New York, Feb. 15...The American Jewish Committee, a non-Zionist organization and pioneer human relations agency in this country is initiating a special educational and cultural exchange program in Israel. The Committee is opening an Israel office for the first time to develop the program, Dr. John Slawson, Executive Vice President of the Committee announced.

Maximo Yagupsky, Director of the Committee's Latin American offices for sixteen years, has been named to head the Committee's new Israel office with headquarters in Tel Aviv. The educational program will be coordinated in the US by the AJC's Committee on Israel which is headed by Alan M. Stroock, a leading New York attorney.

The chief purpose of the Committee program in Israel will be to foster mutual understanding between Israelis and Jews in the United States and other free countries throughout the world. Of special concern will be the youth and young adults of Israel, particularly in terms of advancing their knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in the United States. Mr. Yagupsky will also help interpret to the Committee current Israeli concerns and problems which are of special interest to Jews in this country.

One of the important aspects of the program will be the publication of an independent magazine in Hebrew. It will be similar in character to Commentary, a monthly which is published in this country as a public service by the Committee.

In Argentina, Mr. Yagupsky founded and was editor in chief for eight years of Commentario, a monthly publication in Spanish, which is modeled on Commentary.

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The Committee program will also seek to interpret the United States, generally, its democratic processes and institutions, to the people of Israel. Another objective will be to help clarify the relationship between Israel and Jews in the US and in other lands.

The Committee program will be developed by Mr. Yagupsky in close cooperation with leading civic, religious and educational institutions in Israel. It will involve schools, universities, writers, scholars, publishers and the mass media.

Mr. Yagupsky is a graduate of the School of Law, Buenos Aires University. He was founder and served as First Secretary General of the Argentine-Israel Cultural Institute which promotes cultural exchanges between the two countries.

The new Director of the Committee's office in Israel is fluent in Hebrew, and has translated into Spanish a number of Israeli poets and writers. In Argentina, he had served as General Director of the Jewish school system. He is founder and editor of Argentina's oldest Jewish publishing firm, and specializes in books of Jewish interest in the Spanish language. He is also a former Vice President of the Hebrew Society of Argentina, which is similar to the American YMHA.

Since 1917, the time of the Balfour Declaration, which the Committee endorsed, Palestine, and later Israel, has been an important area of concern to the American Jewish Committee. In the pre-Israel days, the Committee supported Palestine as a home for those Jews who needed or wished to go there. In 1946, then Committee President Judge Joseph M. Proskauer, at the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, pressed for "substantial immigration into Palestine." The Committee supported Israel in her struggle for statehood and has worked continually for increased understanding and friendship between the US and Israel.

Since the founding of Israel, the Committee has been active in helping the young nation to achieve its goals of freedom and self-sufficiency. Thus, the Committee supported Israel's admission to the UN and urged grants-in-aid by the US and loans from the Export-Import Bank. Committee leaders, particularly Jacob Blaustein, an industrialist of Baltimore, played an important role in securing restitution payments to Israel by West Germany.
Delegations of Committee leaders headed by Mr. Blaustein, and Irving M. Engel, Honorary President, have visited Israel on a number of occasions to discuss matters of mutual interest, particularly those which are related to growing understanding between Israelis and American Jews.

In terms of relationships between Israel and US Jews, the latest important development took place last April when an understanding in the form of a joint statement was announced by Israel Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, Honorary President of the Committee.

A significant point in the 1961 understanding, which reaffirmed the 1950 understanding between Prime Minister Ben Gurion and Jacob Blaustein as stated by Mr. Ben Gurion, was that "without any reservation ... the State of Israel represents and speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of Jews who are citizens of another country." Emphasized by the Israeli Prime Minister was that immigration to Israel "rests with the free discretion of each American Jew himself. It is entirely a matter of his own volition."

Mr. Blaustein, who went to Israel last year at the invitation of Mr. Ben Gurion, spent hours of frank and full conversation with the Prime Minister on all aspects of the situation. In making the understanding public last April, Mr. Blaustein asserted that "Prime Minister Ben Gurion undertook to do everything within his power to see to it that the understanding in the future is kept in spirit and in letter."

Mr. Yagupsky is returning to Israel this weekend, following a two-month exploratory visit, to complete arrangements for the opening of the Committee offices in Tel Aviv.

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the oldest human relations agency in this country, combating bigotry, protecting the civil and religious rights of Jews, and advancing the cause of human rights everywhere.

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