

Historic Gathering of Racially and Ethnically Diverse Jews

African American, Asian, Latino and African Leaders Convene in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))-- Jewish leaders from Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Portugal, India, the United States, and elsewhere will meet in San Francisco May 1-4. The conference is organized by Be'chol Lashon, which means "in every tongue" in Hebrew. About 50 people will meet to discuss the role of diverse Jews in shaping Jewish life around the world. Among the participants are:

- Rabbi Capers Funnye, an African American rabbi from Chicago who is associate director of Be'chol Lashon, and cousin to First Lady Michelle Obama.
- Rabbi Alysa Stanton, who will become the first African American woman rabbi in the world on June 6, 2009.
- Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, the first black rabbi from sub-Saharan Africa to be ordained from an American rabbinic school.
- Rebecca Walker, renowned author of *Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*.

"We represent the face of Judaism as it has always been: people of many colors, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities," said Rabbi Funnye. "We have a special role in building bridges to people over all the world."

The conference will tackle tough issues, including how race plays a role in defining how Jews are perceived and how they see themselves. "We want to move beyond racial stereotypes," said Diane Tobin, director of Be'chol Lashon. "Building and growing the diversity of the Jewish people around the globe strengthens us from within and helps combat the charges of racism hurled at us from bigots like the president of Iran."

One of the key topics of the conference is how to help people to convert to Judaism who want to do so. Rabbi Sizomu from Uganda recently convened a rabbinic court (beit din) in Uganda that supervised the conversion of over 250 Africans from Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria.

The 2008 Be'chol Lashon Media Awards will be announced on Sunday, May 3, honoring excellence in coverage of Jewish ethnic diversity in print media, broadcast/film, and new and emerging media. The contest drew entries from around the world. Subjects included explorations of African, African American, Hispanic, Asian and Arab Jewry -- even a debate of the term "Arab Jew."

Be'chol Lashon (In Every Tongue), a global initiative of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, grows and strengthens the Jewish people through ethnic, cultural, and racial inclusiveness. <http://www.bechollashon.org>.