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CANTORS ASSEMBLY AGAIN TURNS DOWN PROPOSAL TO ADMIT QUALIFIED WOMEN

KIAMESHA LAKE, N.Y., May 16 (JTA) -- For the second year in a row, the Cantors Assembly has rejected a proposal to offer membership to women who receive cantorial degrees from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

The vote on a motion to amend the assembly's by-laws to admit women members was 108-82, 19 votes short of the two-thirds majority required for passage.

The balloting took place here Tuesday during the 42nd annual convention of the assembly, which is affiliated with the Conservative movement and is the world's largest body of hazzanim. Cantor Robert Kieval of Rockville, Md., was elected president of the assembly, succeeding Cantor Solomon Mendelson of Long Beach, N.Y.

Since 1987, JTS has granted the diploma of hazzan to women who have successfully completed the required course of study at its Cantors Institute. But the Cantors Assembly, a professional organization of Conservative cantors, has not yet recognized women graduates of the institute.

Last May, a 97-95 majority of the assembly voted against a motion to admit qualified women cantors. This year, the forces supporting the admission of women picked up 13 votes, but that was not enough to change the rules.

In a statement issued by the assembly after the vote, outgoing President Mendelson said, "The issue of admitting women cantors to membership is a sensitive and emotional one that poses complex questions of tradition, religious authority, the status of women in the synagogue and many other factors."

He added, "The Cantors Assembly calls on all its members and the American Jewish community, whatever their personal feelings, to accept this decision with understanding."

'Saddened And Disappointed'

Mendelson also pointed out that for years the Cantors Assembly has been providing scholarship assistance to both male and female students at the Cantors Institute.

"We shall, of course, continue this procedure in the future," he said.

A statement issued by women cantors and cantorial students at JTS said: "We are saddened and disappointed that qualified women cantors have once again been denied membership in the Cantors Assembly.

"But the future is very clear. A majority of our colleagues already demand that women be admitted to this professional association. We know that all members of the Cantors Assembly will soon realize the invaluable contributions that women cantors are making to Jewish life.

"Together with those colleagues who lobbied passionately on our behalf, we will continue to insist that qualified women be granted admission to our movement's professional organization."

Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum, who was re-elected executive vice president of the Cantors Assembly, acknowledged that the majority vote in favor of the admission of women cantors reflected "a change in mood and attitude" of the organization.

U.S. WILL RAISE REFUGEE QUOTA TO ALLOW 19,000 MORE FROM USSR
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 16 (JTA) -- The Bush administration is expected to announce Wednesday that it will raise the refugee quota to allow 19,000 additional Soviet emigrants to enter the United States in the next four months, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency has learned.

This would raise the refugee quota for this fiscal year to 43,500, meeting the anticipated flow of as many as 40,000 Soviet Jews to the United States this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

The overwhelming number of Soviet refugees are Jews.

According to a Justice Department source, Congress will be officially informed of the move Wednesday, when Attorney General Dick Thornburgh is scheduled to meet with the chairmen and ranking Republicans of the House and Senate Judiciary subcommittees on immigration.

The quota for Southeast Asian refugees is also being increased to offset a transfer earlier this year of "refugee slots" from that region to the Soviet Union, one source said.

The Refugee Act of 1980 requires the executive branch to notify Congress before increasing the refugee ceiling.

Sources said Thornburgh and Secretary of State James Baker, who are required under the refugee act to consult with Congress, decided two weeks ago that rather than waiting for both to be in town at the same time, Thornburgh would do the consulting himself.

Will Reach Quota In Two Weeks

The planned consultation comes as Congress is considering a supplemental appropriations bill that would increase the State Department funds for Soviet refugees this year by \$85 million.

The United States is expected to reach its existing quota on refugees from the Soviet Union in two weeks.

If the quota is not raised before then, some 10,000 Soviet Jews currently waiting in Rome for permission to enter the United States would be stranded there indefinitely, said Mark Talisman, Washington representative of the Council of Jewish Federations.

But the additional refugee slots cannot be used unless Congress approves new funds to cover both the State Department's and Health and Human Services Department's share of the costs of processing, transporting and resettling the immigrants.

