

# Israel urges branding guru to shed its 'war-torn' image

BY ANSHEL PFEFFER

► ONE OF Britain's top image-makers is to lead a campaign to recreate Israel's international profile.

Fiona Gilmore, head of the Acanchi group, was in Israel last week meeting all levels of society, from Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to environmental activists in the Negev.

Ms Livni had appointed Acanchi as part of a campaign she has led for three years to re-brand the country and lose its image as a spartan and war-torn.

The aim is to have Israel's name more closely associated with technological innovation and culture and less with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Acanchi will present plans by the end of the year.

Ms Gilmore headed the Springpoint branding consultancy before founding Acanchi in 2003. Her company specialises in creating new images for countries, among them Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

Ido Aharoni, head of the brand-management unit at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, said that the idea to re-brand followed the September 11 attacks on the US, "when we realised that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was going to lose its centrality and that it would be part of a much wider context".

At the time, Mr Aharoni was Israel's media consul in New York. With the then consul-general Alon Pinkas, he brought together media and marketing experts to form BIG — the Brand Israel Group. The initiative was at first funded by American-Jewish philan-

thropists. Detailed research overseas "showed that Israel's brand was that of conflict", said Mr Aharoni.

"Even those convinced that Israel was the good side were still not attracted to us, because we were seen as the producers of bad news. Our conclusion was that it is much more important to be attractive than to be right."

There then followed a PR offensive which exposed other sides of Israel to the international media. Journalists were invited to tour vineyards and to see the newly restored Bauhaus architecture of Tel Aviv.

The Tourism Ministry, concerned that Israel was seen as an exclusively masculine society, launched a marketing campaign featuring supermodel Bar Rafaeli and bikini-clad women on beaches.

In late 2005, the project was endorsed by senior officials, led by then Foreign Ministry director-general Ron Prosor (now ambassador to Britain).

The following year, Ms Livni took it under her wing and secured financing from the Treasury. In October 2006, the project entered its strategic phase, which culminated in the hiring of Acanchi.

"We need to get ready now for the final positioning, since we know what we want to do," said Mr Aharoni. "But this kind of project needs an organising idea, an umbrella which will cover all the fields in which we will be working and the government, private sector and voluntary organisations which will be part of this."



An earlier part of the rebranding campaign from the Tourism Ministry

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## THE JEWISH PRESS

► The Jewish News leads with the story of Kindertransport refugee Hedy Epstein who, the paper claims, is set to spread a virulent anti-Israel message on a tour of the UK.

Ms Epstein, who has reportedly said there is no difference between the treatment of Jews during the Shoah and the plight of Palestinians, will speak to churches, mosques and town halls across Britain next month.

Serious objections have been made by the local kehillah over plans to build a new community centre in the middle of a predominantly Jewish area in Salford, Manchester, the



Hedy Epstein  
Manchester, the Jewish Tribune

reports. Residents swarmed to the council offices in Swinton last week to express opposition to the so-called "Community Hub" which will also be close to the long-established Hebrew school, Talmud Torah Chinuch N'Orim.

The Jewish Telegraph writes about the search to find the next big Jewish musical superstar. The Northern Jewish Young Musician of the Year competition hopes to find the best musical talent in the region.

Auditions will be held in November and December, with the final being held at the Haden Freeman Hall, Royal Northern College of Music, on Sunday, January 18. Money raised from the competition will go towards funding events at the Whitefield student house.