

## Insider's Study Seminar to Argentina, October 23-28, 2003

**Organized by WCJCC (World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers)  
CLAM ( Latin American Maccabi Confederation) and  
FACCMA (Argentinean Federation of Jewish Community Centers)  
In partnership with JDC (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and  
JAFI (the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency for Israel)**

1. Seminar summary and conclusions
2. Seminar program
3. Additional information on program segments
4. Delegation participant list

### **1. Seminar summary and conclusions:**

**Leadership training and staff training** 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 Mexico that spent five days in Buenos Aires on an in depth visit to the JCCs/clubs. The visit took place during October 2003, a time when it was felt that under the current president, Nestor Krushner, the country was beginning to recover. There was a sense of getting beyond the worst crisis, yet many of our hosts noted that this might only be a temporary feeling and that the economic future of Argentina was still at high risk.

The "Insider's Study Seminar" was organized by **CLAM** and **FACCMA** in partnership with **AJJDC** and the **JAFI**. Led by Jerry Spitzer, the president of WCJCC, the delegation delved into the main issues faced by the JCC/clubs and the Jewish community in Argentina and in Latin America.

During the first day, the delegation studied the background issues of the history and current situation of Argentina and the Jewish community. This was achieved through an eye-opening encounter with Sergio Kierman, a leading journalist and civil rights activist who presented a well-articulated summary and evaluation. Following this meeting, the delegation visited the new AMIA building, met the director, Daniel Pomerantz, and learned about the tragic bombings and the effects on the Jewish community. Later, the delegation walked over to Plaza De Mayo and saw not only the traditional Thursday afternoon march of the mothers and grandmothers of the missing people but also demonstrations and union picketing.

In order to better understand the larger context of the Jewish community, the delegation spent a day with WCJCC partnering organizations- AJJDC and JAFI. At AJJDC the delegation met with senior staff Jorge Shulman and Diego Freedman to learn about the current work of AJJDC in Argentina concentrating primarily, but not only, on social welfare. The delegation then visited the very impressive Ariel Job Center that already helped hundreds of Jews get back to the professional work force. The delegation then visited BAMA- the home for the Jewish educator sponsored by the Department of Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The delegation met with Rabbi Sergio Bergman, the director, and BAMA staff to discuss issues of Jewish and Zionist education. At the present time, Argentinean Jewry is challenged by the crisis in formal education, the re structuring of informal education and the need to strengthen education relating to Zionism and Israel. In addition, the group met three JAFI Arevim shlichim who are currently working through FACCMA in various JCC/clubs.

The majority of the five-day seminar was dedicated to in depth visits to JCCs/clubs and meeting 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.**

In general, JCCs/clubs for many years were providing high level informal education in institutions that were mostly geared to addressing the leisure/cultural needs of the Jewish community. Thus, supplementing a very strong formal education that was known to be unique in the Jewish world. As the situation has recently changed, JCCs are reaching out within the affiliated and non affiliated Jewish community and strengthen the sense of Jewish belonging. Very often, the JCCs/clubs are the only Jewish institutions that Jews belong to.

### **The JCCs/clubs visited by the delegation:**

Maccabi Buenos Aires, a JCC/club with a strong focus on sports and sports education.

Lamrot Hakol, a JCC/clubs that is centered on a Conservative synagogue.

Hacoah Nautico Club, a JCC/club focusing on sports and culture with a unique marine department

CISSAB, a JCC/Club that sponsors a Jewish day school as an integral institution.

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: a more central 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.** At the same time, it was apparent that all institutions were hurting and were aware of the fact that the Argentine Jewish community needs to face a period of contraction and adaptation to a new reality that will probably last for many years. While gratitude was expressed to all the outside funding, there was a strong desire to find ways of using the community's own resources in finding solutions for the current problems. 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 influencing the local institutions.

Participating in a citywide lay leadership-training session for JCCs/clubs, Shabbat services, dinner and Tish at the Libertad Conservative synagogue and a remarkable Israeli Folk Dance Festival, all added to a better understanding of the Jewish community at the present time. In addition, the delegation met many members and had a chance to hear the personal stories of people who accompanied the various visits, joined the delegation for meals, interpreted, guided, and came to present their point of view. The seminar concluded with a morning of joint sessions and meetings not only to summarize the visit but also to discuss future collaboration and cooperation.

### **Main Conclusions**

The Jewish community of Argentina is a community with much strength, very rich history and community traditions undergoing a time of crisis that is changing the nature of the community.

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.

The JCCs/clubs would like to find new ways of coping with the recent challenges and channel the JCCs/clubs to a new vision that will enable them not only to survive but also to prosper.

