



# DIGEST

*The newsletter of the World Congress of Gay & Lesbian Jewish Organizations  
Post Office Box 18961. Washington, D.C. 20036 U.S.A.*

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## 300 Choose to Make a Difference in Chicago

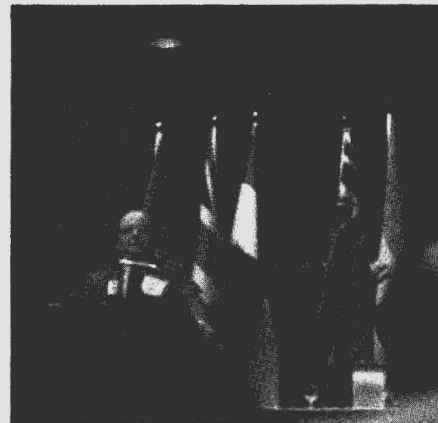
Uniting under the theme "Choosing to Make a Difference," 300 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Jews met in Chicago August 24-27, 1989, at the 11th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews, hosted by Chicago's Congregation Or Chadash. People from four continents attended the gathering, the largest yet held in the United States, some coming from as far as Jerusalem and Johannesburg.

Conference participants were welcomed on opening night with addresses by the President of Dignity/USA, a representative from Chicago's Mayor Daley, and leaders of the Chicago Jewish community. A performance by the Chicago Windy City Gay Chorus was followed by a stunning Chicago skyline tour by boat on the Chicago River and Lake Michigan.

Openly Gay Jewish State Senator Allan Spear of Minnesota keynoted the

Chadashim, and another on Lesbian and Gay life in Israel, led by members of Israel's Gay and Lesbian organization, Aguda Hashomer Zichyut Haprat. Other subjects discussed included Jewish responses to AIDS, ordination of Gay and Lesbian rabbis, leadership and organizational development, and coming out to your family.

Religious services were led during the conference by local Chicago area rabbis and religious leaders, as well as by three out-of-town guests: Rabbi Denise Eger (Los Angeles), Rabbi Yoel Kahn (San Francisco), and Rabbi Elizabeth Sarah (London). In addition, on Friday night the Maxwell Street Klezmer Band provided exuberantly soul-stirring *ruach* as a Shabbat delight. This was followed on Saturday night by a concert by Lynn Lavner, whom many participants remembered from her performance at the Amsterdam conference



*Minnesota State Senator Allan Spear addresses the 11th International Conference.*

Executive Director Barrett Brick, and reports from the non-USA Gay and Lesbian Jewish groups on their organizations and

conference the next morning, speaking on the importance of making differences in our world through personal choices in how we live our lives. Workshops that followed over the next two days stressed the need to choose to make a difference in ourselves and our health, in our relationships and families, through our Jewish traditions, and in our world. Among the most well-attended workshops were those on rituals and ceremonies of Lesbian and Gay Jewish life, led by Rabbi Denise Eger of Los Angeles's Congregation Beth Chayim

in 1987, and dancing to a wonderful mix of music across cultures and generations.

Special presentations during the conference included a video program and discussion on Washington, D.C., Congregation Bet Mishpachah's first Kiddushin ceremony for two women, a video presentation entitled "A Holocaust Family Album," and a display on Jewish-focused panels for the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt by Beth Chayim Chadashim of Los Angeles. Sunday's brunch and plenary session featured an address by World Congress

communities — including one in Hebrew and another in Dutch!

Following moving closing ceremonies, all agreed that the Chicago conference demonstrated an increasing growth and maturity on the part of the World Congress and its member organizations, as well as a strengthened sense of international solidarity and community among Gay and Lesbian Jews. The memories of Chicago will be sure to live on until the 12th International Conference in San Francisco in 1991, and beyond!

## World Congress to Seek UN Affiliation

In a decision marking a milestone in the history of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, the Board of the World Congress has voted to seek consultative status as a non-governmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The application letter, commencing what may be a several-year process, was submitted following the conclusion of the annual meeting of the Board of Directors, which took place August 23-24, 1989, in Chicago, Illinois. Should such status be granted, the World Congress would be the first Gay and Lesbian organization to have a consultative relationship with a major United Nations human rights body.

In addition to beginning the UN application process, the Board further emphasized the international focus of the World Congress by unanimously voting to join the International Lesbian and Gay Association, following a report from observers who attended the July 1989 ILGA conference in Vienna, Austria. In addition, the Board in 1990 will receive a report on possibilities for affiliating with international bodies of the Jewish community.

As a result of the meeting with the World Congress's Executive Director and other national Gay and Lesbian Leaders, the B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League is inviting the participation of Lesbians and Gay men on the local committees and educational

boards convened to implement the ADL's "A World of Difference" curricular and programming campaign against hate violence. The program itself, however, will not be expanded to include segments on hate crimes against Gay men and Lesbians. In addition, religious authorities in Israel continue to block the placing of a plaque recognizing the contributions of the International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews to the Jewish National Fund, and our campaign to override this decision will continue.

