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## The world's most influential Jews: 21-30

By JERUSALEM POST STAFF

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Alexander Mashkevitch, Shimon Peres, Gabbriella Giffords, Natan Sharansky, Nir Barkat, Yosef Abramowitz, Jon Stewart, Ruth Messinger, Roz Rothstein, Abe Foxman.

### 21. ALEXANDER MASHKEVITCH Euro-Asian Jewish Congress president

Coming soon to a television near you: Jewish Al Jazeera. What that means exactly is still a mystery, but the Kyrgyzstan-born Kazakh-stani Jewish billionaire Alexander Mashkevitch says we're about to find out. His people are said to be working tirelessly to put together a proposal for a global news television station with a pro-Israel agenda that is slated to be announced in September.

"It's not a new project, we've discussed it for 10 years," Mashkevitch told *The Jerusalem Post* in April.

"Everybody understands in Israel and the Jewish world today that there is a war not by weapons and military troops, but of information."

Mashkevitch, 57, isn't your run-of-the-mill "oligarch," the term used for businessman from the former Soviet Union who grew fabulously rich after the disintegration of the Soviet empire, many of whom are Jewish.

With a fortune estimated at \$3.4 billion by Forbes, he is richer, more powerful and more colorful than most others. As the head of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, he has put his money where his mouth is, giving generously to Jewish and Israeli causes.

Mashkevitch has proven an invaluable friend of Israel and strong supporter of Jewish communities throughout the former Soviet Union.

### 22. SHIMON PERES President of the state

To discover why President Shimon Peres, who will be 88 in August, is still important, one only has to surf

the Internet to see how many foreign media outlets are publishing material about him. Journalists who regularly cover events at Beit Hanassi often have to wait, because an interview that the president is giving to a foreign journalist or television crew that came to Israel especially for this purpose, is going on longer than scheduled as his interviewers continue to ply him with questions.

Peres is regarded far and wide as Israel's elder statesman and former prime minister, foreign minister and defense minister. He has held all these positions and more, and many of his visits abroad are at the behest of the prime minister or the foreign minister. At the beginning of this month, he flew to Italy to represent Israel at the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Italian Republic. There were some 80 other heads of state in attendance, and Peres did a lot of lobbying for Israel in connection with the fateful meeting in September of the United Nations General Assembly; and of course he again stressed the dangers of allowing Iran to continue with its nuclear program.

Jewish tradition says that no prophet is heard in his own city. Many Israelis think that Peres is passé. That opinion is obviously not shared abroad, judging by the number of invitations he receives to pay a state visit, or the requests he receives from people who want to meet him when they come to Israel. He should not be underrated on the home front because he is one of Israel's best and most effective exports.

### **23. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS** **US Democratic Congresswoman**

Gabrielle Giffords, a representative from Arizona, was hardly a household name in America before January 8 this year. Though she was a rising star in the Democratic Party as a telegenic, hardworking moderate, she became an overnight celebrity when an apparently crazed gunman shot her as she was holding an outdoor meet-and-greet with citizens in her district.

Though several bystanders were killed, Giffords, who turns 41 on June 8, miraculously pulled through.

That day, as a survivor and victim of politically motivated violence, Giffords became a symbol for both the need for a more civil discourse in America as well as the amazing ability of humans to rehabilitate from devastating events with the help of skilled doctors and dogged determination.

At first there were suggestions that she had been targeted in part because she is Jewish. Though the notion that it was an anti-Semitic attack was later revised, the story of her Jewish awakening after a trip to Israel became a showcase for the connection American Jews feel with Israel.

Giffords's prognosis is promising considering that she suffered a bullet wound to the head, which is almost always fatal. Her Congressional future is less certain. However, it is clear that her symbolic position as a fighter and uniter – two key political tropes in 2011 America – will long endure.

### **24. NATAN SHARANSKY** **Jewish Agency chairman**

For many people, Natan Sharansky, 63, remains a symbol of freedom.

The former Prisoner of Zion, who was allowed to come to Israel in 1986 after almost 10 years of imprisonment in the Soviet Union, wrote the 2004 book *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, which helped influence US President George W.



Bush's agenda to spread democracy in the Middle East around the world. Bush presented Sharansky with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

As chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the former Knesset member and government minister oversees many initiatives in Israel and Diaspora communities, and he has instituted some serious reforms in the agency.

Sharansky continues to support the cause of human freedom. In a recent New York Times editorial, he encouraged the US and other countries in the free world to support the popular demonstrations in the Middle East and North Africa and end engagements with authoritarian regimes.

He wrote, "To those millions crossing, or waiting to cross, the line into freedom, we can send a simple but thrilling message of support and solidarity: We are with you. No dictator is a legitimate representative of his people."

## **25. NIR BARKAT** **Mayor of Jerusalem**

Nir Barkat has made *i m p r o v i n g* Jerusalem's image a central aspect of his tenure. The 51-year-old is desperately trying to keep young professionals in the city by showing the world that Jerusalem is bursting with festivals, cultural events and affordable housing. Barkat, who was elected the ninth mayor of Jerusalem in the fall of 2008, made his millions as the co-founder of BRM Technologies, a software firm. He spent six years as the head of the opposition on the city council before being elected mayor.

Barkat's conservative policies, including his controversial plan to create the Gan Hamelech project of historical parks in the Al Bustan neighborhood of Silwan, have raised the ire of activist groups. But Barkat expends most of his energy in smaller projects: convincing contractors to build affordable apartments, trying to create jobs in the sciences and biotechnology sector, and improving tourism from the current three million tourists a year to 10 million tourists by 2020.