An estimated \$75 million in State Department funds and \$22 million in HHS funds will be needed to process the additional 19,000 Soviet refugees.

Much of the \$75 million in State Department funds would go to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for refugee processing and transportation.

The additional funds are being introduced in Congress as amendments to a multibillion-dollar supplemental appropriations bill.

The bill, which faced widespread opposition because of its size, has been pared considerably, and the House may vote on it as early as Wed-

nesday, Talisman said. The bill would then have to pass the Senate.

Meanwhile, Jewish groups are already beginning to lobby for sufficient slots and funds for the 1990 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

Bills Pending In Congress

Talisman said the 43,500 Soviet slots will be enough next year, despite anticipated increases in Soviet emigration, because "there is going to be larger numbers going to Israel."

He based this estimate on the "positive impact" of a program that has allowed thousands of Soviet Jews to visit Israel on tourist visas.

A Justice Department source disputed Talisman's prediction, pointing out that the percentage of Soviet Jews opting for Israel over the United States has remained constant at around 10 to 11 percent.

The source said the administration will likely propose at least 43,500 Soviet refugee slots next year, although no decision has been made yet.

The administration has been reviewing U.S. refugee policy at President Bush's request and may propose changes sometime this summer, the source said.

Meanwhile, several bills attempting to address the refugee backlog are pending in Congress.

In the House, Rep. Bruce Morrison (D-Conn.), is sponsoring a bill that would give Vietnamese, Soviet Jews and Pentacostals presumption of eligibility for refugee status for the 1990 fiscal year. It has been approved by a subcommittee and is awaiting consideration by the full House Foreign Affairs Committee.

In the Senate, an identical bill sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) may be voted on Wednesday by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, an aide to the senator said.

Fewer Rejections Reported

The bills would reduce the discretion that adjudicators of the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service now have in deciding whether to grant refugee status to Soviet Jews, Talisman said.

Currently, Soviet Jews have to prove a "well-founded fear of persecution" to qualify for refugee status.

Under the Morrison and Lautenberg bills, the burden of proof would shift to INS officials to explain why a particular Soviet Jew was not granted refugee status.

Prior to last fall, Soviet Jews wishing to enter the United States were automatically given refugee status.

But close to 2,000 have been denied refugee status since Sept. 14, a month after then Attorney General Edwin Meese ordered the INS to use a "more equitable and legally appropriate application of existing U.S. refugee law worldwide."

The rejection rate reached an all-time high in March, when HIAS reported that 36.5 percent of Soviet Jews applying for refugee status were denied.

The figure was down to 27.9 percent in April, according to HIAS figures, and was 19.2 percent for the first 11 days of May, according to Talisman.

He attributed the decrease to the free legal assistance provided recently to Soviet Jews in Rome by Jewish lawyers visiting from the United States.

LIKUD MINISTER CALLS ON SHAMIR AND PERES TO RESIGN OVER PLAN By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) -- Opposition to Israel's new peace plan continues to simmer within the Likud bloc, with one Cabinet minister calling on the heads of the Likud-Labor coalition government to resign.

Yitzhak Moda'i, leader of Likud's Liberal Party wing and minister of economics and planning, made the suggestion Tuesday at a news conference in Tel Aviv.

He has been a leading opponent of the peace plan, which calls for Palestinian elections and eventual self-rule in the territories.

Moda'i insisted that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Vice Premier Shimon Peres are "morally obliged" to step down and "seek a new mandate" from the public. The two are leaders of the Likud and Labor parties, respectively.

Moda'i denounced the proposed elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as "a surrender to the terror" of the Palestinian uprising. He claimed the plan deviates from the unity coalition's guidelines, from Likud's platform "and, as far as I know, from Labor's platform too."

Moda'i said the Likud Central Committee is expected to convene early next month, and he anticipates trouble for Shamir over the election plan.

If Shamir loses a Central Committee vote on the plan, he will have to seek new Knesset elections, Moda'i said.