Leadership training, staff training and lay/staff relations were identified 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 make 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 an 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.

Finally, CLAM and FACCMA would like to develop a school for leadership- lay and professional together with all partnering organizations and asked WCJCC to help facilitate this project.

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

## **2. Seminar program**

### **Insider's Study Seminar to Argentina, October 23-28, 2003**

#### **Objectives:**

- \* Gain in-depth understanding of the current state of the Jewish Community Centers in Argentina (trends, needs, restructuring, visions for the future).
- \* Seriously engage with the senior leadership of CLAM, FACCMA and the JCCs/clubs in discussions on ways to collaborate and use available resources in order to help JCCs in the short and long term.
- \* Connect with JCCs worldwide via consultants, staff training, lay leadership training, twining of JCCs, seminars in Israel, long term planning, exchange programs, regional conferences and more.
- \* Celebrate Shabbat together with members of the Jewish community thereby enhancing the sense of Klal Israel.

#### **Thursday, October 23 Welcome to Buenos Aires**

06.00 Arrival in Buenos Aires

Check into Emperador Hotel

11.00 Program presentation

Argentina today: situation of the Jewish Community in the national context

Visit to the AMIA and Plaza de Mayo

17:00 Hotel  
19:30 Reception with lay leaders from CLAM, FACCOMA, JAFI, JDC, MWU and the Argentinean Community Centers  
Attend a session of the Leadership Training course at Maccabi Buenos Aires:  
"Jewish Community Centers"- a worldwide movement.  
Dinner with hosts at Puerto Madero

Overnight: Emperador Hotel, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Friday, October 24 JCCs in Partnerships

09:00 Visit to the Ariel Job Center founded and funded by JDC. Meet with staff.  
11:30 Visit to BAMA and meeting with JAFI staff

P.M. Sightseeing tour of Recoleta Neighborhood and Palermo Parks  
17:00 Return to hotel, rest and free time  
19:00 Shabbat services at Libertad synagogue  
Shabbat dinner and Tish with Rabbi Sergio Bergman

Overnight: Emperador Hotel, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Shabbat, October 2 Shabbat- Shevet Achim Gam Yachad

09:00 Services and Kiddush followed by text study with Rabbi Fabian Skornik  
at Lamroth Hakol  
13:00 Visit to the Club Nautico Hacoaj / Sociedad Hebraica Argentina Community Center  
Lunch with lay leaders and professionals  
Visit to Tigre

Free night

Overnight Emperador Hotel, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Sunday, October 26 Insider's Visit to JCCs

10:30 Depart for visits to CISSAB Community Center to view  
the wide variety of Sunday programming, meet with members, staff and lay leaders

Visit to the neighborhoods San Telmo and La Boca in Buenos Aires or attend a soccer game

20:30 An Evening of Tango (cultural performance)

Overnight Emperador Hotel, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Monday, October 27 JCCs in a Changing Reality

09:00 Depart for a visit to Brit Achim community center and the Jewish neighborhood, concentrating on  
social welfare.  
14:00 Return to the hotel and afternoon rest  
18:00 Visit to the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina Community Center  
Meet with lay leaders and staff  
Attend community wide folk dancing festival

Overnight Emperador Hotel, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Tuesday, October 28 Joint Planning for the Future

9:00 How do we make the bond? a session on the "tachles" of future projects.  
11:00 Wrap up session and evaluation  
  
13:00 Concluding lunch  
14:00 Seminar ends

### **3. Additional information on program segments:**

#### *Maccabi Buenos Aires*

President: Isaac Ursztein  
Executive Director: Naty Furmansky

One of the main foci of all JCCs/clubs is sport. Playing a very important role in the life of the JCCs/club, they serve as a vehicle to bring the entire Jewish community together and to foster a sense of identity and belonging. The delegation visited the Maccabi Buenos Aires club and witnessed first hand practices and training for the upcoming Latin American Maccabi games in Chile.

At the Maccabi Buenos Aires club we attended a special session of a Leadership Training Course initiated by FACCMA with the support of AJJDC- Leatid, JAFI, MWU and the local JCC/clubs.

#### *Lamrot Hakol- synagogue and JCCs/club.*

President: Marcelo Taussik  
Executive Director: Rabbi Fabian Skornik

The delegation attended Shabbat services, Kiddush and study session at a unique JCC/club that is centered on a Conservative synagogue. This community is very active and growing. It provides food, medicine and social services to 600 families in need. The delegation visited a kitchen where food is cooked and then distributed. The keen sense of Jewish responsibility was apparent throughout the visit.

