



ARAB LEAGUE MEETS WITH BAKER ASKS FOR REOPENING OF PLO OFFICE

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 27 (JTA) -- Secretary of State James Baker was urged by the Arab League on Thursday to reopen the Palestine Liberation Organization's Washington office.

"I am under the impression that he does not oppose reopening it, but he wants to have the proper timing," Clovis Maksoud, the Arab League's permanent representative to the United Nations, told reporters after a 35-minute meeting with Baker at the State Department.

But a State Department source said, "I do not believe that language was used." Baker "explained that our position has not changed," the source said.

On Sept. 15, 1987, the United States ordered the PLO to close its Washington office by Dec. 1 of that year, a decision upheld by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Since then, however, PLO leader Yasir Arafat has renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist.

Baker said Thursday that to reopen the office is "within the discretion of the president, who has to certify that the PLO is not a terrorist organization," Maksoud said.

Kaddoumi Wants To Visit U.S.

Maksoud also announced that Farouk Kaddoumi, the PLO's political director, wants to visit the United States "sometime after the Ramadan feast," which ends May 5.

But he said he did not ask Baker about granting a visa to allow the PLO official to enter the United States. Last fall, the United States barred Arafat from coming to New York to address the United Nations.

The meeting with Baker was arranged at the request of the Arab League two weeks ago, the State Department source said. Accompanying Maksoud at the meeting were North Yemen's ambassador to the United States, Mohsin Alaini, and Kuwait's ambassador, Sheikh Saud Nasir al-Sabah.

On the fate of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Arab League delegation informed Baker that it considers Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's proposal for elections in the territories "part of a charade," Maksoud said.

The elections "are intended to undermine the mandate and the representative character of the PLO," he added.

He said he told Baker the Shamir plan "was intended to frustrate the international outrage concerning the practices of Israel in the occupied territories."

The State Department source said Baker "reiterated his belief that the idea has merit" and that "those committed to peace should not dismiss it."

Baker asked Maksoud about the PLO's application for full status in the World Health Organization and other specialized U.N. agencies.

Said Maksoud, "We consider this to be a right of the Palestinians, and we are going to proceed with these discussions within the United Nations."

SHAMIR PLAN 'ALIVE AND KICKING' DESPITE ARAB REJECTION, SAYS U.S.

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 27 (JTA) -- The United States tried Thursday to put the best face on a statement released the day before by 80 Palestinian leaders rejecting Israel's call for elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"The fact that Palestinians inside and outside of the West Bank and Gaza are debating and discussing the election idea is a positive and healthy sign," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said at her daily briefing. "We are only at the beginning of a process."

Tutwiler was commenting on reports of an underground leaflet circulating in the territories and signed by Palestinian academics, business leaders, journalists, doctors and engineers.

The document rejects Yitzhak Shamir's call for Palestinian elections, which the Israeli prime minister has said would allow Palestinians to choose representatives to negotiate an interim period of autonomy with Israel.

Instead, the leaflet insists that Israel begin negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization and take part in an international Middle East peace conference, both of which the government adamantly opposes.

"This isolated occurrence of elections does not illustrate how it will lead to the end of the occupation and to Palestinian national independence," says the document, according to a copy excerpted in The Washington Post.

PLO Statement Differs

The document also reportedly calls for a U.N.-supervised withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories before any election could take place.

The document took a much more rejectionist tone than a statement made earlier in the week by Salah Khalaf, a deputy to PLO leader Yasir Arafat, that the PLO would accept elections if they were made part of an agreement for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories.

Khalaf, also known as Abu Iyad, said this was agreed upon during a three-day meeting in Tunis of all PLO factions, which ended Monday.

"We can discuss elections as one stage in a series of defined stages, as long as it is clear that the final settlement is self-determination and Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territory under (U.N. Security Council) Resolution 242," Khalaf said Tuesday.

