

DIASPORA LEADERS URGE ISRAEL TO RECONSIDER TALKS WITH PLO

By JTA Staff Report

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- Leaders of Diaspora Jewry gathered here for the Prime Minister's Conference on Jewish Solidarity With Israel are urging Israel to reconsider its opposition to negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

But Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told the 300-member conference steering committee Monday that his government was united in opposition to such talks and to the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

He told his audience that the Palestinians living "west of the Jordan" would have to be satisfied with a limited form of self-government as an interim arrangement. The final status of the territories could only be discussed after such an interim arrangement had proved itself for some time.

However, the prime minister did acknowledge that the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza Strip could not continue for long. He said that he would present new ideas for furthering the peace process during his visit to Washington next month, but he did not elaborate.

On another subject, the premier was reported to have told the world Jewish leaders that the "Who Is a Jew" issue is not on the Israeli legislative agenda at present.

He called on Diaspora leaders to work out a formula acceptable to all of the various streams of Judaism.

The prime minister's remarks were made in a closed-door session of the steering committee in advance of Monday night's official opening of the solidarity conference, which is being attended by some 1,200 Jewish leaders from around the world. Shamir briefed reporters on the essence of his remarks after his address.

Recapturing 'Moral High Ground'

Also addressing the steering committee Monday were Vice Premier Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency Executive.

Israeli newspapers had recently criticized the composition of the steering committee, charging that it had been hand-picked by Israeli diplomats, rather than elected by the Jewish organizations represented at the solidarity conference.

But judging by the Diaspora leaders' remarks Monday, more than "yes men" were invited to participate on the committee.

Israel Radio reported that nearly every single speaker from the floor during the steering committee meeting urged Israel to consider negotiating with the PLO now or in the future.

Dr. Lionel Kopelowitz, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jewry, was quoted as asking, "What criteria would the PLO have to fulfill, and what change of policy would have to take place, which would permit Israel to talk to the PLO? Because ultimately talks are held with your enemies, and not with your friends."

"Israel must recapture the moral high ground and provide the agenda for peace for this region,

to which other countries must respond," he said.

Nissim Gaon, president of the World Sephardi Federation, recalled that Sephardi Jews had played a role in promoting the dialogue with the late president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat. The same thing should be done in the future for Israel and the Palestinians, he said.

But Shamir was not in the room when most of this exchange took place.

Labor May Quit Government

Charlotte Jacobson, veteran leader of Hadasah and treasurer of the Jewish National Fund, said she was disappointed that there was no opportunity when the premier addressed the delegates to discuss his forthcoming trip to the United States.

She warned that American public opinion was turning against Israel and in favor of PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

In his remarks to the leaders, Vice Premier Peres hinted that his Labor Party might have to pull out of the Likud-led national unity government before the year is out, if the two sides cannot reach agreement on an approach to accelerate the peace process.

"I think we shall have to make up our minds in the coming months," he said. "If we can find a joint solution, fine. If not, we shall have to make a historic choice. We will have to make it in a fair way, a united way, in a civilized way," he said.

Peres, who serves as finance minister in the Cabinet, told the steering committee that the Jewish people had never ruled over another people, and that no other people had ever ruled over the Jewish people.

No concessions should be made to terrorism or violence, he said, but concessions should be made for peace.

Foreign Minister Arens, a Likud ally of Shamir's, told the steering committee Monday that the Palestinian uprising would not destroy the State of Israel.

"But if this series of violent acts brings about political ramifications and creates an impression that Israel is isolated, that it doesn't have the support anymore of the Jewish community in the U.S., or other Jewish communities, that the U.S.-Israeli relationship has been damaged, then mortal danger will be lurking in the shadow for Israel and the Jewish people," he warned.

He urged world Jewry to express solidarity with the Jewish state.

Arens noted that the same chemical weapons that served to annihilate millions of Jews during the Holocaust were now surfacing in the Middle East.

Iraq used chemical warfare against the Kurds, and no one protested, he said. By the same logic, he said, the Iraqis and others will not hesitate to use it against Israel.

The conference itself was officially opened Monday night by President Chaim Herzog, who told the delegates that they were here not as supporters of any given policy, but as loyal Jews.

(Contributing to this report were JTA Managing Editor Elli Wohlgelemer and Israel correspondents Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel.)

CONFERENCE INTENDED TO BACK ISRAEL, NOT SHAMIR, SAYS U.S. JEWISH LEADER

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- As Jews from around the world gathered in Jerusalem on Monday for the Prime Minister's Conference on Jewish Solidarity With Israel, a top American Jewish leader rejected allegations that the hidden agenda of the conference is to endorse Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's policies.

