

FOURTH LEBANESE JEW REPORTED KILLED

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Feb. 19 (JTA) — A fourth Lebanese Jewish hostage was reportedly murdered in Beirut this week. An extremist Shiite Lebanese group, "The Organization of the Oppressed in the World," announced the "execution" of Dr. Elie Hallak, 60, a physician and the vice president of the Lebanese Jewish community. Last Sunday, the body of another hostage, Ibrahim Benisti (also spelled Benesti), 50, was found in west Beirut. He had been badly beaten and shot in the back of the head.

Hallak, a popular general practitioner and lecturer at Beirut Medical School, was kidnapped outside his home in west Beirut March 30, 1985. Three other Jews were kidnapped at the same time.

Lebanese police say his body has not yet been found but a Beirut daily, An-Nahar, published Wednesday a Polaroid photograph of Hallak's body. The photo was of the same type as the one showing the body of Benisti and two members of his family who had also been kidnapped.

Claims By The Killers

The killers also published a communique saying that Hallak's killing was in retaliation for "Israeli terrorist activities in villages of oppressed people in south Lebanon." The Shiite organization, believed to be close to the pro-Iranian Hezbollah movement, also accused Hallak of having been "a prominent member of the Israeli Mossad (secret service)."

In similar fashion, a statement found pinned to Benisti's body said he had been killed "for having been an Israeli spy" and as an example "to all other Israeli agents." It called the victim "a pillar of Israeli espionage in Lebanon."

Two months ago The Organization of the Oppressed murdered two other Jewish hostages, Prof. Isaac Tarrab and Haim Cohen Halalah. Three more Jewish hostages are believed to be in the hands of the gang, which has murdered four of its Jewish captives since December.

The Organization of the Oppressed is a relative newcomer to the terrorist scene which first became known last June when it hijacked a TWA airliner to Beirut demanding the release of 300 Shiite prisoners believed to be held by Israel.

Jewish organizations in France contacted throughout the day Lebanese officials in Beirut to try and obtain the release of the four Jewish hostages still held by the gang.

BACKGROUND REPORT LEBANESE JEWS FACE TERRORISM

By George Gruen

(Editor's note: The spellings of the names of Lebanese Jews who have been in the news lately, and even their ages, keep changing depending on the sources of the reports, making it difficult to standardize this information. The article by Dr. George Gruen, director of Middle East Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, provides the most authoritative spellings and ages to date.)

NEW YORK, Feb. 19 (JTA) — The murder of two Lebanese Jews within the past week by a radical Shiite Moslem group indicates an intensification of the terrorist campaign against Lebanon's tiny and defenseless Jewish community.

The latest victim is Dr. Elie Hallak, 60, a prominent pediatrician and vice president of the High Council of the Lebanese Jewish community. In a statement published Wednesday in the Lebanese daily An-Nahar and in the French press, the group, which calls itself "The Organization of the Oppressed in the World," said it would not release Hallak's body until the Israelis had left Lebanon.

A Polaroid photograph accompanying the statement confirmed that Hallak was in their hands, but it could not be determined from it whether he was dead or alive.

The caption provided by the group depicted him as "a leader of the Mossad," the Israeli intelligence service.

An Ominous Statement

This is ominous since the charge of spying for Israel was used by the group to justify its killing of three other innocent Lebanese Jews within the past three months.

The Organization of the Oppressed had not earlier admitted to holding Hallak, although he was kidnapped at the end of March 1985 together with three other Lebanese Jews, presumably because it knew how patently false the charge of spying was.

Hallak was a much-loved and highly respected doctor whose patients came from all ethnic and religious segments of Beirut's society. Indeed, some years back he treated the son of one of the leaders of the PLO.

When news of his abduction was revealed, the kidnapping was condemned by Christian and Moslem officials including Lebanese Justice Minister Nabih Berri, the leader of the mainline Shiite group, Amal.

Following Hallak's kidnapping, his wife, Rachel Hallak, who was in Paris at the time, went to Beirut and remained there for several months, trying, in vain, to obtain his release. She is back in Paris now with the couple's three sons — Andre, Alain, and Marc, who range in age from 17 to 21 — who were sent there to study several years ago because of the turmoil in Lebanon.