U.S. TEAM DEPARTS FROM ISRAEL SAYING PEACE PLAN HAS 'POTENTIAL' By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) -- The first team of experts the Bush administration has dispatched to the Middle East flew home Tuesday night, apparently encouraged that Israel's new peace initiative has some "potential."

Dennis Ross, chief of policy planning at the U.S. State Department, who headed the mission, said before the group's departure that there was "reason to believe that there is a potential opportunity" for peace and pledged "hard work" by the United States to build on it.

In addition to its discussions with Israeli leaders, the group visited Egypt and Jordan and met with two delegations of Palestinian leaders in the West Bank.

According to Ross, the other parties in the region are studying the plan "very seriously."

But the people directly concerned, the Palestinians in the territories, seem unconvinced.

The Israeli military authorities arrested one of six West Bank dignitaries who was to meet with the Americans.

He is Hassan Khatib, a lecturer at Bir Zeit University, who was seized in a roundup of Palestinian activists only hours before the meeting was to take place.

A spokesman for the other five, Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, also a member of the Bir Zeit faculty, told reporters afterward that they had categorically rejected the election proposals offered by the Israeli government.

"On the other hand, we are for elections as a principle," Nusseibeh said. But they would have to be "part of a process that would clearly lead to the realization of Palestinian rights," including "the right to statehood."

ISRAEL USING CARROT AND STICK ON PALESTINIANS IN TERRITORIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force has launched a new offensive in the administered territories, apparently intended to show the Palestinians that the alternative to backing Israel's proposed peace plan could be quite unpleasant.

No official explanation for the crackdown has been given. But it coincides with the start of an intensive Israeli campaign at home and abroad to promote its peace initiative, which was approved by the Cabinet on Sunday.

Persuasion and reason are being used to try to convince Palestinian dignitaries. The Palestinian masses, however, are being subjected to hardship.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, one of the principal authors of the plan, met with 15 influential Palestinians on Monday to explain it.

He told them the plan offers a chance to finally solve the Palestinian problem, and he urged them not to "waste the opportunity, as you have done in the past."

Rabin may have made some headway, insofar as not all of the Palestinians at the meeting rejected the plan outright. The defense minister seems confident that more meetings of this kind could create pressure by local leaders on the Palestine Liberation Organization to change its negative position.

The PLO leadership in Tunis has labeled the Israeli peace plan "a farce."

The tough measures the IDF is taking in the territories are apparently intended to convince the Palestinians that rejection of the peace plan will have only unpleasant consequences.

Workers Ordered Home

On Monday evening, a blanket curfew was clamped on the entire Gaza Strip. It differed from hundreds of past curfews in that it was ordered with little prior notice and was not in response to any specific disturbances by the Palestinians.

In fact, the territory has been relatively quiet in recent days.

At the time the curfew was announced, Arabs from Gaza working inside Israel were ordered to leave and return to their homes immediately. It is the first time such an order has been issued to the tens of thousands of Gazans who are employed in Israel.

No official explanation for the move was given. A senior military source said the measure was taken in view of "violent acts by residents of the territories within Israel proper," resulting in new tension between Jews and Arabs.

Anti-Arab sentiments boiled over in the southern Israeli coastal cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod last week.

Jewish youths stoned Arab vehicles and individual Arabs were assaulted and beaten in the streets, following discovery of the body of Sgt. Avi Sasportas, an IDF paratrooper missing since Feb. 16 who is believed to have been murdered by Arab abductors.

The military source claimed that "the curfew has proven itself as an effective way to reduce violations of public order." The source admitted it was collective punishment, affecting innocent and guilty alike.

"We want the residents of the territories to realize that they cannot act violently and escape punishment," the source said.

HEALTH ASSEMBLY CONDEMNS ISRAELI HEALTH PRACTICES IN TERRITORIES

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, May 16 (JTA) -- The World Health Assembly's committee of experts adopted a resolution Tuesday condemning Israel for allegedly neglecting the health needs of Palestinians in the territories it administers.

The vote was 67-2, with 32 abstentions. The United States and Israel cast the only negative votes.

The American delegate, Neil Boyer, called the resolution harsh and one-sided. He further faulted it for repeatedly referring to the West Bank and Gaza Strip as "Palestine," which "implies a non-existent political status."