#### *Hacoach Nautico Club*

(at this point officially merged with Hebraica though currently at a standstill)

President:  
Executive Director: Dani Korin

One of the largest and more veteran Jewish clubs in Argentina. The activities focus on sports and culture. Its unique in its marine education- 250 wooden rowing boats and special training and competitions connected to that. The delegation visited the facilities, watched activities and participated in a working lunch with senior leadership and staff. Main issues that were raised included the need for leadership training to confront new realities and challenges and a desire for self help and becoming self-sufficient.

*CISSAB- A JCC/club that sponsors a Jewish school.*

President: Aldo Dinenzon  
Executive Director: Roman Winnik

The delegation visited the suburban site of this JCC at Tigre. Very spacious grounds with large facilities and housing units. At CISSAB, the leadership decided to concentrate on Jewish education and 20% of all the dues go to sponsor a community Jewish school. This school has now merged with another school due to the situation but the commitment of the leadership is still strong. CISSAB also helps some 400 families in need, At a lunch meeting with staff and lay leaders, CISSAB president spoke about the commitment to continue sponsoring the school, the importance of lay/professional relationships and the request to get help in training and connecting with other models of JCCs around the world.

*Brit Achim- A JCC /club in the south of Buenos Aires*

President:  
Executive Director: Fernando Agof  
This is a JCC/club that had to deal directly with the current 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 delegation visited one of the homes and saw also an agricultural project that helps provide food for the families.

*Hebraica*

President:  
Executive Director: Dani Korin  
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. On the day we visited simultaneous courses were taking place in addition to the regular sports and leisure activities. It was apparent that this great institution was going through difficult times. Apparently, the economic crisis led to a severe drop in membership and lack of funds to continue sponsoring all these activities.

At the height of the crisis an effort to merge the two leading JCC/clubs Hacoach and Hebraica. During the visit, this merger was at a standstill. On the one hand, at both JCCs/clubs the need to cooperate, not loose members and provide a more efficient structure was expressed. However, it was also apparent that merging two major institutions with strong traditions and affiliations was very hard.

*Ariel Job Center of AJJDC*

The delegation heard a briefing from Jorge Shulman, Diego Fridman and several staff members on JDC's involvement in Latin America. JDC has been operating in Latin America since 1918. Its main areas of operation are: welfare, community building, leadership training, conferences and visits. Currently JDC operates 75 welfare centers serving 36, 355 Jews- 18% of the Jewish Community. UJC invested now in Argentina 14 million dollars as opposed to less than one before the recent crisis. In the area of leadership training Leatid provided seminars for 517 leaders from JCCs. It helps strengthen the organizations. It is involved with the recent merger of Hacoach and Hebraica in order to stop the drop of member sand better use limited resources.

JDC staff identified the strength of JCCs. Since most of the community members are not religious, there is a strong affiliation with the JCCs/clubs. There is a strong feeling of belonging and a strong desire to belong. The challenge JCCs/clubs face is in their leadership. The leadership has to change its mindset and understand that the different reality today requires different solutions. There is a need to use available resources in a more creative way. They suggested for JCCs/clubs to adopt a new approach to fundraising, perhaps more like the North American model.

### *Ariel Job Center-*

A JDC sponsored center that helps professional people who are unemployed. 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 delegation learned that soon it is going to adapt the Mati model of developing small business that was founded by JDC in Israel. So far, 550 Jews found jobs and 127 developed small businesses. During the visit, we met one of the women who developed a business for selling Argentinean arts and crafts through a catalogue.

### *JAFI- BAMA*

Some members of the delegation who arrived a day earlier met with Dr. Drori Ganiel, JAFI's central Shalicha to Argentina and the south of Latin America. The delegation also met Uri Avir, the head of JAFI delegation to Latin America. The delegation visited BAMA and met with Rabbi Sergio Bergman the director of BAMA and members of the staff. BAMA 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. BAMA began collecting relevant data and conduct research on this topic to help reach out to this important segment of the Jewish population. The support comes from American Jewry via UJC and from Israel via the Ministry of Education. Sergio spoke very eloquently on the cultural problem of Argentinean Jews who to a large extent lost the common vision. BAMA's aim is to help create this new vision by planning and thinking together, by offering new content. FACCMA has been a strong partner in this process. 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.

