



**Gray Academy**  
OF JEWISH EDUCATION

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

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**Past Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Alh`jooj, Encourages 200 High School Students to Be Positive Change-makers on Raoul Wallenberg Day**

*Mayor Sam Katz Kicking Off Today's Student-led, Charity-driven, Program*

**Winnipeg, MB** – Today, 200 high school students from Gray Academy of Jewish Education and St. John's-Ravenscourt come together to learn from – and interact with – an amazing panel of human rights mentors, as well as use their passion for peace to help others. This is all a part of Gray Academy's annual student-led Raoul Wallenberg Day program; a program honouring Raoul Wallenberg's legacy by inspiring young people to be proponents of positive change. Students will meet at the Berney Theatre at 8:45am to begin the exciting full-day program.

Mayor Sam Katz will deliver greetings before the students receive a keynote address from the co-executive directors of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development; Vivian Silver, a former Winnipegger who has been honoured for her peacekeeping work and Amal Elsana Alh`jooj.

"It is wonderful to see youth taking the initiative to spur each other on to make positive changes for the people around them," says Alh`jooj, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee for her *One Thousand Women* submission in 2005. "Though I've seen groups around the world struggling to come to a peaceful agreement, it's encouraging to know tomorrow's leaders are looking to find ways to thrive together."

Students will also have an opportunity to further the dialogue about a variety of human rights-related topics during breakout sessions and a panel discussion with our keynotes and guests of honour. Today will also feature a musical break with Ariel Posen and Alexa Dirks, as well as a loonie/tonie drive to benefit Siloam Mission and Koats for Kids.

"We hope today's group of inspiring and influential speakers will encourage our peers to come together and be leaders for change," says Gaston Lopez Ficher, a grade 12 student at Gray Academy and student organizer. "We are anxious to give back to Winnipeggers in need, and are encouraging community members to be difference-makers by coming by the campus and adding their contributions to our fundraising drive."

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**For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

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(Bios below)

**Raoul Wallenberg**, a Swedish diplomat stationed in Budapest, Hungary in July 1944 is credited with rescuing more than 100,000 Hungarian Jews from deportation to the death camps at the risk of his own life. On January 17, 1945, Wallenberg disappeared on his way to a meeting with Soviet officials. His exact fate is unknown and he is presumed to have been murdered or to have died in a Soviet prison. In 1985, Canada declared Raoul Wallenberg its first honorary citizen, and in 2001 proclaimed January 17th as Raoul Wallenberg Day to honour his courage, character, and humanity. Gray Academy of Jewish Education is proud to sponsor an annual program highlighting human rights and social activism for our student body. This year, our day's theme is: "If you will it, it is no longer a dream."

**Gray Academy of Jewish Education** is a JK – grade 12 university preparatory school that places equal value on both Jewish and general academic programs, and provides opportunities to nurture the emotional well-being and spiritual development of all students. Our vision is to provide an educational environment of academic excellence, strong Jewish values and proud citizenship.

### **Panelist Bios for Raoul Wallenberg Day 2012**

**Amal Elsana Alh`jooj** is a Bedouin woman who is the founding director of AJECC, which works to reach social, political, and economic equality for the Arab community of Israel. At 17, she established the first Arab Bedouin women's organization to improve the situation of Bedouin women. Today, she is one of the key shapers of public opinion regarding the status of the Arab minority and the status of women in Israel. Her work has been recognized by numerous awards. Alh`jooj was a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize within the framework of the "One Thousand Women" submission in 2005.

**Vivian Silver** was born in Winnipeg and moved to Israel in 1974. She is currently the co-executive director of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development. She was awarded the 2011 Goldberg IIE Prize for Peace in the Middle East. Silver is a founding member and co-chair of Shutafut-Sharaka, a forum of civil society organizations committed to the advancement of democratic values and the promotion of an equal and shared society for all Israeli citizens; Jews and Arab-Palestinians, alike.

**Christine Melnick** was elected as the MLA for Riel in June of 2003. Early that year she was appointed by Premier Gary Doer as Minister of Family Services and Housing. She has been serving as Minister of Water Stewardship since 2006. Melnick's work brings her in touch with the Aboriginal, Métis, Francophone and Anglophone communities. She has long been active in women's health, human rights, literacy and environmental issues.

**Serge Kaptegain** was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and came to Canada four years ago to flee civil war. Today, he works as a French teacher and lives in Winnipeg. Kaptegain is the founder of Hand in Hand for Peace, which raises awareness about the Democratic Republic of Congo by presenting in schools about human rights violations. He is also the founder of Refugee Stars, which helps refugees integrate into Canadian society. Kaptegain frequently speaks publicly about his first-hand refugee experience.

**Jonathan Kroft** is a prominent Winnipeg lawyer and businessman and has been president of both the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg and of Advocates in Defence of Freedom of Expression (the Canadian Media Lawyers Association). Jonathan received the UIA Federations Canada Leadership Award in 2000 and the Harry Silverberg Award for Community Leadership.

## **Breakout Session Leader Bios for Raoul Wallenberg Day 2012**

**Judy Richichi** is a former subject of the child welfare system and the development director at Siloam Mission.

**Shimon Segal** is a law student at the University of Manitoba and founded the Youth Engagement Strategy.

**Yael Shrom** is at medical school at the University of Manitoba, and lived in Ramogi village, Uganda for two months in 2010.

**Emma Fineblit** is the Assistant Director of West Broadway Youth Outreach and studied in Nkozi, Uganda for a semester.

**David Rubinfeld** is a young entrepreneur who recently helped raise \$100,000 for Habitat for Humanity in the Cycle of Hope.

**Rabbi Shmuel Altein** is the director of the Jewish Learning Institute of Chabad Lubavitch.

### **Children of the Earth High School Presenters:**

**Justin Harper** is part of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative and is developing a business plan to house northern students who are receiving an education in Winnipeg.

**Drake Perry** is a member of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative Program, which is assisting him in the development of a photography business.

**Beverly Pettit** is enrolled in the Medical Careers Exploration Program – a joint initiative between Children of the Earth and Pan Am Clinic.

\*\*Vivian Silver, Amal Elsana Alh`jooj, and Serge Kaptegaine will also be leading breakout sessions.