But Khalaf said that if the elections would lead only to autonomy "then we reject autonomy, and we have rejected it in the past."

Palestinians consider "autonomy" a barely disguised continuance of the status quo in the territories, while they use "self-determination" as a synonym for a Palestinian state. Israel rejects a Palestinian state out of hand.

In an apparent response to Khalaf's remarks, the United States on Wednesday said that it was "encouraged" by what it called "the willingness of Israelis, Palestinians and others in the area to explore the concept of elections as part of a broader political process."

But that was before the rejection statement

by 80 Palestinian leaders was reported. And meanwhile, Khalaf was amending his remarks. He was quoted Wednesday as saying, "We cannot accept elections in the shadow of occupation and without international supervision after the withdrawal of Israeli forces."

Eban Meets With Baker

Even in the face of those comments and the signed leaflet, U.S. officials are not yet prepared to let go of the election idea.

Tutwiler, when asked Thursday if U.S. officials believe Israel's election idea is "alive and kicking," responded, "Yes, we do."

Secretary of State James Baker had no illusions that Shamir's proposals would be embraced in whole by the Palestinian leadership inside or outside the territories, according to former Israeli Knesset member Abba Eban.

Eban met Thursday morning with Baker and Dennis Ross, director of the State Department's policy and planning staff, at the State Department's invitation.

He said Baker assured him that the United States will continue to display "patience and perseverance" in the face of conflicting reactions to the plan.

"It's like a tennis match, and the ball will go from one court to another," Eban said in a telephone interview. "The U.S. would like to keep the ball in the air as long as it can."

(JTA staff writer Andrew Silow Carroll in New York and correspondents David Friedman in Washington and Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

KOLLEK CHIDES CHURCH LEADERS FOR STATEMENT ON THE UPRISING

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 27 (JTA) -- Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek hit back hard Thursday at a number of prominent local Christian church leaders who had publicly criticized Israel the day before over its handling of the Palestinian uprising in the administered territories.

"It seems that Islamic terrorism and threats by leaders of the intifada have forced the heads of the Christian churches to give in to their dictates," said the mayor. "I suspect that this is the background to their criticism of the Israeli government."

"I regret their pronouncement, even if they were under pressure," he said.

Kollek was reacting to a statement published Wednesday by the heads of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Syrian Orthodox and Anglican churches in Jerusalem, protesting Israel's "excessive use of force" and "unprovoked harassment" against Palestinians.

The first three denominations are the largest among the Christian churches in the Holy Land. All told, an estimated 50,000 Christians, most of them Palestinians, live in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The church leaders' statement called on the international community to work for "a just and speedy solution of the Palestinian problem."

"In Jerusalem, on the West Bank and in Gaza, our people experience in their daily lives constant deprivation of their fundamental rights because of arbitrary actions deliberately taken by the authorities," the statement said.

It spoke of "unarmed and innocent people being killed by the unwarranted use of firearms."

It attacked arrests without trial and demolition of Arab homes, and singled out for special condemnation "frequent shooting incidents in the vicinity of holy places."

The statement demanded that Israel respect free access for all believers to all holy places--a veiled reference to the current restriction placed by the authorities on West Bank residents who wish to worship at the mosques on the Temple Mount. The ban was imposed after mass rioting there earlier this month, when rock-throwing spread to the Western Wall area.

Kollek noted sourly in his response the church leaders' "silence and lack of condemnation when terrorists kill Jews, when stones are thrown at worshippers at the Western Wall and when Jewish cemeteries in Jerusalem are desecrated."

There have been frequent instances of desecration at the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

ARMY BLOCKS 'MEMORIAL HIKE' FOR GIRL KILLED IN BEITA

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 27 (JTA) -- The Israeli army blocked West Bank settlers Thursday from entering Beita village, where they planned to hold a "first anniversary memorial hike" for an Israeli girl killed there a year ago.

