

FEWER FIRES REPORTED THAN FEARED ON PALESTINIAN DAY OF ARSON

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 22 (JTA) — Eight deliberately set fires were reported in various parts of Israel and the West Bank Wednesday. Most of them were promptly extinguished and the damage was relatively slight.

In fact, the wave of arson against Israeli property called for by the underground command of the Palestinian uprising was less serious than expected.

In recent weeks, there has been an average of 18 forest and crop fires a day, which Israelis acknowledge is the latest weapon of the Palestinian uprising.

But Israeli Arabs and Palestinians from the administered territories did not respond in any great numbers to the exhortations in leaflet No. 19, distributed this week. It called for the large-scale burning of Israeli property on Wednesday, especially such agricultural assets as forests and fields.

The leaflet gave the Israeli authorities plenty of advance warning, and elaborate precautions and preventive measures were taken. Fire brigades were alerted. Aircraft were used to spot fires as soon as they started, enabling fire-fighters to act swiftly.

The massive presence of security forces along the "Green Line," the boundary between Israel proper and the administered territories, apparently deterred would-be arsonists.

The cool, damp weather of recent days also helped keep the fires from spreading rapidly.

18 Acres Destroyed

The most serious blaze occurred at about noon local time. About 12 acres of forests were destroyed near the Israeli Arab village of Taiba, east of Kfar Sava.

Another six acres were scorched Wednesday morning, near the Arab village of Umm el-Fahm, in central Israel, east of Hadera.

Fires also were reported near Ashkelon, at Kafr Kasim in the Lachish region, the Etzion bloc of settlements south of Jerusalem and in the Gilboa mountains.

If Palestinians generally ignored the call to arson, they did largely observe a general strike called Wednesday by the underground command. Shops were closed, public transportation was halted and most students and workers stayed home.

But except for Ramallah, Arab municipalities in the West Bank stayed open.

There were a few incidents. Two Arabs were wounded when Israel Defense Force soldiers opened fire in Nabliu Wednesday afternoon, after they were attacked with rocks and bottles.

An Arab shepherd attempted to stab a civilian employee at the military firing range south of Hebron.

The intended victim was employed by the Green Patrol Rangers. He was sent with soldiers to eject the shepherds from the firing zone when he was knifed. His assailant was caught later in the Arab village of Inna, west of Hebron.

An Israeli Arab helped police capture a

terrorist who entered Israel from the West Bank, apparently with intent to do harm. He was spotted Tuesday night by Israeli Arabs from Mukebile village, near Mount Gilboa. They alerted security forces who, with the villagers' help, caught the suspect hiding in a field.

The head of the Gilboa Regional Council praised the villagers for their courage and good citizenship.

U.S. CALLS PLO OFFICIAL'S STATEMENT CONSTRUCTIVE, BUT NOT AUTHORITATIVE

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 22 (JTA) — The State Department said Tuesday it did not consider a statement by a Palestine Liberation Organization official advocating direct peace talks with Israel to be an "authoritative statement" of the PLO.

The statement, made by PLO spokesman Bassam Abu Sharif during the recent Arab summit in Algiers, was written in a "constructive tone," State Department spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley said, adding that it also contains "some positive points."

Five Palestinian terrorist groups, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, have denounced the statement, and are calling for Sharif to be brought to trial before a Palestinian court. The New York Times reported Wednesday.

Oakley did not say which parts of the statement were constructive, but some of the more favorable references to Israel were that "Israel's objectives are lasting peace and security" and "no one can understand the Jewish people's centuries of suffering more than the Palestinians."

Sharif also wrote that the PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, but that it has not said so unconditionally because "neither resolution says anything about the national rights of the Palestinian people."

Also, Sharif said the PLO is regarded as the representative of the Palestinian people by "every Palestinian questioned by diplomats and newsmen of the international community."

But Oakley doubted whether the statement represents "official PLO policy." She warned that "if the PLO is serious about moderating its position so as to make a positive contribution to the peace process, it can do so in an authoritative way."

She added, "We have yet to see such an authoritative statement."

U.S. policy is not to speak to the PLO until it accepts the two Security Council resolutions and recognizes Israel's right to exist.

FOUR PFLP TERRORISTS CAPTURED IN PRE-DAWN RAID ATTEMPT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 22 (JTA) — Four terrorists who were about to infiltrate into Israel in the pre-dawn hours were captured Wednesday morning, after a running skirmish with an Israel Defense Force patrol just inside the Lebanese border.

Three of the terrorists were shot and sustained slight wounds.

There were no Israeli casualties.

The incident occurred around 4 a.m. just across the border from Kfar Yuval in Upper Galilee. The IDF soldiers were on a routine patrol when they encountered the gang about to infiltrate into Israel. They gave chase which lasted about a half-hour.