During Hallak's months of captivity, he was reported to have served as a physician. The Organization of the Oppressed is apparently connected to the pro-Iranian Hezbollah (the Party of God), as one of the Americans held captive by the fundamentalist Hezbollah at the time of the TWA hijacking reportedly saw Hallak treating patients.

Other Killings By The Gang

The Organization of the Oppressed kidnapped and murdered Haim Cohen and Prof. Isaac Tarrab, in late December. At that time, it threatened to kidnap and kill additional Jews unless its demands — that "Shiite mujahidin (holy warriors) captured by the Israel-backed South Lebanon Army were promptly released from a detention camp in Khyam — were met.

Ibrahim (Abraham) Benisti, a Lebanese Jew in his forties, and his 68-year-old father, Yehuda, were kidnapped in the past few weeks. Yehuda's other son, Youssef, 33, had been seized in May 1985.

The Organization of the Oppressed brutally murdered Ibrahim Benisti on February 15. According to the Beirut police, his body was found the morning of February 16, wrapped in blankets in a street in west Beirut near the line dividing the predominantly Moslem section from Christian east Beirut. The coroner's office reported that Benisti's body bore signs of torture and beatings to the head. He was shot twice and then strangled.

Near the body was a copy of the statement issued by The Organization of the Oppressed to the press, declaring that Benisti had been "a prominent agent" of the Mossad. The charges were categorically denied as "nonsense" by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Victims Not Involved in Politics

Indeed, none of the kidnap victims had been involved either in internal Lebanese politics or the Arab-Israeli conflict. Outraged students and friends of Tarrab attested that the distinguished retired professor of mathematics had only nominally been Jewish and had had no connection to Israel.

Cohen was a department store accountant known as a kind and gentle person, who chose not to go to Israel, his sister-in-law Rosemary Cohen declared in Los Angeles, because "he did not wish to face the possibility of killing his Arab friends in battle."

It was precisely because they felt fully integrated in Lebanese society and had both Moslem and Christian friends that the kidnap victims chose to remain in Lebanon even after the overwhelming majority of Lebanon's 6,000 Jews left in the years after the 1967 Six-Day War and the decade of internal strife following the eruption of the civil war in 1975. Today fewer than 75 Lebanese Jews remain, most in east Beirut.

Tragic Fate Of The Benisti Family

The tragic fate of the Benisti family is typical of the misplaced trust of those Lebanese Jews who remained. The family lived in the Wadi Abu Jamil section of Moslem west Beirut near the main synagogue. Yehuda Benisti operated a gift shop and general store near the Beirut airport, which adjoins a Shiite and Palestinian neighborhood.

When his other son, Youssef, was abducted last May 18, the father at first did not notify the police or the Jewish community, because he believed that his friends and customers from within the Shiite community would discreetly intervene on behalf of his son and arrange for his release. It was only toward the end of last year, when all quiet interventions had failed, that Yehuda Benisti approached the Jewish community in east Beirut for help.

According to the February 15 statement by The Organization of the Oppressed, they had seized Ibrahim Benisti — as well as Yehuda and Youssef — because "all three were part of an Israeli spy network."

In its statement, published in An-Nahar the next day, The Organization of the Oppressed declared that Ibrahim had been slain in revenge for Israel's presence in south Lebanon, the alleged "violation of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem ... by the filthy boots of Jewish Israeli occupation," and the shelling of Shiite Moslem villages in south Lebanon.

The fanatical Shiite group also threatened that "all those interested in having any kind of relations with Israel" would face "adequate measures from us." It added that "the punishment of the spy Ibrahim Benisti should serve as a warning."

The latest kidnappings bring to 10 the number of Jews known to have been abducted in the past two years. There are hopes that five are still alive. The Organization of the Oppressed had earlier claimed to be holding Elie (Youssef) Sraur, 68, who was in charge of preparing the dead for burial according to Jewish rites, and Isaac Sasson, in his mid-60's, a pharmaceutical executive who is the president of the Lebanese Jewish community. Both were kidnapped at the end of March 1985.