"This conference is not a theater. It is real," said Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"We want to give (Shamir) the backing to engage in the peace process," he told reporters over breakfast Monday at the Jerusalem Laromme Hotel.

He said that by convening this conference, Shamir was taking a certain risk since he would be opening himself up to criticism over his policy.

But either way, Reich added, Shamir will gain. Either a majority of Jewish leaders will support the government's policies or the prime minister will be exposed to a variety of views.

The real purpose of the conference, he said, is to express Jewish unity in support of Israel's needs.

Ben-Gurion Airport was crowded Monday afternoon with arriving delegates from such organizations as the Jewish National Fund and American Jewish Congress. The conference opened Monday night at Binyanei Ha'uma, Jerusalem's convention center.

Reich praised Jewish leaders for coming in such large numbers for a conference that barely lasts three days. He noted that participants are paying their own fares.

1,200 Participants

The conference is expected to draw some 1,200 Jewish leaders from around the world. Shamir had originally hoped for 3,000 delegates, but Reich said he expected even smaller numbers than those who eventually showed up.

Reich chose his words carefully when asked how the conference would deal with the sensitive issue of negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"Very few of the participants of the solidarity conference would support a Palestinian state," he said, "but there might be some who might support negotiations with the PLO."

He said that when members of the Conference of Presidents met at the White House earlier this month with President Bush, they did not get the impression that the United States was rushing to press Israel to enter into negotiations with the PLO.

Rather, he said, he expected the United States to pressure the PLO to allow Palestinians in the territories to elect their own representatives, as Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has proposed.

Reich said he expects Shamir to come to Washington next month with ideas that will "move the peace process forward. I think he is bringing peace proposals that will be acceptable to Washington," he said.

Reich, who also is president of B'nai B'rith International, described Shamir as "a very sharp, a very smart and a very capable leader to effectuate a peace initiative that will be acceptable by the Americans."

But peace will not come immediately after the Shamir visit," Reich cautioned. "We waited 30 years for the Camp David accords, and any progress will take time."

PEACE TALKS CAN'T EXCLUDE PLO, SECRET ISRAELI REPORT ADVISES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 20 (JTA) -- A secret Israeli intelligence report prepared for top government officials says a dialogue with the Palestinians is impossible without the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The report, which says the PLO has undergone a substantive change for the better, also concludes that the Palestinian uprising will not stop in the foreseeable future unless Israel engages in talks with the PLO.

Details of the annual intelligence report, which was recently submitted to senior government figures in Jerusalem, were leaked to the Israeli news media Monday, possibly to coincide with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's convening of an international Jewish solidarity conference in Jerusalem.

Shamir has resolutely refused ever to negotiate with the PLO, a position that was challenged at the conference Monday.

The report was prepared by what were described as "authorized elements for appraisal," all of whom are said to have agreed that the intifada has been a catalyst for all political processes connected with the Middle East conflict.

Those "elements" told the political higher echelons that a real change has occurred in the PLO, which now sincerely desires to find a realistic political solution to the Israel-Palestinian problem.

They noted this commitment is supported by the abundance of statements by PLO leaders on the issue.

The report also says there are no leaders in the territories who are not directed by the PLO. This would quash Shamir's intention to negotiate only with Palestinian "moderates" in the territories.

Concern Over Iraqi Role

The report says that even the most fervent supporters of Jordan's King Hussein have fallen silent in face of the king's decision, unchanged since last July, to sever all ties to the West Bank and leave its destiny up to the PLO.

The report's authors believe the United States and Soviet Union now have a common interest in settling the conflict, and that this will necessarily bring about coordination between the superpowers on the problem.

The report raises concern about the economic cooperation agreement signed recently by Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and North Yemen. It points out that the group's strength in the Arab world is increasing.

It observes that if the political process were to run aground again, this confederation could become a major threat to Israel's security, because Iraq would place its awesome military might at the group's disposal.

The report's authors believe it is up to Israel to decide whether this alliance remains merely a basis for political and economic cooperation -- or whether it expands to include hostile military coordination in the event of Israeli rejection of a political solution.

**IDF RAIDS BASES IN SOUTH LEBANON,
IN AFTERMATH OF TERRORIST ATTACKS**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 20 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force, beset in recent days by infiltrations of its southern and eastern borders, demonstrated Monday that it is not neglecting its vigilance against terrorism from the north.

IDF planes attacked terrorist targets in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, striking bases of Ahmed Jabril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, northeast of Zahleh.