"This time they caught them living," Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told reporters, "which will give us an opportunity to receive more information on all these repeated attempts to infiltrate the Galilee."

The terrorists were identified as members of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. They were apparently planning terrorist acts in Israel.

The terrorists were in possession of machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and explosives when captured.

In the past five months, Palestinian guerrillas have tried to infiltrate Israel's northern border eight times. Five soldiers and 17 gunmen have been killed in the resulting battles.

PALESTINIAN ARMS SMUGGLER SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, June 22 (JTA) -- Omar Mohammed Sofrini, the Palestinian arrested Monday while trying to smuggle arms and explosives aboard a ferry sailing to Israel, was sentenced Wednesday to three years in prison and fined 70,000 drachmas, the equivalent of \$530. He will be jailed pending his appeal.

The 40-year-old Nazareth-born Sofrini was arrested by Greek authorities, who were tipped off by alert Israeli security agents operating in Piraeus, the port of Athens.

He was apprehended aboard the Cypriot-registered car ferry Paloma, which was about to sail for Haifa via Rhodes and Limassol, Cyprus.

An inspection of his Mercedes car yielded a pistol, 101 9mm cartridges, two silencers, 20 detonators and materiel used to assemble explosive charges, all concealed in the chassis.

Greek authorities said Sofrini drove the car from Nuremberg, West Germany and arrived in Athens last Saturday. He entered Greece from Yugoslavia on a West German passport.

The authorities investigated it for possible forgery but determined it was valid. Sofrini is a citizen of West Germany, where he has lived for 20 years.

He reportedly told the Greek police he did not know the weapons and ammunition were hidden in his car. He said it must have been concealed there by a Syrian, Wuafik Gepart, who works in the garage in Germany where Sofrini had his car serviced.

The materiel may have been intended for a terrorist group in Israel.

According to a lawyer appointed by the West German Embassy in Athens to represent Sofrini in court, the suspect left Israel 20 years ago to study in West Germany, married a German woman and has three children. He is a photographic technician by trade.

Sofrini held Israeli citizenship until five years ago, when he was naturalized in Germany. He is a Christian and according to his lawyer has no criminal record in Germany and is not interested in the Palestinian struggle against the Israelis.

He was returning to Israel, the court was

told, to visit his ill mother, Fatma, who still lives in Nazareth. The court established that he had not visited any Arab country but visited Israel last summer.

Sofrini broke down and wept in court. He insisted he would not have driven the car if he knew it contained explosives because his own life would have been in danger.

The incident cast light on the fact that Israeli security agents operate at foreign seaports as well as airports, at least in Greece, checking passengers, luggage and cargo bound for Israel.

While most visitors to Israel come by air, large numbers arrive in the many car ferries plying Eastern Mediterranean routes, particularly in summertime.

The 3,985-ton Paloma is one of them. She had 400 passengers, 200 cars and 100 crew members aboard at the time Sofrini was arrested. The ship's owner, Ilias Trohides, said the suspect was found asleep in his cabin.

Meanwhile, political circles in Athens attributed the stiff sentence imposed on Sofrini to Greece's desire to appear tough on terrorists as the summer tourist season begins.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

ISRAELIS CONCERNED THAT SYRIA MAY BUY ADVANCED CHINESE MISSILE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 22 (JTA) -- Israeli policy-makers and military planners are watching with mounting concern Syria's growing arsenal of ground-to-ground missiles, which could put Israeli population centers in jeopardy.

According to recent press reports, Syria is seeking to buy an advanced short-range missile, the M-9, which is produced in China.

The M-9 has a range of about 375 miles, double that of the Soviet-made SS-23, which Moscow has refused to give the Syrians. Israeli sources said the M-9 is not yet operational, but would be capable of hitting Israeli cities from deep inside Syria.

The Israelis say it is possible that Iran might be prepared to finance Syria's purchase of the weapon from China, which will insist on immediate payment in hard currency.

But the United States may be able, through diplomatic means, to dissuade the Chinese from making the sale, Israeli analysts said. The New York Times on Wednesday quoted a State Department spokesperson as saying the United States would view such a sale with "deep concern."

Israeli sources noted, however, that American efforts did not prevent China from selling its Silkworm missiles to Iran.

The Israelis are especially worried about the missiles, because of the use of chemical warfare in the Iran-Iraq war and indications that Syria, too, is seeking a chemical warfare capacity.

Premier Yitzhak Shamir said in a television interview that Syria consistently seeks to arm itself with missiles. "This is not new," he said, "but it is worrying." Shamir would not comment on the report that Syria was seeking missiles from China.

But the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, referred to it earlier this week. He said Israel would develop methods to intercept ground-to-ground missiles in flight, to strike at their launching pads and improve defensive measures to absorb their impact.