Israel Defense Force troops allowed about 150 youthful West Bank settlers and right-wing supporters to walk in the vicinity of the Arab village, but not to enter it, fearing a repeat of last year's incident.

On April 6, 1988, 15-year-old Tirza Porat was killed in the confrontation that ensued after a group of Israeli teen-age hikers on a Passover outing entered the Arab village, which lies south of Nablus.

News reports first indicated that she had been killed by village residents. But an army report later revealed that the bullet that killed her came from the gun of an Israeli chaperon escorting the hikers.

Two residents of Beita were slightly injured in a clash with soldiers Thursday morning, while the Jewish hikers were in the vicinity.

At least four Palestinians were killed in other clashes during the final days of Passover and scores of others were reported wounded.

8-Year-Old Killed

On Tuesday, passengers of three Israeli vehicles that were stoned in Hebron got out of their cars, smashed windows of local cars and stores, and traded blows with Palestinians, the police reported.

A similar incident occurred in Hebron on Monday, when buses carrying Israeli tourists on Pesach holiday outings were stoned.

The IDF said that three persons, including an 8-year-old boy, were killed and 23 injured by soldiers responding to riots during the holiday period. But Palestinian sources said that the IDF had killed four people and wounded another 80.

A fifth Arab death is believed to have been carried out by Palestinians who claimed their victim was "liquidated" for having collaborated with the Israeli authorities.

During the past week, Palestinian assailants have killed 10 West Bank and Gaza Strip Arabs, either for collaborating with the Israelis or for carrying out "criminal activities," such as drug trafficking.

**MITTERRAND TELLS JEWISH LEADERS
HE DOESN'T NECESSARILY BACK PLO**

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, April 27 (JTA) -- President Francois Mitterrand has reaffirmed his friendship with Israel and assured the Jewish community here that his intention to meet here next week with Yasir Arafat does not mean he now supports the Palestine Liberation Organization's aims.

"Talking does not mean accepting" the PLO's objectives, Mitterrand said in a letter addressed to CRIF, the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions.

In the letter, addressed to CRIF President Theo Klein and released for publication Thursday, Mitterrand said that his "quest for peace is based on dialogue and this means the need to hear all the parties" to the Middle East dispute.

The president added his wishes to the Jewish community on the occasion of Passover, recalling the traditional greeting "Next year in Jerusalem." Mitterrand added that "France does not forget the victims of the Holocaust nor those of blind terrorism."

Klein welcomed Mitterrand's letter as a "positive step," but said that neither he nor any members of the organized community are prepared to meet with the PLO leader.

Arafat is due to arrive here Tuesday for a two-day official visit at the invitation of Mitterrand, his first visit to a major Western country.

He will meet with Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, former Premier Raymond Barre and the three former French foreign ministers with whom he has met: Jean-Francois Poncet, Jean Sauvarnagues and Claude Cheysson. He also will be the guest of honor at a banquet given by Dumas, which Premier Michel Rocard is due to attend.

Arabs To Stage Major Rally

Mitterrand is due to confer with President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker on May 18 and 19. French officials say he will report to them on his meeting with Arafat.

Several civil rights organizations as well as the Union of Arab Immigrants have called for a mass gathering on Tuesday to express their support for Mitterrand's decision to meet with Arafat. The demonstration will coincide with a rally called by the Jewish community to protest the Arafat visit.

The Union of Arab Immigrants hopes to demonstrate the numerical weight of French Moslems, who are believed to number more than 1.5 million people. The French Jewish population is no more than 600,000.

In recent weeks, French Arabs have entered the political scene, and several will run for the European Parliament in June on the lists of practically all major political parties. This phenomenon is viewed with anxiety by Jews here.

A public opinion poll published Thursday shows that Mitterrand's popularity rating has increased by 5 percent since the announcement of his forthcoming meeting with Arafat, and this in spite of the Jewish community's strong negative reaction.

The French opposition parties have either backed the president's initiative or refrained from commenting on it.

