

Toronto teen co-chairs human rights summit

Frances Kraft
Staff Reporter

Jesse Freedman says he and fellow Jewish teens have a responsibility to prevent atrocities from happening again.

A Grade 11 student at Crestwood College in Toronto, Freedman, 16, recently participated in the March of the Living, the annual Holocaust educational program that takes place in Poland and Israel.

"The trip was powerful, but we can't let the trip just end," he told *The CJN*.

Freedman, who is finishing a one-year term as regional president of B'nai Brith Youth Organization's (BBYO) Lake Ontario region, wants more students to know about the upcoming Human Rights and Genocide Summit, a pilot project of the PANIM Institute of BBYO, which he is co-chairing with Laurel Cohen, who lives in Orlando, Fla.

The summit will be held at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Silver Spring, Md., just outside Washington, D.C., from June 26 to 28. It's geared toward March of the Living participants, but open to all Jewish teens in grades 10, 11 or 12.

Applications are being accepted until June 3, and about half of those registered so far are March alumni. The cost of the summit is \$250 (US), or \$150 (US) for alumni. Bus transportation for Toronto alumni is \$210.

The summit will include sessions on how to lobby, and speakers from organizations including Free the Slaves, the Genocide Intervention Network, and the Committee on Conscience, which is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Summit participants will visit the museum, which has an exhibit on preventing genocide.

As well, students will see the movie, *The Wrong Side of the Bus*, about the difference between being a bystander and being an "upstander." The documentary traces the journey of a South African-born child of Holocaust survivors and his son back to Cape Town, and the father's coming to terms with apartheid and his lack of action as a young man.

American teens will have meetings at U.S. congressional offices, while their Canadian counterparts will head to the Canadian Embassy.



Laurel Cohen, left, and Jesse Freedman, the 2011 Human Rights and Genocide Summit Teen co-ordinators, flank Phyliss Heideman, international chair of the March of the Living advisory committee.

[Eli Rubenstein photo]

Mikah Goldman, program manager of PANIM, expects between 50 and 70 students to participate in the pilot project. "I'm hoping that teens will really feel empowered," she said.

Freedman said the trip made him feel that taking action to prevent injustices is "necessary," not just important.

"I feel I've been blessed by being born in a free country. I have the ability to give back to the community that's given me so much.

"I feel like, as Canadians and Jews, we represent the two largest peacekeeping forces in the entire world," he said. "Canadians are known worldwide for peacekeeping, and attempts to stop genocides and protect human rights. And as Jews, the commandment of tikkun olam, repairing the world, is written into our holy texts."

Judith Finer-Freedman, Jesse's mother and vice-chair of BBYO's international board of directors, said she hopes the Canadian March of the Living has "a presence" at the summit.

Alana Getzler, Toronto March director, said that although there is post-March programming here, the summit offers a different model and is "a great opportunity for kids to put the lessons of the March into action."

Toronto March of the Living alumni who wish to register for the summit should contact Getzler at agetzler@ujafed.org to register and arrange bus transportation from Toronto.

In Montreal, March alumni who wish to register should contact Mandy Gillman at mandy.gillman@bjec.org.

For more information about the summit, or for non-alumni of Canadian March of the Living who want to register, go to <http://panim.bbyo.org/genocidesummit2011>.



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