

Moroccan Jewish Heritage Celebrated at the ASF Gala Benefit Dinner

BY SHMUEL BEN ELIEZER

Over 500 guests gathered recently at The Pierre Hotel in Manhattan to attend the 2010 sparkling gala benefit dinner of The American Sephardi Federation (ASF) where a most special honor was bestowed upon His Majesty, Mohammed VI, King of Morocco. Accepting the prestigious award on His Majesty's behalf was Serge Berdugo, Ambassador-At-Large. The Honorable Marc C. Ginsberg, former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco served as the keynote speaker for the evening.

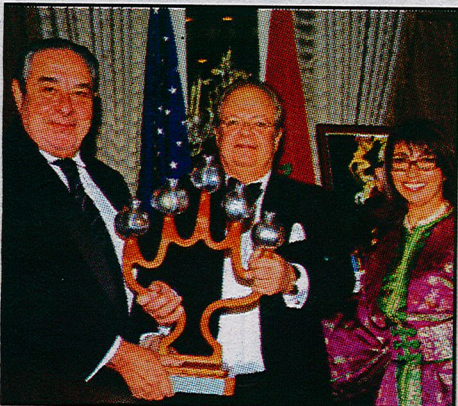
Paying honor to the glorious Jewish heritage of Morocco, the event was sponsored under the aegis of His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco, who has



Former US Ambassador to Morocco, Marc Ginsburg was the evening's key note speaker.

Photo by Smuel Ben Eliezer

proven to be a strong friend of the ancient Jewish community. Morocco stands alone in the Muslim world as being a shining paradigm where Jews live in relative safety and have not been compelled to emigrate after



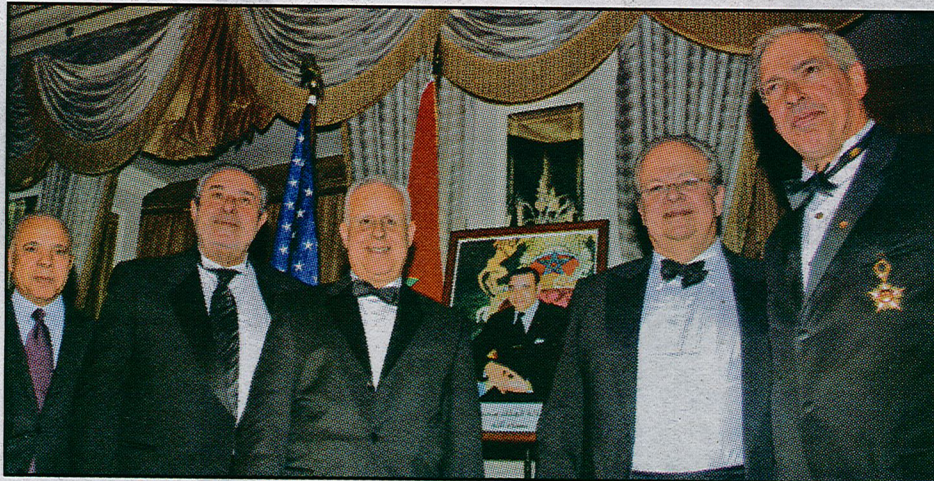
L-R: The Hon. Serge Bergudo receiving the award on behalf of His Majesty King Mohammed VI from David E.R. Dangoor, President of the American Sephardi Federation. Also seen is Dany Devico Moyal, ASF Dinner Co-Chair

Photo by Smuel Ben Eliezer

the establishment of the state of Israel, as in other Islamic countries.

"We are here this evening to pay tribute to a unique ruler, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, of the Kingdom of Morocco," Mr. David E.R. Dangoor, President of the ASF told the gathering. "His Majesty rules over a richly diverse country, and culture, that is thousands of years old."