Even Simone Veil, a major opposition leader and survivor of Auschwitz, has said that the meeting could help in the search for a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict.

**CANADIAN NEWSPAPER CHAIN BUYS
MAJOR SHARES OF JERUSALEM POST**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 27 (JTA) -- A Canadian-based newspaper chain has won the top bid for a controlling interest in The Jerusalem Post, Israel's only English-language daily paper.

An agreement in principle was reached Tuesday between Hollinger Inc. and Koor Industries, the Histadrut labor federation conglomerate that is liquidating the 55 percent block of shares it now holds.

The agreement was signed by Israel Investors Corporation, the Koor subsidiary that owns the shares, and Hollinger President David Radler of Vancouver.

Shimon Ravid, Koor's financial director, declined to name the sum to be paid, but confirmed that the Canadian bid was "by far the highest of the eight submitted last week."

The sums mentioned vary between \$17.5 million and \$20.6 million. Ari Rath, co-editor and managing director of the Post, said the amount was "probably closer to the \$17.5 million figure" -- more than twice the \$8 million offered by the next highest bidder, U.S. businessman Arye Genger, a former Israeli.

A joint bid by Robert Maxwell and Charles Bronfman was the third largest and considerably lower than the top two.

Rath told Israel Radio Thursday that he, Co-Editor Erwin Frankel and the Post's editorial staff were satisfied with the purchase by Hollinger, who has promised to maintain the newspaper's independence and journalistic integrity and to avoid making major staff changes.

Editors And Staff Reassured

Rath appeared relieved that the left-leaning paper had not been sold to either Genger or Maxwell. Genger is a protégé of Industry and Trade Minister Ariel Sharon, of whom the Post has been highly critical in the past.

Maxwell, who now holds 30 percent of the shares of the afternoon newspaper Ma'ariv, recently criticized its editor for publishing stories on a secret intelligence report that appeared to challenge the assumptions behind some of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's longstanding policies.

The Hollinger Corp. owns close to 80 daily newspapers in the United States and Canada, as well as the Daily Telegraph in Britain. It also has some 120 weeklies, including Saturday Night magazine in Canada and The Spectator in Britain.

The Canadians technically will be buying 55 percent of the shares of the Palestine Post Co., the Post's holding company, which still maintains the 60-year-old paper's original name. They will get half the shares of Jerusalem Post publications, which include the newspaper's lucrative international edition, and its printing presses, which do a healthy general printing business.

Hollinger reportedly has indicated it may be interested in buying the remaining 45 percent of Post shares, now owned by Bank Hapoalim.

The Hollinger press empire, a public company registered on the Toronto Stock Exchange, is controlled by Conrad Black, David Radler and V. White, currently serving as principal secretary to the Canadian prime minister.

Radler is quoted by Ma'ariv Thursday as stressing that it is Hollander policy to give free reign to the individual editors and editorial staffs of the newspapers it owns.

NEW HUMAN RIGHTS LAW COULD SPLIT WORLD JEWRY, REFORM LEADER FEARS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 27 (JTA) -- A proposed Israeli law guaranteeing human rights has as much potential as the "Who Is a Jew" amendment to split American and Diaspora Jewry from Israel, the head of the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary warned this week.

The reason is that "while in principle it contains provisions for the free expression of religion, it de facto separates out from that the areas of marriage and divorce," Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion said here Tuesday.

"Authority in those key areas is maintained by the Orthodox religious courts," he told reporters at a National Press Club breakfast meeting.

He was referring to the fact that weddings and divorces performed in Israel by Reform and Conservative rabbis are not recognized by the government as valid.

The new law is seen as a step toward a written constitution for Israel, and its provisions are expected to be included in the constitution. It provides for a special constitutional court that would rule on whether proposed legislation violates the provisions of the human rights law.

Gottschalk said that while some members of the Knesset would like to see marriage and divorce included in the law, they appear to be willing to go along with the exclusion to prevent opposition by the Orthodox parties to the entire law.