"The development and success of Jerusalem is significant not only for Jewish people but for people around the world," Barkat told *The Jerusalem Post* after hearing he was named one of the 50 most influential Jews. "I am totally dedicated to the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people."

## **26. YOSEF ABRAMOWITZ** **Solar power pioneer**

Yosef Abramowitz, who moved here five years ago from Massachusetts, has taken on the challenge of launching the Israeli solar power industry from scratch, along with Arava Power Company cofounders Ed Hoffman and David Rosenblatt. At 4.95 megawatts, Israel's first solar field – called Ketura Sun – was launched by the company on June 5, at Kibbutz Ketura in the Arava.

In a response to being chosen as one of the 50 most influential Jews by *The Jerusalem Post*, the 47-year-old Abramowitz said: "Humanity is in a race against time.

There are 390 parts per million of carbon dioxide and we need to get it down to 350 million, and instead it's just increasing exponentially. China is adding a coal fire plant every week, demand for hydrocarbons is increasing, so every country has to do its part to really switch as fast as possible to renewables... here in Israel we are blessed by having a small country that has an enormous amount of sun, that is in every day we are wasting a tremendous amount of sunlight. So we have an opportunity – for our own energy security and as citizens of the world – to utilize as much of that sunlight as possible.

"The goal is for Israel to be a renewable light unto the nations, and so we first have to do this for ourselves, and the ripple effects just for being a model, an example. We can't possibly change the world – we're too small – but we can be catalytic and able to demonstrate how what we're doing can be replicated. And so if we're not living an ethical life then who are we? It's all about our actions. The beauty of being a Jewish state is that it's also about our collective actions. We're told that God has put before us life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your offspring may live. What are we doing building more coal and gas power plants?"

## **27. JON STEWART**

### **Political commentator**

One sign of political influence in modern America is how big a crowd one can draw. The packed stadiums that US President Barack Obama was able to conjure gave him some of the momentum needed to knock off better-known and well-funded competition in 2008, and the swooning masses Sarah Palin inspires is an indication of her enduring political appeal.

By that marker, Jon Stewart is on record as one of the country's most successful political commentators.

Three days before the 2010 midterm elections, when die-hard political activists should have been busy knocking on doors, Stewart attracted an estimated 200,000-plus people to the US Mall. Once there, he urged reason, moderation and civility in an appeal warmly embraced by the young, diverse crowd.

For Stewart, 48, has become more than a comedian and TV personality for this demographic. He has become a primary information source with his halfhour nightly news show satirizing the media and current events, as well as a political and cultural arbiter to boot. His guests include political heavyweights, and his humorous interviews with them are often more revealing than mainstream sources.

He frequently utilizes and lampoons his Jewish heritage as part of his efforts to stir the pot and ultimately compose a more harmonious brew. And it's one that the masses seem to be drinking up.

## **28. RUTH MESSINGER**

### **President, American Jewish World Service**

New Yorkers remember Ruth Messinger as the first woman to receive the Democratic Party's nomination for New York City mayor. She lost the 1997 election to Rudolph Giuliani, who won a second term. Messinger had previously served for 12 years on the New York City Council and for eight years as Manhattan borough president.

When her career in New York City politics came to an end, Messinger became the president of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS). According to the *Forward*, AJWS had a \$2.8 million budget and funded 65 projects and 50 organizations in 20 nations in 1998, when Messinger took over. Today, it funds 626 projects and 458 organizations in 34 countries and has a budget of \$42m.

Messinger, 70, was one of the strongest voices urging the US and international community to stop the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. She also helped raise \$6m. for 17 organizations in Haiti after the earthquake there in January 2010, according to the *Forward*, and traveled to Haiti to see first-hand the relief efforts that AJWS made possible.

## **29. ROZ ROTHSTEIN**

### **CEO of StandWithUs**

As the second intifada began to progress, Roz Rothstein was troubled by the lack of any effective, organized public defense of Israel by the American Jewish community.

After two teenagers were stoned to death outside Tekoa on May 8, 2001, she and her husband, along with other activists, decided to establish StandWithUs.

Today, StandWithUs is a global operation which organizes demonstrations, advertising campaigns, petitions and other initiatives which help oppose the delegitimization of Israel, and also trains young people to advocate for Israel. StandWithUs operates a website where North Americans can find local stores that carry Israeli products ([www.buyisraelgoods.org](http://www.buyisraelgoods.org)), and publicizes periodic "Buy Israeli Products" days to encourage store owners to continue carrying Israeli goods.

## **30. ABE FOXMAN Anti-Defamation League head**

As national director of the Anti-Defamation League since 1987, Abraham Foxman is at the forefront of combating anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry. The ADL is famous internationally for its efforts.

Whenever Jews or the Jewish state are in the line of fire, Foxman's voice can be heard. In the past few months alone, he has spoken out against actor Charlie Sheen's anti-Semitic comments and the University of Johannesburg's decision to cut ties with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and called for European countries to be more vigilant in enforcing sanctions against Iran and for Facebook to take down a page calling for a third intifada.



Foxman's personal history adds relevance to the ADL's battle against Holocaust denial. He was born in 1940 in Poland and hidden from the Nazis by his non-Jewish nanny. Foxman was reunited with his parents after the war and moved to the US in 1950.



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