On July 1, 1984, Raoul Sobhi Mizrahi, 54, an electrical engineer who ran an electrical supply company, was kidnapped by three armed gunmen from his apartment in west Beirut. There were no ransom demands. He was beaten to death and his body was discovered on July 3. A group calling itself the "National Resistance Army — The Nation's Liberation Faction" said it had killed Mizrahi "because he was an Israeli agent." This was firmly denied by his family.

Still missing is Salim Jammoos, secretary general of the Lebanese Jewish community. He was kidnapped on August 15, 1984, reportedly by three armed men who abducted him from his car near the communal office located in the compound of the main synagogue in west Beirut.

FOUR TERRORISTS KILLED BY IDF SOLDIERS WHO CONTINUED THEIR SEARCH FOR TWO MISSING IDF MEN IN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 19 (JTA) — Four terrorists believed to be members of the Hezbollah extremist group were killed Wednesday in a clash with Israel Defense Force soldiers who continued their massive search of south Lebanon for two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Shiite extremists Monday.

The clash occurred near the village of Haris in south Lebanon, according to a communique issued here by the IDF. No Israelis were injured. But according to Lebanese sources, the clash resulted in the death of 10 Lebanese — four Hezbollah members, four members of Amal, and two civilians.

The Army, meanwhile, declined to comment on a threat by the kidnapers to kill one of the two soldiers unless all Israeli forces are withdrawn from south Lebanon by 9 p.m. Wednesday, local time.

But some army and Defense Ministry sources expressed fear that the soldiers are no longer in south Lebanon and that their captors have taken them to Beirut or possibly to the Bekaa Valley. Nevertheless, Uri Lubrani, the Israeli Coordinator for south Lebanon, said the search would continue until the missing men were found.

Missing IDF Soldiers Identified

They were identified by the IDF Wednesday as Yossi Fink of Raanana and Rahamim Alsheich of Rosh Haayin, both 20 and both students at the Karnei Shomron Yeshiva in the West Bank, which combines religious studies with military service under a program called Yeshiva Hesder. Fink, born in Manchester, England, was brought to Israel by his parents at the age of five. They were kidnapped by an organization calling itself the Islamic Resistance Front.

Israeli commentators said that the IDF's efforts to find the two soldiers has become as much a retaliatory

action as a search. Four terrorists were killed near Haris village Wednesday, reportedly after they opened fire on Israeli troops. Israel, meanwhile, has also turned to diplomatic channels to gain the release of the soldiers. Most of this activity is centered on the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. Hezbollah has been holding five Americans and two French nationals hostage for nearly a year.

JEWISH AGENCY BUDGET SET AT \$381 MILLION FOR F/Y 1986-87 By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Feb. 19 (JTA) — The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency, concluding its two-day meeting here Wednesday, approved a Jewish Agency budget of \$381 million for fiscal 1986/87.

Leon Dulzin, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, told a press conference that two highlights of the new budget are a \$50 million allocation for rural settlements in Israel which face financial difficulties and a \$20 million allocation for housing for new immigrants.

He said the \$50 million will be disbursed over a period of two years, and the \$20 million will be used to purchase 4,500 housing units for newly arrived immigrants.

Dulzin said the budget also includes \$1.8 million for four new settlements to be established in Galilee and in the Arava region of the Negev. Jerold Hoffberger, Board of Governors chairman, who took part in the press conference, stressed that the Jewish Agency does not allocate money for settlements or projects in the administered territories. "We operate strictly within Israel's 1967 borders," he said.

Both Hoffberger and Dulzin noted that the Board of Governors meeting, the first ever held in the U.S., was successful. They expressed satisfaction that the Jewish Agency has been able to maintain a balanced budget for the last four years.

Other Major Budget Items

Other major budget items include an allocation of \$52,450,000 for immigration and absorption. This is much less than the \$88 million for that purpose in the previous budget. The difference is attributed to the \$40 million the Jewish Agency spent last year to absorb some 10,000 Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia.