"Its history has been forged by its peo-



L-R, The Honorable Mohamed Karmoune, Consul General, Kingdom of Morocco Consulate General in New York; The Hon. Serge Berdugo, Ambassador-At-Large for the Kingdom of Morocco; H.E. Mr. Mohammed Loulichki, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations; (Photo of King Mohammed VI); David E.R. Dangoor, President of the ASF; The Hon. Marc Ginsberg, Former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco

Photo by Smuel Ben Eliezer

ple—Muslims and Jews alike—who have managed to uphold a culture of peace which has always prevailed over the travails of the moment." Mr. Dangoor continued. "It is this genuine, national consensus on tolerance and truths that makes the Kingdom of Morocco so unique. A special relationship has always existed between the Jewish community and the leadership of Morocco. Jews in Morocco have respected and revered three generations of Sultans and Kings who have courageously defended the values of their country."

The Key note speaker at the dinner was the former US Ambassador to Morocco, the Honorary Marc C. Ginsberg. Mr. Ginsburg was the first Jewish ambassador to Morocco and while he is of Ashkenazic extraction he quickly embedded himself in the Jewish community by attending Jewish cultural events and holiday services in the local synagogues.

During his address, he talked about the long historic and political commonalities between the US and Morocco. He spotlighted the fact that Morocco was the first nation to ratify a treaty with the US. "The 1787 treaty of peace and friendship between the United States and Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdullah was the first such treaty between the United States and another nation," Mr. Ginsburg explained. "The letter from George Washington thanking the Sultan is still on display at a museum in Rabat."

Mr. Ginsburg went on to elaborate on the present day close relations between the US and Morocco.

"But their collective courage has been most put to the test in defense of the Jewish



L-R: The Honorable Fernando Villalonga, Consul General, Consulate General of Spain in New York; Mr. Carlos Benaim; Dany Devico Moyal; Wassane Zailachi, Deputy Chief of Mission - Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Washington, D.C.; David E.R. Dangoor, ASF President; Florence Amzallag Tatistcheff; Norman S. Benzaquen; The Hon. Serge Berdugo; The Hon. Mohamed Karmoune, Consul General, Kingdom of Morocco Consulate General in New York; The Hon. Marc C. Ginsberg, former Ambassador to Morocco; and Hakham David Messas, Chief Rabbi of Paris

Photo by Elliot Moskowitz

people, whether in Morocco, Israel, or throughout our Diaspora. I am reminded that my appointment to the kingdom was not without controversy. As the first American of proud Jewish heritage, raised during his

formative years in Israel, I was surely going to attract a bit of attention."

"At a time when the Iranian president dismisses The Holocaust, King Mohammed VI, has defiantly declared the nazi destruction of Jews as one of the most tragic chapters of modern history", he said adding that "for good measure, Morocco severed diplomatic relations with the greatest enemy of Israel and the Jewish people in the world today." Ambassador Ginsburg continued.

"Every Jew throughout the world, myself included, should be enormously grateful and thankful to King Mohammed for standing tall against the enemies of the Jewish people. In a turbulent region where America can't count on reliable friends, how fortunate the American people are to have such a trustworthy and reliable ally in Morocco. Morocco is not merely a fair weather friend, but a strategic partner in every sense of the word. As a diplomat, if I were to construct a list of the most dependable allies of the United States, Morocco would surely be on that list."

"Most importantly, (we are friends) because since its independence in 1956, Morocco has been led by courageous, thoughtful and innovative rulers who share

our common goal of promoting reconciliation between Arab and Israeli and ending the threat of extremism throughout the Muslim world." Mr. Ginsburg concluded.

The dinner was also graced with the presence of many notables including Hakham David Messas, Chief Rabbi of Paris who gave the benediction. Ambassador Mohammed Loulichki, Morocco's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, along with the Hon. Mohamed Karmoune, Morocco's Consul General in New York.

The dinner was also the occasion to present awards to the various heroes of Moroccan Jewish heritage. Recipients of the Leon Levy Leadership Award were Norman Benzaquen, Florence Tatistcheff Amzallag, and Carlos Benaim. Moroccan Jewry and its long history are the focus of a year-long series of events at the American Sephardic Federation on West 16th Street in Manhattan, during 2010-2011. The series includes cultural exhibitions, concerts, a film festival, an international symposium and heritage tour of Morocco. This year will also see the establishment of the Resource Center for Moroccan Jewish Heritage. The aforementioned events are also being conducted under the High Patronage of His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco.



The Grand Ballroom at the Pierre Hotel in New York City was filled to capacity for the American Sephardi Federation dinner.

Photo by Smuel Ben Eliezer