

# World Times

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Lead story



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## ORT Argentina helping to reverse cycle of unemployment

**The past five years have been particularly difficult for Jonathan Zahavi and his family in Argentina. His father, a doctor, used to have a thriving medical practice in Buenos Aires, but can now only get work on an occasional basis. It is rare for his mother, a housekeeper, to get work at all.**

**The ORT Argentina graduate says that without the full scholarship he received to attend the ORT Technical High School in Argentina, it would have been impossible for him to have received such a high standard of education.**

The difficult years that Jonathan and his family have had to endure are a direct result of the recession that has left Argentina's Jewish community in crisis. Shaken both psychologically and economically, its future is threatened by political instability, severe economic decline and pervasive anti-Semitism.

Argentina's community, which is the fourth largest in the Diaspora and was once a pillar of strength in world Jewry, is suffering dramatically. Traditionally in Argentina, about 4,000 Jews lived below the poverty line. The number has risen to more than 25,000 in the past two years. ORT's activities, an integral part of the community, have similarly been placed under enormous strain.

The statistics make grim reading: around 25 percent of the once mainly middle-class Jewish community is now living near or below the poverty line. For an estimated 2,000 students at Jewish schools their only hot meal of the day is at school. In Buenos Aires, the centre of ORT Argentina's activities, 1,700 Jewish families have lost their homes.

One common theme resonates throughout the community—the urgent need for employment.

“The ever-increasing economic problems in Argentina are causing great hardship to millions of people, not least among members of Argentina's Jewish communities. Our ORT schools there are meeting this challenge by continuing to provide education and training to those who need it,” said Mauricio Merikanskas,



**Jonathan Zahavi, an ORT Argentina graduate, at World ORT London**

Chairman of the World ORT Board of Directors. “This is a time when demand for the practical skills that ORT provides so well are most needed.”

Jonathan said that he left ORT with skills that he probably would not have obtained any where else in Buenos Aires. With an ORT education behind him, he was already qualified enough to get a part-time



**ORT Technical High School in Argentina**

job in his field of study, so that he could help support his family when he started University.

“The education ORT can provide is the only chance our students have of maximising their prospects for employment, breaking their downward spiral into poverty and helping them to build a better future,” said Baruj Zaidenknop, National Director of ORT Argentina.

Many members of the community have sought to escape the situation. In 2000, 1,000 Argentine Jews made aliyah; in 2001 this rose to 1,400. The Jewish Agency estimates that at least 3,000 will leave for Israel during 2002 and Israeli authorities are preparing for as many as 20,000 Argentine immigrants over the next five years.

Jonathan recently visited the World ORT offices in London on his way back from taking part in the Birthright Programme, a fully funded trip to Israel for young Jewish people who have not yet travelled there. “For me the answer is clear: when I finish University, I will move to Israel. It is difficult, but Israel offers me more than the little or no opportunity there is for me in Argentina. There is no future for me in Argentina.” ■

# ORT Israel prioritises security over education

**Last summer the ORT Ramot high school opened its doors during the school holidays to allow dozens of grieving pupils to come and mourn the death of Ronen Landau, a 17-year-old student at the school who was shot and killed as his father was driving to their home in Givat Ze'ev.**

That day, Aliza Golan, Principal of ORT Ramot, said that teachers and psychologists were on hand to be an open ear for pupils to express their emotions. Many pupils spoke of their fear of going out in the evenings, whilst others said that they would try to continue their normal routine despite the security concerns.

"We simply want to let them know that that their concerns, their fears, their tears are legitimate and to say that we are here to talk," Golan said.

Landau was the first of the school's 1,050 pupils to fall victim to the current violence. But he is one of the more than 24 ORT students and graduates who have lost their lives as a result of terrorist activity.

Since the Al-Aqsa Intifadah started in October 2000, ORT Israel, an integral part of Israeli society, has been cast into a whirlwind of tragic incidents, which have affected each and every one of its 90,000 students and over 8,000 employees. As a result of the violence, special emergency counseling and grief therapy programmes have been put in place in many ORT schools around the country.

But the security situation is only one of the myriad of difficulties facing Israel in general and ORT Israel, as part of the national fabric, has been severely affected too. Restructuring its priorities, the Israel government authorized a five percent cut in the budget to all secondary schools in



**Ronen Landau, ORT Ramot student who fell victim to terrorists**

Israel, redirecting that money to urgent security needs.

"The largest number of ORT schools and students are in Israel. The violence which besets the Jewish State and the financial problems that come in its wake make ORT's mission both more crucial and more difficult," said Richard Goldstone, President of World ORT. "State subventions for education have been cut as the defence budget increases. I earnestly call on members of ORT throughout the world to join ORT leaders in creating a special fund necessary to see ORT Israel through this difficult period. Only if this call meets with an appropriate response will ORT Israel be able to maintain its essential programmes."