The new budget, however, sets aside a reserve of \$15 million for immigration and absorption needs in the event of an unexpected influx of olim into Israel. The new budget also includes \$52 million for Youth Aliyah, \$11,750,000 for Jewish education worldwide, \$44 million for higher education and \$16 million for vocational training. The budget is subject to final approval by the Jewish Agency Assembly to be held in Jerusalem June 22-26.

Dulzin noted that the Jewish Agency spends only three percent of its total budget on central administration. It will amount to \$12 million this year. In addition to the regular budget, the Board of Governors approved \$48 million for Project Renewal, the same as last year, for the rehabilitation of depressed neighborhoods in Israel.

The only budget item to raise controversy was the allocation of \$250,000, a marginal sum in the context of the total budget, to build a youth hostel in Jerusalem by the Reform movement. Orthodox Board members objected strenuously and a heated debate ensued. But the objections were overruled and the allocation was approved.

Following the Board of Governors meeting, which ended Wednesday night, 22 Board members accompanied by senior Jewish Agency staff will begin Jewish Agency Week, a series of visits to 46 Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada. The visitors will participate in various communal activities including local Federation board meetings, Jewish Agency committee meetings and campaign cabinet and leadership meetings.

ISRAELI SCIENTISTS PRAISED FOR POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO STAR WARS RESEARCH PROGRAM By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 19 (JTA) — U.S. General James Abramson, head of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) (Star Wars) program, said here Wednesday that Israeli scientists had already made useful proposals for possible Israeli contributions to Star Wars research.

Abramson is in Israel to attend the annual Israel conference on aviation and aeronautics opening in Tel Aviv Wednesday and continuing at the Haifa Technion Thursday.

He said that Israeli research work in this field would benefit not only the American program but would also let Israel enjoy a variety of spin-offs to meet its own needs in countering short and intermediate-range missiles such as the SS-21, 22, 23 and Scud missiles, which threaten this country.

"We want Israeli ideas for an architecture primarily against the shorter-range threats, and this is one of the ideas we are already discussing," he told a press conference here. Abramson said that one Israeli proposal already made was "absolutely unique," connected to what is known as an "electro-magnetic rail-gun firing system."

"You also have some advanced work in electronics, in electronic counter-measures, you have some people here who have ideas about advances in free electron lasers — there is a large series about specific kinds of things ... a whole range of your technical community (the Israel aircraft industries, the Rafael weapons production industries, the Technion and the nuclear research facilities) have already presented us with some good ideas."

Abramson said the SDI had already forced the Soviet Union to come up with some proposals for arms reductions.

BOLIVIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY HONORED

LA PAZ, Feb. 19 (JTA) — In an impressive ceremony presided over by President Victor Paz Estenssoro, the Bolivian government has awarded its highest national decoration to the umbrella organization of the nation's Jewish community, the World Jewish Congress reported here.

The award, the Condor of the Andes, was given in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Circulo Israelita de la Paz, the representative body of Bolivian Jewry and the WJC affiliate here.

LATE NEWS BULLETIN

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Senate Wednesday ratified the Genocide Convention 38 years after the United Nations adopted it. The vote was 83 to 11, and the United States now joins 97 other nations which have formally endorsed the treaty.

ANTI-SEMITIC REMARKS SPARK CONCERN

By David Kantor

BONN, Feb. 19 (JTA) -- Recent anti-Semitic remarks by West German political figures drew expressions of grave concern at a ceremony in Stuttgart Tuesday where Werner Nachmann, chairman of West Germany's Jewish Community, was presented with the Theodor Heuss Prize for his "contribution to the process of reconciliation between Germans and Jews."

Hildegard Hamm-Bruecher, chairperson of the Theodor Heuss Foundation which presented the award, observed that "the hidden or open identification with recent anti-Semitic utterances has certainly not been just by accident."

She was referring to the slur by Hermann Felner, a ranking member of the Christian Social Union (CSU) Bundestag faction, that surviving Jewish slave laborers of the Nazi era who seek reparations create the impression that "Jews are quick to show up when money jingles in German cash boxes."