Justice Minister Dan Meridor has predicted that the law will be adopted by a broad majority "within a reasonable period."

"As a political compromise, it is understandable. As a compromise of principle, it is incomprehensible," Gottschalk said. "At this juncture in the development of the state it should certainly have been included in the total package."

Could End 'Who Is a Jew' Effort

Gottschalk said he believed that if the human rights bill contained provisions for the complete free exercise of religion, it would put an end to the Orthodox parties' efforts to amend the Law of Return to reject as Jews those converted by Reform and Conservative rabbis.

An agreement by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir last December to back such an amendment caused a storm of protests from American Jews, which resulted in Shamir backing off.

While the issue "was put to rest for now," the amendment is still in the Knesset and "will come to light again, certainly by the time the next election comes around," Gottschalk said.

"The human rights bill gives us an opportunity to discuss this issue again before it heats up and surfaces" in the next election, he said.

While conceding that the Reform movement is not completely happy with the Law of Return as it is presently written, he said that "one could live with it." But he stressed that any attempt to amend it will result in the non-Orthodox losing ground they have gained in Israel.

He said the issue does not personally affect a large number of people, although it could be in the thousands if the numbers of Soviet Jews going to Israel increases greatly. Many are married to non-Jews or had non-Orthodox weddings.

"It is truly a battle over principle -- religious equality to all who identify themselves with

the Jewish people," Gottschalk said.

To foster such equality, he urged that Israel recognize Reform rabbis and institutions in Israel. Currently only Orthodox rabbis enjoy recognition.

Gottschalk said that while HUC-JIR was given government land for its Jerusalem campus, it was recognized as an educational institution, not a religious institution. Only Orthodox synagogues receive government funds.

Gottschalk conceded that the Reform movement has expanded its own concept of "Who is a Jew" by declaring that someone is a Jew if he or she has a Jewish father or mother. Halacha requires a Jewish mother.

But he argued that this was not a new concept, but rather a return to an "ancient tradition," since from biblical times to the Roman conquest "your status was determined through your father's house."

He said that during the Rabbinic Period it was decided that a Jew was someone born of a Jewish mother since, with the Roman conquest, many women were taken by soldiers. Children were born and no one knew who were their fathers.

He said this was a correct approach, but "I don't think it was in the mind of the rabbis to exclude the others."

DUTCH NAZI REPORTEDLY DEAD 3 MONTHS AFTER BEING FREED

By Henrietta Boas

AMSTERDAM, April 27 (JTA) -- One of the two final Nazi war criminals released from Dutch jails in January has reportedly died in West Germany, according to a director at the Dutch prison.

Ferdinand aus der Funten, 79, who was released Jan. 27, is reported to have died from a brain hemorrhage, according to Alexander Schoonen, deputy director of Koepel Prison in Breda.

The news comes on the heels of a report that seven Dutch groups that provide material aid to victims of World War II have demanded some \$75 million annually to compensate for psychological damage caused by the release of aus der Funten and Franz Fischer, as well as the official Dutch representation at the funeral of Japanese Emperor Hirohito.

Aus der Funten, a captain in the SS, was deputy director of the office responsible for deporting Jews to death camps, overseeing all Jewish deportations from the Netherlands from 1941 to the end of the war.

Schoonen said aus der Funten died sometime in the last few weeks. He said he did not know where he had died, saying only that he knew the German had "changed hiding places" frequently after being released.

The Dutch groups dealing with wartime reparations have requested the additional \$75 million to use in each of the next two to three years.

The release of aus der Funten and Fischer, as well as the Dutch presence at Hirohito's funeral, evoked an emotional outpouring here from those who were prisoners of the Nazis in Europe and of the Japanese in what were then the Dutch East Indies.

The seven organizations say they received many thousands of calls for help from war victims who were seriously disturbed by the two events, and that as a result, the organizations had to engage additional professional staff.