Serving scores of communities in Israel, ORT helps those suffering from severe unemployment, those who are in direct proximity to the borders with the Palestinian Authority, those who suffer from terror attacks, and many who are unable to cope with the cuts in education

**"We simply want to let them know that that their concerns, their fears, their tears are legitimate and to say that we are here to talk"**

budgets. ORT Israel comes to the assistance of its schools and colleges and most of all to the aid of its students, faculty and employees.

The complexity of the issues warrant a rainbow of solutions, and ORT Israel has been quick and resolute in its response.

Special emergency counseling and grief therapy programmes were put in place at ORT Levovich High School in Netanya, when the school lost two students to a suicide bomb attack, just after a car bomb exploded outside its main building.

In communities surrounding the ORT High School in Beit-El, where students had to ride to school in armored vehicles until even those measures were considered unsafe, a new location was

found and ORT provided special services so that learning would not be interrupted.

Unemployment has struck so deeply in communities surrounding the ORT High School in Migdal HaEmek that the school management started a lunch service, to ensure that students could have at least one hot meal everyday.



**ORT Israel student sings at a memorial for lost classmates at ORT Levovich in Netanya**

The Jewish students at the ORT high school in Afula and the Arab students at the ORT "Achva" high school serving the Bedouin villages of the lower Galilee volunteer together for the "Sunflowers"

project, where they help cancer patients at a hospital serving both communities. When relations grew more tense, a mediation programme had to be put in place so that animosity could be relieved enabling dialogue to continue.

A compensation scheme had to be found for monies taken away from ORT Israel schools that offer special programmes in technology and sciences to advanced students, so that their success would not be diminished and ORT Israel's overall matriculation success would not be disrupted.

"These solutions needed more than out-of-pocket money. They needed personal resources, they needed an open ear and an open heart. They required attentiveness

and a service-inclined policy,” said Zvi Peleg, the newly-appointed Director General of ORT Israel.

The Intifadah is not over yet. The economic crisis in Israel, so say the analysts, has yet to peak. The proverbial saying that “things will get worse before they get better” seems to be ever so true. In the meantime, the pupils and staff at ORT Ramot are dealing in a positive way

with the grief of losing their pupil and classmate. The school is plans to name a computer room in Ronen Landau’s memory and to establish a website in his in name, as he was, in the words of Golan, “a real computer enthusiast.”

“We still can’t digest the news. We are trying to work out the grief, the sorrow, the frustration, the fear generated by the tragedy,” Golan said. ■

brought to bear on the local administration, and a new building was allocated to the Jewish community for use as a school.

The threat has now been averted through the efforts of the Kazan Jewish community and ORT to save the only Jewish school in the city.

Here, two 9<sup>th</sup> Grade pupils at ORT Kazan, Anton Raitzin and Evgenia Slavina, illustrate what their school means to them:

## ORT’s leadership in CIS saves school

**In recent years, there has been an unprecedented opportunity for the remaining Jewish population in the Commonwealth of Independent States to connect with their Jewish heritage. By providing the highest level of education in a Jewish environment, ORT has become a staple in the community promoting Jewish continuity and expression in the region.**

But last summer, ORT’s role of education provider was expanded to include defender of Jewish interests, when the Jewish community of Kazan – one of the remotest of communities where ORT works – was faced with an incident that reminded them of just how fragile their religious freedom is and ultimately reinforced the need to remain ever vigilant in the politically precarious region.

Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan, the largest republic in Russian Federation – and a Muslim state – where roughly 6,000 Jews remain. The ORT Technology School was opened in Kazan in 2000 as part of project Regeneration 2000. By 2001 the school roll had risen to 550 students, with an additional 210 students on short-term courses.



**Student at the ORT school in Kazan learning Hebrew**

The government of Tartastan publicly promotes a culture of ethnic and religious tolerance. However, during the night of 13 July 2001, the existence of religious tolerance in Kazan became extremely questionable, when a fire broke out at the School. The fire and the consequent activities of the local fire department in extinguishing the flames resulted in extensive damage, and caused the building to become unusable. It is generally believed that the fire was the result of arson by anti-Semitic elements, although nobody has yet been charged with the crime.

The local community decided to underwrite the costs of repairing the damage, but re-opening the school was not a straightforward matter.

The following week, the Mayor of Kazan issued a mayoral decree prohibiting the reconstruction of the school and ordering the relocation of the Jewish students to the neighbouring mainstream school, allowing Jewish subjects to be taught only on Sundays. This blow to the school staff, students, parents and all Kazan Jews demonstrated the continued presence of anti-Semitic forces at the highest levels of local government.

But the community continued with the reconstruction of the school, while at the same time mounting a political and diplomatic offensive to try to have the mayoral declaration revoked.

In spite of protest, the Mayor continued with his opposition, visited the school in person to order the cessation of rebuilding activities, and sent in workers to destroy the rebuilt sections of the school.