Outrage over Felner's remark was still running high when it was disclosed that Mayor Wilderich Von Mierbach of Korschbroich, a member of the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU), had suggested to his town council's budget committee that "a few rich Jews should be slain" in order to balance the budget.

Responsibility Can't Be Evaded

Annemarie Renger, Vice President of the Bundestag, said at the award ceremony that Germans, regardless of whether they are of the wartime or post-war generation, cannot shrug off responsibility for the crimes against the Jews. She expressed dismay at the political climate which tolerates anti-Semitic statements by public officials.

Another speaker, Martin Stoehr, a Protestant clergyman, said a new beginning in relations between Christians and Jews is impossible without rooting out what he called the racial "poisoning" of church and theology. He urged a public campaign against anti-Semitism in all walks of life.

Nachmann, in accepting the award, said Jews are deeply disappointed with what has been said and written lately. There are some in this country who speak out in a provocative, thoughtless way, he said but concern over this must not be limited to Jews who are sensitive to anything that hints of Germany's past.

ITALIAN MPs PETITION TO PLANT A FOREST IN ISRAEL FOR KLINGHOFFER

ROME, Feb. 19 (JTA) -- Members of Parliament representing virtually all political factions have signed a petition to plant a forest in Israel in memory of Leon Klinghoffer "and all victims of international terrorism."

Klinghoffer was the elderly American Jew murdered by Palestinian terrorists who seized the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro in Egyptian waters last October. The petition was signed by MPs of the Christian Democratic Party, the Communist Party, the Liberals, Radical Republicans, Socialist and Social Democratic parties.

100,000 MARKS MADE AVAILABLE FOR BUILDING A SYNAGOGUE IN DARMSTADT

By David Kantor

BONN, Feb. 19 (JTA) -- The city of Darmstadt has made available 100,000 Marks toward the plan-

ning and construction of a synagogue and Jewish community center in the heart of the town, a multi-million Mark project to be financed jointly by the municipality, the State government of Hesse and private donors.

The synagogue is scheduled to open on November 9, 1988, the 50th anniversary of the infamous Kristallnacht (night of broken glass) when mobs destroyed Jewish shops, homes and synagogues in the first major pogrom of the Nazi regime. Although only 150 Jews live in Darmstadt today, the synagogue and community center will serve other Jewish communities in Hesse.

The project was enthusiastically welcomed by all factions at a meeting of the City Council this week. A member of the Free Democratic Party called it a contribution to peaceful co-existence. A Social Democratic Party member said the synagogue would be part of Darmstadt's history. A representative of the Green Party urged the budget committee to display generosity.

Local citizens have already raised 20,000 Marks and have called on the general public to follow suit.

PUT 'EM ON HOLD

JERUSALEM, Feb. 19 (JTA) -- The Knesset has finally entered the electronic era. The Knesset House Committee decided unanimously Tuesday that MKs will cast electronic ballots, rather than raising their hands, when a vote is called for. MKs will have a button next to their seat which they will press for a no or a yes. One problem that has not yet been worked out is how to prevent an MK from pressing the button several times, and thus register several votes.

MORE SOVIET JEWRY ACTIVISTS CONVICTED

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19 (JTA) -- Nine more Soviet Jewry activists were convicted Wednesday of demonstrating too close to the Soviet Embassy here. The nine were among a group of 42 Hebrew school teachers and others who had themselves arrested at a protest on the eve of the Geneva summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev last November.

The November demonstration was the most recent in a series of arrest rallies outside the Soviet Embassy that began last May. Like almost all of the more than 100 demonstrators convicted to date, the nine who were tried Wednesday were given a 15-day suspended prison sentence, as well as six months unsupervised probation and a \$50 fine.

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Eliahu Essas, the Soviet Jewish aliya activist who became an Orthodox Jew while still in the USSR, spoke critically of the way Russian Jews have been absorbed in Israel. According to the 40-year-old Essas, too much stress has been placed on material benefits and not enough on the "spiritual" needs of the immigrants. He claimed this contributed to the high dropout rate among Soviet olim. "If coming to Israel is only about apartments and cars and not about aliya, going up to the holy land, then it is no wonder that the dropout rate has reached 80 percent or more," said Essas.