Some personnel changes also took place at the Board meeting. Eric Keitel of San Francisco's Sha'ar Zahav was elected President, succeeding Lorry Sorgman of Boston's Am Tikvah. Denise Fontente, also of Am Tikvah, stepped down as Development Director (West), and was succeeded by William Wahler of New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah.

In another action, the Board selected Toronto as the site of its 1990 meeting, marking the first time that the World Congress will meet in Canada. The 12th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews in 1991 was awarded to San Francisco's Sha'ar Zahav. Following the 1989 Board meeting, its members joined 300 other Gay and Lesbian Jews at the 11th International Conference, hosted by Chicago's Or Chadash August 24-27, at Chicago's Hyatt Regency.



MK Shulamit Aloni at Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, with CBST member Arthur Strickler.

## Knesset Members Meet Gay and Lesbian Jews

The year 5749 will be remembered within the Gay and Lesbian Jewish community as an historic year. For the first time, members of the Israeli Knesset addressed meetings of Gay and Lesbian Jews, both in Israel and in the United States.

On erev Shabbat Shuva, September 16, 1988, MK David Zucker, Secretary-General of the Citizens Rights Party (RaTZ), spoke to Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, New York's Gay and Lesbian Synagogue. A crowd of 500 heard MK Zucker describe RaTZ's commitment to Gay and Lesbian Rights, which was illustrated in 1988 by the party's leadership in the repeal of Israel's anti-sodomy law, a holdover from the British mandate. MK Zucker also described the party's advocacy of the rights of women, non-Orthodox religious groups and Arabs as part of a broad commitment to human rights.

Six months later, on March 17, 1989, an equally large crowd at CBST heard MK Shulamit Aloni, also of RaTZ, speak on

many issues of human rights in Israel. MK Aloni confirmed that the Law of Return would not bar Lesbians and Gay men from making *aliya*, and also touched on many issues surrounding the current Palestinian conflict.

That same week, in Tel Aviv, some 200 Israeli Lesbians and Gay men gathered at the Tzavta club to hear from four MKs: Haim Oron (Mapam), Avraham Poraz (Shinui), Ada Ravon (Labor/Naamat) and Reuben Rivlin (Likud). All four MKs declared their opposition to discrimination based on sexual orientation, as well as their belief that open Gay men and Lesbians should be able to serve in the Army, although closeted individuals are properly barred from sensitive positions. In addition, the legislators agreed that Gay men and Lesbians should enjoy a right of privacy in their bedrooms. However, MK Rivlin stated his opposition to the proposition that homosexuality be portrayed as a "legitimate alternative lifestyle" in Israel's schools, drawing vocal protest from the audience.

## Reconstructionists Admit Gay/Lesbian Synagogue

On January 1, 1989, Atlanta's Congregation Bet Haverim, a member of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, was officially admitted into the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot. Bet Haverim becomes the fifth World Congress member organization to be admitted into an American synagogue body.

With Bet Haverim's admission, the Reconstructionist movement becomes the second movement to admit Gay and Lesbian Jewish organizations into mem-

bership. The Reform movement was the first, formally admitting Los Angeles's Beth Chayim Chadashim into membership in 1974. BCC's admission into the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was followed by San Francisco's Sha'ar Zahav, Miami's Etz Chayim and Chicago's Or Chadash. However, while the Reconstructionist movement will accept students and ordain as rabbis openly Gay and Lesbian Jews, the Reform movement to date will not.

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1990

April 28-May 1 Amsterdam 2d European Regional Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews

June 29-July 1 Toronto 3d Midwest Regional Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews

July 2-3 Toronto World Congress Board of Directors Meeting

to be scheduled : Southern, Western, and Northeast Regional Conferences

1991: 12th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews — San Francisco

## We Remember

The World Congress lost two of its Board members this past year to complications resulting from AIDS. Gary Piccola, of Atlanta's Bet Haverim, and Harvey Robbins, of Houston's Aytz Chayim, both succumbed in the Spring of 1989. Harvey Robbins represented Aytz Chayim on the Board of the World Congress since 1981, while Gary Piccola represented Bet Haverim from 1985 through 1987. Both individuals were unceasing in their support of the World Congress, and for the Jewish and Gay and Lesbian communities. Our hearts go out to the families, friends and loved ones of Mr. Piccola and Mr. Robbins. May their memories be for a blessing.

**YES! I am proud to become a "Friend of the World Congress."** My contribution entitles me to a one-year subscription to the World Congress Digest, and helps support programs of public education in the fight against prejudice, sexism, and homophobia throughout the world.

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