### *Shabbat Services, Dinner and Shabbat Tish at the Libertad synagogue-*

Libertad is the oldest synagogue in Buenos Aires and the main one. A few years ago Rabbi Sergio Bergman instituted a Conservative congregation and began addressing the needs of the community. The delegation attended a very impressive Friday night dinner and *tish* where food was served to close to 200 people, most of them under poverty line. It started with a group of 20 people and it now encompasses a wide range of activities. At the *tish* the rabbi teaches, sings, there are performances and a great Shabbat spirit. One of the unique aspects of this project is the fact that the sponsors of the dinner not only give the financial assistance but also serve the food.

### *Folk Dance Festival*

Israeli folk dancing is a major aspect of Jewish life in Latin America. Every JCC/club has an active dance program and numerous dance troupes. The delegation was fortunate to attend one of the many folk dancing festivals. Several hundreds members of the Jewish community attended an

impressive festival with dance troupes representing the various clubs. Segments included a variety of Israeli dancing and choreography.

### *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. The delegation was especially privileged to spend time with Dr. Benny Weiss, the new general director of CDI Mexico, who contributed from his experience and wisdom.

### *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, Tukiman, FACCMA also serves these communities who have a hard time maintaining the Jewish community in these far away places.

### *Overview and background on Argentina:*

*Sergio Kiernan, senior editor of "Pajina Doce", a human rights newspaper*

Sergio tried to explain to us what has happened to Argentina during the last decade. He began by giving an historical background. Argentina until recently was the richest county in Latin America. In 1910 it had the 9<sup>th</sup> largest per capita in the world! The county was founded by European immigrants and a strong middle class was established. It is a country that has everything- rich land, good climate, and well-educated people.

So what went wrong? In Sergio's mind, it is all due to internal political reasons. During the decade between 1930 to 1940 there were awful governments. Then came Peron and created an authoritarian rule. Military *chuntas* always kept political power. Unlike other Latin American countries, at least they weren't dictators for life. In 1945 Argentina was one of the richest countries in the world after US, Canada, and Australia. However, Peron spent all the money in just 6 years. For the last 20 years the country is trying to build a democracy.

Sergio believes that part of this process is searching for truth, opening up old issues. Such as in the case of the 30,000 missing people and recently, discovering files regarding bringing Nazis to Argentina after the Holocaust. Sergio and others would like to make sure this does not happen again. (Kiernamn was the journalist who was given the first chance to observe files concerning Peron's personal involvement in bringing Nazis to Argentina and the open door policy that enabled many Nazis to find refuge in Argentina. He elaborated on this issue.)

When asked what led to the current crisis, Sergio explained that during the Menem years, in the 90s, there was a huge trend of privatizing. National companies were sold for low prices, monopolies were created, corruption continued and the external debt rose to 70%of the GNP. As a result, local companies collapsed and the small and medium businesses, which were always, the backbone of the economy collapsed. This is th4e worst crisis in Argentina' history. It doubles the 1930's crisis the US and more than doubles the Great Depression in the US. In 2002 alone the economy shrunk by 11%/

The height of the crisis was in December 2001 when riots left 21 people dead. What ensued was a period of instability when presidents kept resigning as exemplified in a week when five presidents were installed and then resigned.

Currently, it is president Nestor Krishna who leads the county. He has the support of 72% of the population, according to recent polls. He installed some optimism and faith. He began fighting corruption and instituted some sense of stability.

*Overview on the Jewish Community  
presented by Jorge Shulman, of JDC Buenos Aires:*

Jewish population of Latin America is estimated at 500,000 Jews.  
Argentina- 200,000, 85% of which live in Buenos Aires  
Brasil- 130,00  
Mexico- 50,000  
Uruguay- 20,000

During the last decade several traumatic events shook the 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!

In the Jewish community there were usually 2% poor today more than 18% live under poverty line, in a country where in the general population more than 50% live below poverty line. From serving 4000 people in the late 90's, JDC now serves 36,355. 18% of the Jewish community is in dire need. The poverty line is set at an income of only \$200 a month. That means that many of those working are still under poverty line as the average salary is \$147 a month.

## **5. Seminar participants**

### **North America**

Jerry Spitzer                      Lay leader  
WCJCC president, JCCCA vice president, JDC board and more  
Linda Spitzer                      Spouse lay leader involved with UJA Federation of New York

### **Israel**

Arturo Bach                      Chief Executive Director, Haim Zippori Training Center, IACC  
Etti Isler                          Executive Director, Israel Federation of Community Centers  
Arik Shua                          Executive Director of Beit Dani Community Center, Tel Aviv  
Smadar Bar-Akiva                Executive Director, WCJCC

### **Mexico**

Benny Weiss                      General Director, CDI

Submitted by Smadar Bar-Akiva  
November 2003