

Addressing The Challenges of Jewish education Worldwide in a Changing World

Last week, the advisory committee of UnitEd, a global initiative of the Israel Ministry of Diaspora Affairs in collaboration with Herzog College, convened a 4-day Colloquium in Israel for twelve Jewish education experts from 7 countries. UnitEd is a joint venture of the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Herzog College, at a cost of approximately NIS 100 million, of which 30% is financed with the help of various Jewish philanthropic organizations, and partners in the Jewish communities worldwide. Over the past year, the Advisory Committee met virtually and began wrestling with challenges facing approximately 1,500 Jewish schools in Jewish communities worldwide and is currently formulating a series of strategic approaches to broaching these issues. The Israel Colloquium was the Committee's first face to face meeting and stimulated a series of extremely rich and productive discussions.

One of the key issues that the group addressed is the global shortage of teachers, and more specifically, how it impacts Jewish education. A significant part of the phenomenon manifested itself during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many teachers, faced unprecedented challenges, and as a result, some decided to retire, while others turned their attention to other professions. As the experts reported, Jewish schools are struggling to find qualified and talented teachers who can address the multiple challenges in thoughtful and creative ways and thereby provide day school students with a rigorous and engaging Jewish education.

Over the course of the Colloquium the group met with Dr. Nahman Shai, the Israel Minister of Diaspora Affairs and Tziona Koenig-Yair, the director general of the ministry, and learned of the Israeli government's deep commitment to partnering with key Jewish education worldwide.

The committee is chaired by Rabbi Dr. Howard Deitcher and among the various members of the committee can be found: Rabbi Prof. Yehuda Brandes, president of Herzog College and chairman of the Hamad Council in Israel; Paul Bernstein, CEO of Prizmah, U.S.A; Dr. David Bryfman, CEO of The Jewish Education Project in New York; Dr. Daniel Held, Executive Director of the UJA Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto, Canada; Ariel Cohen Imach, Director of the Central Council of Jewish Education, AMIA in Argentina; Rabbi David Meyer, Executive Director of PaJeS, UK; Prof. Rona Milch Novick, Dean of the Azrieli School for Advanced Studies in Jewish Education at Yeshiva University, New York; Devorah Serrao, CEO of Alliance France; Prof. Miriam Heller-Stern, Vice Provost for Educational Strategy of Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles; Theresa Gafna Venova, deputy head of Jewish Studies at the Lauder School, Prague, Czech Republic;

According to the Minister of the Diaspora, Dr. Nachman Shai: "Strengthening Jewish education in the Diaspora is one of the key issues that we addressed over the past year. It is important for us, at the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs to help Jewish communities around the world provide the younger generation with a Zionist Jewish

education, connected to tradition and yet at the same time, one which is pluralistic and of high quality. The advisory committee that met last week discussed all these issues and the various inherent challenges that confront the communities, in the hope that together we will offer practical and long-term solutions.”

According to Rabbi Prof. Yehuda Brandes, president of Herzog College, the college partnered with the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs as a result of a deep commitment and understanding about the acute need to strengthen education for Jewish identity, and the complex challenges facing Jewish educators.

Hana Dorsman, CEO of UnitEd, believes that "Our goal is to create a global Jewish education network that will respond to the current challenges in Jewish education, in a systemic approach that includes consulting, culling and preparing educational materials, and professional development. Jewish education around the world faces many new challenges, and differ between countries. The purpose of UnitEd's advisory committee is to examine the various challenges and difficulties, draw the conclusions and suggest suitable and relevant answers for the various Jewish communities around the world."