the Gran Hotel
16:30 Back to hotel, time for packing and resting
19:00 Aviv Festival – final night (dinner at festival)

Monday March 12th, 2007

Airport

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3. Seminar participants

**North America**

**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.

**Linda and Jerry Spitzer, New York, NY, USA**

Jerry is Chairman of WCJCC board
In addition, JDC Board Member, JCC Association Board Member, UJA Federation of New York Board Member

**Israel**

**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.

**Tikva and Prof. Hillel Schmid, Mevaseret Zion, Israel**

Vice President, WCJCC
Hillel is the Chairman of the Israel Federation of Community Centers representing 500 community centers in Israel. He is also a senior professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Social Work department currently on a Sabbatical in New York.

**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
(Affiliated with IACC)

**Shaul Shani, Ramat Gan, Israel**

WCJCC board member, IFCC board member
Executive Director of Beit Immanuel Companies, Ramat Gan
Yair Damary, Ramat Gan, Israel
Administrative Director, Beit Immanuel Companies, Ramat Gan

Enat Lois Grinboim, Ramat Gan, Israel
Early Childhood Director, Beit Immanuel Companies, Ramat Gan

Smadar Bar-Akiva, Jerusalem, Israel
Executive Director, WCJCC

Former Soviet Union

Danny Gechtman, Kiev, Ukraine
JDC representative, Central and Western Ukraine

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Smadar Bar-Akiva
April 30, 2007