The Israeli army spokesman reported that all planes returned safely to their base, despite anti-aircraft fire directed at them from Syrian and terrorist positions.

According to reports from Beirut, five people were killed and 15 injured in the attack. Other sources said as many as 15 were killed in the attack.

Jabril's group is a rejectionist offshoot of the Palestine Liberation Organization allied with Syria and strongly opposed to Yasir Arafat's leadership of the PLO and his recent conciliatory stands.

The group is suspected as being the party responsible for blowing up Pan American World Airways Flight 103, in which 270 people were killed last December in Scotland.

News reports described Monday's attack by Israel as an act of retaliation for recent terrorist assaults on Israel and quoted Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin as saying he believed that "those who deserved to get it got it."

**SOLDIERS AND DOCTOR BUNGLED
RESPONSE TO RAID IN THE ARAVA**
By Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- The Israeli soldiers who were attacked by terrorists in the Arava on Friday night did not follow army procedure in handling the incident, according to military sources who investigated the tragedy.

One soldier was killed and a Bedouin tracker was wounded in the assault, which occurred near Moshav Hatzeva, just inside Israel's eastern border with Jordan.

Military sources said Monday that the soldiers should have tried to "assault and eliminate" the terrorists before evacuating and treating the wounded.

But the sources also placed fault on the army doctor who treated the soldier, criticizing him for not knowing the area and wasting time getting to the injured.

Five soldiers routinely patrolling the usually quiet border Friday night were alerted by the tracker to footprints on the dirt path that runs along the border fence.

The tracker, who left the patrol vehicle to investigate, was subsequently surprised by a command in English to stop. A gunman hidden in a bush then opened fire on the tracker and the vehicle.

As the soldiers returned the fire, another gunman hiding in the bushes opened fire, mortally wounding Sgt. Maj. Oren Lior.

The terrorists' subsequent silence tricked the soldiers into believing they had killed their attackers. But the terrorists later slipped back through the fence into Jordan, where they were subsequently apprehended, according to Jordanian officials.

The military doctor reportedly was so unfamiliar with the terrain that he and a non-commissioned officer who accompanied him could not figure out how to exit a nearby moshav's locked gate.

As a result, the doctor and officer were apparently detained 40 minutes after Lior was shot, sources said.

**MUBARAK PRAISES ISRAEL ON TABA,
BUT CRITICIZES SLOW PEACE ADVANCES**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 20 (JTA) -- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warmly praised Israel on Monday for peaceably relinquishing the Taba beach resort to Egypt and suggested it augured well for Arab-Israel relations.

But he also criticized the Jewish state for taking "stumbling" steps in the peace process with the Palestinians, saying Israel's "resort to violence" in trying to quell the 15-month-long intifada "can only breed more violence."

In what was described as a "major and important address" to the Egyptian Parliament, convened to celebrate Egypt's new sovereignty over Taba, Mubarak said Israel had fulfilled all its obligations under the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, which was signed 10 years ago this Sunday.

Addressing the Egyptian people in his televised speech, Mubarak repeated the message of amity and peace he delivered at Taba on Sunday, when the Egyptian flag was officially hoisted over the enclave.

He also reiterated Sunday's call on Israelis not to fear the Palestine Liberation Organization and to be willing to meet its representatives for negotiations.

He said the fulfillment of the Taba agreement would help spread an atmosphere of "peace and reconciliation," not only in relations between Egypt and Israel, but also between Israel and other Arab countries.

**SOUTH AFRICAN CAMERA CREW
MAKING TOURISM FILM IN ISRAEL**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 20 (JTA) -- The Israeli Ministry of Tourism has invited a camera crew from South Africa's government-run television to prepare a promotional film on tourist sites in Israel, Ha'aretz reported Monday.

The paper points out that this contravenes the 1987 Cabinet decision to reduce the scale of ties with South Africa, for which Israel has been roundly criticized.

The South African crew is now filming in Israel, but opposition from the Foreign Ministry has blocked producers from interviewing government officials.

The South African Jewish community has been regarded for many years as the most stalwart Zionist community of all Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

But in the past several years as racial problems have escalated in that country, emigrating Jews have chosen largely to settle in Australia or other countries.

The effort to lure South African visitors is apparently part of a global attempt by Israel to improve its lot as a tourist attraction, a major source of revenue that has been whittled away since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising.

NATIONAL FRONT WINS MAYORAL RACE, COUNCIL SEATS IN 143 LOCALITIES

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, March 20 (JTA) -- The extreme right-wing National Front won a local race for the first time Sunday in the second round of French municipal elections.