**NEW VISA POLICY WON'T LIMIT
FREEDOM OF CHOICE, SHULTZ TOLD**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, June 22 (JTA) -- Israel's decision to issue visas only to those Soviet Jews committed to making aliyah will not prevent Jews from immigrating to the United States and other countries, a delegation of U.S. Jewish leaders told Secretary of State George Shultz on Wednesday.

Morris Abram, who headed the delegation, said he explained to Shultz that under the new Israeli policy "freedom of choice will be exercised in the Soviet Union," rather than in Vienna, where, up to now, the majority of Jews who have left the USSR with Israeli visas have opted to go to the United States.

Abram, who chairs the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, spoke to reporters at the State Department after meeting with Shultz.

The secretary of state "obviously believes in freedom of choice," Abram said. "He did not indicate that he disagreed with the way we have argued for the choice to be exercised, nor did he say he approved."

Abram said that the new policy, announced by the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday, simply means that Soviet Jews who receive an Israeli visa must go directly to Israel, via Romania. Jews who want to immigrate to the United States may now apply for visas directly from those countries.

"We take at face value the Soviet Union's statements that all Jews who wish to go to the West can go to the West," Abram said. He added that under the new policy, to which the Soviets have agreed, "nobody is going to have to go where they don't wish to go." He noted that in recent months, some 300 persons have immigrated directly to the United States.

Most Should Go To Israel

Abram said that while the American Jewish community believes in freedom of choice, it feels the majority of Jews leaving the Soviet Union should go to Israel, because there they will be "redeemed as Jews having been stripped of their traditions for 70 years."

Abram added that the new Israeli policy, which the NCSJ welcomed, only puts into effect a system that would have existed if the Soviet Union had not broken diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967.

Myrna Shinbaum, the NCSJ's director, said that Jews applying for exit visas to Israel or another country must still do so on the grounds of repatriation or family reunification. She said the Soviets have suspended for this year the requirement that the family member abroad be a first-degree relative: a parent, child or sibling.

The NCSJ wants unrestricted emigration for all Jews who want to leave, Shinbaum said. Abram said that emigration figures are "not up enough by a long shot."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said he urged Shultz to stress to the Soviet government the concern about an increase in anti-Semitism in the USSR.

Also participating in the meeting were Constance Smukler, NCSJ vice chairwoman; Jordan Goldman, an NCSJ executive committee member; Mark Levin, the NCSJ's Washington representative; and Albert Chernin, executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

**TWO AILING REFUSENIKS REPORTED
IN LINE TO RECEIVE EXIT VISAS**
By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, June 22 (JTA) -- Western diplomats have been informed by the Soviet government that the emigration of two well-known, ailing refuseniks is imminent.

But the refuseniks themselves, Benjamin Charny and Yuri Zieman, both of Moscow, have not been told they have permission. The Zieman family made headlines during the superpower summit in Moscow, when President Reagan planned, then canceled, a personal visit to their home.

The Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow informed the embassies of the United States, Sweden and Canada that Charny and Zieman would be allowed to leave. On Wednesday, ambassadors of all three nations telephoned the two men to notify them of the news.

In addition, Soviet authorities informed Charny on Tuesday that he was no longer considered to be in possession of "state secrets." This has been the chief reason cited for denying Charny permission to emigrate over the last nine years.

Charny's brother, Leon, who lives in Needham, Mass., said in a telephone interview Wednesday that Benjamin was telephoned Tuesday by the deputy director of the institute where Charny worked 18 years ago. The man, speaking on behalf of the ministry which supervises that institute, told him his secrecy was lifted.

Over a year ago, Charny was told he should not bother to apply to emigrate until 1995.

Refused Just Last Week

Zieman, a refusenik for 11 years, was refused again last week. His daughter, Galina Zieman-Khatutsky, who lives in Brighton, Mass., said in a telephone interview Wednesday that he was given no reason for the decision.

Both Khatutsky and Leon Charny said the two men were suffering greatly because of their medical problems and "the terrible strain."

Zieman was in the hospital with hepatitis in May. He suffered what was diagnosed in November as a brain aneurism and is said to experience double vision and severe headaches.

Leon Charny said he was "terribly worried" for his brother's medical condition. He has been suffering from coronary disease and several forms of cancer during the nine years he has been a refusenik.

The refuseniks' families in the United States were notified of the latest developments by Richard Schifter, U.S. assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs. Initially, all parties decided to observe caution and not alert the news media. They decided otherwise after receiving assurances from U.S. officials.

Assurances From State Department

Khatutsky said Schifter told her that everything was going to be all right. "It's all decided," she said Schifter told her.

But the State Department counseled that they should not expect the emigrations to be settled within the next couple of weeks.

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) telephoned Khatutsky to congratulate her while she was speaking with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Both the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews also welcomed the news.

