



MUSEUM
OF JEWISH
HERITAGE

A LIVING
MEMORIAL
TO THE
HOLOCAUST

Edmond J. Safra Plaza
36 Battery Place, New York, NY 10280
(646) 437-4200 www.mjhnyc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 19, 2009

Contacts: Betsy Aldredge Abby R. Spilka
(646) 437-4337 (646) 437-4333
baldredge@mjhnyc.org aspilka@mjhnyc.org

Indian-Jewish Communities and the Attack in Mumbai Explored in Fascinating Panel Discussion

at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

New York, NY— In India, a country that values religious and ethnic diversity, Jewish communities— some of which are 2,500 years old— have been given the opportunity to thrive largely free of anti-Semitism. On **Sunday, March 15 at 2 p.m.**, the **Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust** will present *Jews in the Cradle of India*. Panelists **Romiel Daniel**, president of the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA; **Nathan Katz**, author *Who Are the Jews of India?*; **Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky**, Chabad-Lubavitch Movement representative; and journalist **Rahel Musleah** will discuss the varied histories of these different groups of Jews throughout the country, as well as their future in light of the recent terrorist attack in Mumbai. This program will be preceded **at 1 p.m.** by a screening of the film *In Search of the Bene Israel* (USA, 2008, 38 minutes) directed by **Sadia Shepard**.

Tickets are \$10 adults, \$7 students/seniors, \$5 for members and are available online at www.mjhnyc.org or by calling the Museum's box office at 646.437.4202.

In Search of the Bene Israel follows filmmaker Sadia Shepard's journey to reconnect with her maternal grandmother's Bene Israel community of Western India. The documentary examines this group of 3,500 Jews in and around Mumbai in the process of a community-wide migration to Israel and centers on a Jewish-Indian filmmaker working in Bollywood, a family who takes care of a rural synagogue, and a young couple on the eve of their marriage and departure for Israel.

Professor Nathan Katz, a leading scholar of Indian Jewry, will open the discussion with a brief introduction on the history of Jews in India. For centuries, waves of Jewish immigrants sought refuge or opportunity, fleeing Christian and Muslim persecution in Spain and the Middle East, and establishing business dynasties that lasted for hundreds of years. Jews were afforded opportunities they could never have attained in other areas of the world, including positions in the government, before, during, and after British rule. Since the foundation of Israel, emigration has affected the size of these communities, yet they survive and in some cases, continue to thrive.

Rahel Musleah will continue with a discussion on Baghdadi Jews, who came from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen approximately 250 years ago and settled in Mumbai. These traders became prominent in both the economic and cultural life of the city, contributing to the construction of public structures and rising to positions of power within the government. **Romiel Daniel** will follow, speaking on Bene Israel, whose tradition holds that the group arrived in India over 2,000 years ago as the result of a shipwreck, settling in villages just south of Mumbai, where they thrived for centuries.

Professor Katz will address the audience about the oldest of India's Jewish communities, the Cochin Jews, who may have appeared in the South of India as early as 2,500 years ago. In the city of Kerala,

(MORE)

there is still a Cochin Jewish presence. **Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky** will speak on the Chabad-Lubavitch movement in India. He will address the November terrorist attack on its center in Mumbai and how the Jewish community there has responded in the aftermath of this tragedy.

This program is co-sponsored by the *Indian Jewish Congregation of USA*.

About the Panelists

Romiel Daniel, the first Indian to head a U.S. synagogue, is president of the Rego Park Jewish Center. He is originally from Mumbai.

Professor Nathan Katz is the chair of the Religious Studies department at Florida International University where he teaches courses about South Asian religions, Buddhism, Indian Judaism, and the history of religions. He is a pioneer in the study of the Jewish communities of India. In 1990 he was invited to join a delegation of eight scholars and rabbis who met with the Dalai Lama at his palace in Dharamsala, India, for extensive Jewish-Tibetan dialogue.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky is the Chairman of the Educational and Social Services arms of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

Rahel Musleah was born in Calcutta, India, and is of the seventh generation of a Calcutta Jewish family that traces its roots to 17th-century Baghdad. Ms. Musleah is an award-winning journalist with hundreds of published articles and several books to her credit including the songbook *B'Kol Arev: Songs of the Jews of Calcutta*.

About the Museum

The Museum's three-floor Core Exhibition educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the rich tapestry of Jewish life over the past century—before, during, and after the Holocaust. Special exhibitions currently on view are *Woman of Letters: Irène Némirovsky and Suite Française*, extended through August 30, and *The Shooting of Jews in Ukraine: Holocaust by Bullets* until March 23. The Museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall. It is also home to Andy Goldsworthy's memorial *Garden of Stones*, as well as James Carpenter's *Reflection Passage*, Gift of The Gruss Lipper Foundation. The Museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and is a founding member of the *Museums of Lower Manhattan*.

###