As a result, one of Jean-Marie Le Pen's nationalist followers will become mayor of Saint-Gilles, a 10,000-inhabitant city in southern France. And Le Pen himself will sit on the Paris City Council.

The National Front also won some 800 seats on the municipal councils of 143 localities, scoring over 30 percent of the total vote in several cities.

Though the party fell short of making a national mark and also failed to conclude alliances with any of the mainstream right-wing parties, it scored enough of a victory to continue playing a major role in French politics.

The National Front ran in only some 200 cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants. Most of its votes were wasted as the mainstream right-wing parties refused its offers for joint lists or coalition arrangement.

Observers stress, however, that if the National Front does as well in the June elections for the European Parliament, it will be able to send some 30 deputies to the Strasbourg-based assembly.

Seats in the European Parliament, which is the legislative body of the 12-nation European Community, are allocated on a strict proportional basis.

Strong Showing In South

The National Front advocates the expulsion of foreigners from France, particularly Arabs and Africans. Party leader Le Pen denies he is anti-Semitic. But his crude jokes about gas chambers and the Holocaust have antagonized many Jews.

In Sunday's voting, Charles-de Chambrun, a minister under former President Georges Pompidou, won the Saint-Gilles City Hall with 39.53 percent of the vote. In the second round, a plurality is sufficient to elect the mayor.

The National Front also did well in several other cities in southern France, scoring 35 percent of the popular vote in Cagnes-sur-Mer, close to 30 percent in Perpignan and close to 25 percent in Toulon.

In Nice, a tourist paradise and the capital of the French Riviera, the National Front scored close to 20 percent and won several key seats on the City Council.

Le Pen, who ran in one of the Paris districts, lost several points since the first round of voting on March 12. But he still managed to score over 11 percent of the vote, enough to give him a seat on the City Council.

HAREDIM BATTLE WOMEN AT THE WALL

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 20 (JTA) -- Ultra-Orthodox men who threw chairs at a group of women attempting to conduct services at the Western Wall themselves became the target of the Israeli police on Monday.

Police lobbed tear gas to disperse the ultra-Orthodox men, who were enraged to see about 60 women conducting group prayers at the wall.

Women representing various movements

within Judaism were confronted by a line of ultra-Orthodox men blocking their way as they tried to go past the security check. Police guards intervened to allow the women get to the women's section at the wall.

Then, some of the haredim tore down the division between the men's and women's sections, with some of the men hoisting chairs to throw at the women. One woman was hit on the head.

The police threw tear gas and everyone dispersed.

STUDY PROJECTS HALF A MILLION MESSIANIC JEWS BY THE YEAR 2000

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, March 20 (JTA) -- Some 350,000 Jews already believe in Jesus as their saviour, and the number may swell to half a million by the year 2000, according to a recent study by a Christian fundamentalist group.

The results were reported by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which found the study in a Christian fundamentalist magazine, titled A.D. 2000 Together.

The study, which was conducted by an Anglican missionary, David Barret, was commissioned by the North American Renewal Service Committee, an organization in Oklahoma City that studies the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal Christians.

A.D. 2000 Together is published by Charismatic Renewal Services, a group in South Bend, Ind., that "does work on behalf of the North American Renewal Service," said a spokesperson reached by telephone in South Bend.

Barret was an Anglican missionary to Kenya, a Vatican consultant on world evangelism, editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia and a statistician for the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, according to Michael Skobac, who is special consultant to the JCRC's Task Force on Missionaries and Cults.

Skobac, who is also New York director for "Jews for Judaism," did not speak with Barret, the magazine's publishers or the parent group in Oklahoma.

2 Percent Of World Jewry

Barret's report places the number of Jewish believers in Jesus at about 2 percent of the world Jewish population, according to Skobac.

He said Barret's study examined the numbers of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians worldwide over the past 90 years.

The charismatic branch of Christianity emphasizes the work of the "Holy Spirit" and is often associated with ecstatic practices by faith-healers and those who speak in tongues.

The study asserts that there are over 1 million Pentecostal missionaries in the world today.

The report, which is divided into different ethnic groups, has an entry on Hebrew Christians, according to Skobac.

Barret writes that of the 350,000 Jews who have converted to Christianity, about 140,000 have continued to identify as Jews and have chosen to affiliate with "Messianic synagogues," rather than assimilating into Christian churches.

Messianic churches hold Christian prayer services with Jewish "flavor," Skobac said.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency was unable to obtain a copy of the report or determine how the statistics were computed.