AUSTRIAN JEWS SHOWING RESTRAINT ON POPE'S MEETING WITH WALDHEIM

By Reinhard Engel

VIENNA, June 22 (JTA) — The Jewish community in Austria is playing it cool with respect to Pope John Paul II's five-day visit here, which begins Thursday.

It will include at least one meeting with President Kurt Waldheim and, for the first time on a papal visit to this country, a meeting with representatives of the Jewish community.

The pontiff is to receive six Jewish leaders here Friday morning. The delegation will include Paul Grosz, president of the Federal Association of Jewish Communities, Chief Rabbi Paul Eisenberg of Vienna and the heads of the Jewish communities in Graz, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck.

Austrian Jews are hardly pleased by the pope's contacts with Waldheim, whose exposed Nazi past has made him anathema to most heads of state and government. But Grosz made it clear the community will react cautiously.

"We will observe carefully whether the pope will remain within his range of diplomatic duties, or whether he will present Waldheim as a white knight. If the latter is the case, we would have to speak up," the Jewish community leader declared.

Grosz flatly denied media reports that he had prepared a strongly worded speech to deliver to the pope in which he would blame the Catholic Church for inciting anti-Semitism and criticize the pontiff for not raising that subject when he met Waldheim at the Vatican a year ago.

The Jewish delegation, however, will present the pope with a resolution stressing the positive results of the Second Vatican Council more than 20 years ago as a basis for continuing Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

U.S. Jews More Outspoken

The Austrian Jewish community is far less confrontational over the issue of the pope and Waldheim than American Jews.

In New York, the executive committee of the American Jewish Congress adopted a resolution May 30 urging the pope not to meet with Waldheim when he goes to Austria.

The resolution stated that if the meeting does take place, "we would hope that its tone will underscore the pope's understanding of the seriousness of the charges against Waldheim."

A New York group calling itself "Zachor-Coalition of Concern," headed by Rabbi Avraham Weiss, has taken out advertisements in The New York Times and other newspapers telling the pope that "by choosing to meet Mr. Waldheim you have morally compromised yourself." Members of the group have left for Vienna, where they plan to stage protests.

But Austrian Jews seem to accept the pope's diplomatic obligations toward a Catholic head of state. Waldheim's trip to the Vatican in June 1987 was not at the pope's invitation, as the President's Office tried to imply, but was requested by Waldheim. The pope rarely denies such requests.

Will Visit Mauthausen

Jewish community leaders here will ask the pope, in the resolution they present to him, to carry the ecumenical message of Vatican II to every city, town and village he visits in Austria.

The pope will make a brief visit to site of

the Mauthausen concentration camp Friday and will meet with former victims. Jewish leaders here express hope that the horrors of the Holocaust will not be played down or compared to other horrible events of the era.

According to Grosz, the Jewish community is asking the pope to acknowledge the sacredness of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. "Austrian Jews welcome all activities of the Austrian Church and the Holy See which fight anti-Semitism," he said.

WEST GERMAN JEWS TRYING TO LIMIT FALLOUT FROM EMBEZZLEMENT CASE

By David Kantor

BONN, June 22 (JTA) — Some members of West Germany's Jewish community were reported this week to be withholding or trying to suppress information in order to minimize the damage done by the Werner Nachmann scandal.

But individuals in the community said Wednesday they will do their best to keep the public informed as more facts unfold implicating the late leader of the Jewish community.

Nachmann is being investigated for embezzling money intended for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution and the large-scale misuse of community funds.

The investigation is now centered in Baden, in southern Germany, where Nachmann headed the local Jewish community in addition to serving as chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. He died suddenly in January.

Community sources revealed that one of the auditors assigned to investigate his illegal activities in Baden had in fact received a \$7,000 loan from Nachmann out of the community's budget.

Nachmann alone controlled the Baden community's finances. He reportedly transferred to it large sums from the reparations account he administered as chairman of the Central Council of Jews.

He channeled this money to secret accounts, to private building projects and to friends and supporters in the community, the community sources said.

Large sums also allegedly went to businesses controlled by Nachmann or by women who had close relations with him.

Press Liaison Fired

Kurt Rosendahl, a journalist hired by the Baden community as its liaison with the news media, was fired, according to reports Tuesday, because he criticized loans given wealthy businessmen who are part of the investigation of the Nachmann scandal.

Rosendahl said Wednesday he was not opposed to loans to community members in financial distress, but he said the kind of loans made by Nachmann were not based on need.

Ury Popper, the new chairman of the Baden Jewish community, told reporters the investigation into Nachmann's affairs was continuing along lines determined by the community's elected bodies.

But one community member, Sigmund Nissenbaum, implied through his lawyer Tuesday that the community was trying to block a full report on the scandal.

Nissenbaum, who claims to be the legal chairman of the Baden community, accused the community of canceling an investigation of Nachmann's activities a year ago. According to his lawyer, Hans Kistner, that was when Nachmann began embezzling on a national scale.