At State level, the Jewish case had a more sympathetic hearing, and this was expressed in an official response sent by President Shaimiev to the Israeli Ambassador. Eventually, pressure was

“On 6<sup>th</sup> September 2000 ORT Technology Centre was opened at our school. In the beginning it was so unusual: no one other school in our city has such equipment!



**Inauguration day at the ORT school in Kazan**

When we came to the ORT school, a wonderful world opened for us. All the best is given to children here. After limitations in our previous schools we could not believe at first that pupils are also allowed to use the Internet. But then we realised that this is a different world with different attitudes towards children. This is our second family, which cannot be replaced with anything.

Last summer vacation we heard terrible news. Our school was set on fire! We all were shocked! The authorities wanted to close our school and to destroy the family that we created. With the help of ORT our families fought to save our school and everything we had started there.”

“Our ORT students in the region depend on us to provide the best education possible and we owe it to them to do so in a secure environment,” said Vlad Lerner, National Director of ORT in the CIS.

“This situation is similar to so many previous incidents throughout Jewish history, and reminds us how fragile the state of our existence is in many parts of the world. We are reminded that we need to remain vigilant and to be able to marshal our forces to defend our interests in the face of hostility and anti-Semitism.” ■

# ORT South Africa offers freedom to be independent

**From walking the dusty streets of Soweto, unemployed and frustrated, Gugu Makhanya made her way to the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, with little hope of finding employment. The skills she has since acquired at ORT South Africa have helped transform her from a young woman with very little self-confidence into one with a job, dignity, and a positive attitude towards life.**

**She attributes her success to the training she received at the ORT South Africa's Employability Skills Training Programme. During the course of her studies, Makhanya qualified as top of her class.**

The Employability Skills Training Programme is a six-week training course targeting unemployed individuals from marginalised communities and groups in South Africa. Core course components comprise basic computer training, entrepreneurship, business planning and communication skills.

"Before I started the ORT programme, I had no idea how to operate a computer; but with the help of my excellent instructors, I learned how to operate Windows 98, to use Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel," Makhanya said. "I also learned how to communicate effectively, and obtained problem-solving, presentation and customer care skills and gained a greater sense of self esteem."

"ORT South Africa helped me to find a permanent job. The support and encouragement I received there is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life."

Since 1999, ORT South Africa has significantly increased the number of projects and programmes it can offer to needy communities in South Africa. During the Apartheid years, ORT South Africa's operations were somewhat limited due to its policy of not operating in racially segregated schools. However, in 1993, ORT SA was able to introduce the Technology Education programme through the ORT-STEP Institute. This programme provided training in technology education for schoolteachers. Course content included studies such as science, mathematics, IT, textile technology, food technology, graphics and the technological problem-solving process.

More than 94 percent of ORT SA employability skills training graduates

have subsequently found employment or started their own small businesses. Course fees are nominal and training takes place at specially constructed ORT SA labs.

One of the greatest priorities and challenges for today's South Africa is to increase the capacity of its human resource base in order to build upon South Africa's existing infrastructures and industries, as well as helping traditionally disadvantaged groups and communities get back on their feet, says Iris Colyn, National Director of ORT South Africa.

**"ORT South Africa helped me to find a permanent job. The support and encouragement I received there is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life."**

"All ORT South Africa projects and programmes provide tools to individuals, groups and communities which enable them to take control of their lives, empowering them to become their own agents of change," Colyn said. "ORT South Africa's vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to contribute to the new South Africa's reconstruction and development process."

Adult Basic Education and Training in Science and Technology (ABET), which is offered throughout the country and certified by the University of South Africa, is another course offered by ORT South Africa designed to encourage those who find themselves in low-paid jobs or in jobs with little or no prospects. The course helps people to improve their career and job prospects by introducing them to the "technological problem-solving process". This can include training in: financial planning and management, life skills, computers, self-employment skills and new vocations.



**Students at the ORT Employability Training and Skills course in South Africa**

Run in conjunction with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in two provinces, the ABET course has proved especially successful amongst rural communities, both by helping community members to increase their earning capacity and by opening up new opportunities.

"By training trainers in the communities, schools and industries involved in our projects, we ensure that new knowledge and skills do not leave the project area or community once ORT SA has withdrawn," Colyn said. "ORT South Africa's projects and programmes essentially teach valuable life skills which have a long-term positive impact on individuals, their dependants and the community at large."

"The positive impact of ORT South Africa interventions is sustainable precisely because we aim for empowerment and self-sufficiency." Mathanya is now working as a call centre controller for a leading Johannesburg Security Company.

"It is hard to find the words to describe how blessed I feel that I found myself at ORT. One day I hope to fly the ORT flag to even higher levels. It is with a deep sense of pride and honour that I extend a word of thanks to ORT South Africa and everyone involved in making me who I am today," she said. ■