Australia said it abstained because formulations such as "occupied Arab territories, including Palestine and Golan, are misleading and unacceptable in that they imply that the State of Israel is part of the occupied territories."

The outcome of the vote was no surprise.

If anything, the delegates wanted to mollify the Palestinians for last Friday's vote deferring for a year the Palestine Liberation Organization's bid for full membership in the World Health Organization. The 166-nation health assembly is the WHO's governing body.

The resolution expressed concern over the "deterioration of health conditions in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine and the Golan."

It charged Israel does not conform to the requirements of health services and proposed that the WHO work in cooperation with "Palestine" to meet the health needs of the Palestinians.

The resolution requested the WHO's director general to promote cooperation with the Arab states, to see to it that collaborating WHO centers are administered by Palestinians, not the "occupation authorities" and to support all Arab foundations and bodies wishing to establish hospitals and health clinics in the territories.

The Israeli delegate, Yoram Less, director general of Israel's Health Ministry, said the ministry is considering a new policy of decentralized government health services in the territories, allowing autonomous health organizations to run them.

HOUSE PASSES BILL ON PLO MOVES

WASHINGTON, May 16 (JTA) -- The House of Representatives voted 396-6 on Tuesday to bar American payments to the United Nations if the Palestine Liberation Organization is admitted to the world body or any of its agencies.

The measure must now pass the Senate.

It apparently has the backing of the Bush administration, which served notice earlier this month that it would withhold its \$73.9 million contribution to the World Health Organization's fiscal 1990 budget if the PLO's bid for full membership succeeded.

It was largely because of the American warning that the 166-nation World Health Assembly, the governing body of the WHO, voted 83-47 in Geneva last Friday to defer the PLO's request for one year.

But the issue may be raised this week at a meeting of the governing board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, one of several other specialized U.N. agencies the PLO is seeking to join.

WORLD LABOR AGENCY CHARGES ISRAEL DISCRIMINATES AGAINST ARAB WORKERS

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, May 16 (JTA) -- The International Labor Organization urged Israel on Tuesday to eliminate alleged employment discrimination against Arab workers in the Israeli-administered territories and to remedy what it charged were inequities in the provision of social benefits to them.

A report issued by the ILO on Tuesday blames those conditions on "considerations of state security, which are omnipresent in relations between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian people and workers of the occupied territories."

It says that "inequality of opportunity and treatment is evident in access to employment and conditions of employment."

The report is an appendix to the ILO director general's report to the 76th session of the International Labor Conference, which opens here on June 7.

Annexed to it are communications received from Arab countries and organizations, as well as from the Israeli government.

The report is based on a recent ILO mission to the region, which found a serious deterioration of the economy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It attributed this to the Palestinian uprising, now in its 18th month.

Economic Decline In Territories

The report expresses serious concern over the "violation of trade union rights," in the territories, "interference in trade union activities and repression against trade unionists, whose effect is to destroy the trade union movement and create an atmosphere of intimidation tending to draw workers away from trade unions."

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee made similar charges against Israeli labor practices last summer, in an attempt to disqualify Israel from receiving certain U.S. trade benefits.

Last month, the U.S. trade representative rejected those charges, though it limited its ruling to cover Arab workers in Israel, rather than the administered territories.

The ILO report quotes an official Israeli government survey as saying that living standards in the territories have fallen 50 percent and economic activity has declined by some 30 percent since the start of the Palestinian uprising in December 1987.

"Resolute measures should be taken as soon as possible to halt the economic decline in the occupied Arab territories," the ILO report states.

STATE COMPTROLLER'S REPORT FINDS EVIDENCE OF CRIMINALITY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 16 (JTA) -- State Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat says she has found evidence of possible criminal offenses by government officials over the past two years.

In her annual comptroller's report, submitted to the Knesset on Monday, Ben-Porat said she has asked Attorney General Yosef Harish to investigate "between 8 and 10 cases of suspected criminality."

The 1,084-page document, made public at a news conference Tuesday, was said to be the most critical and scathing report to date on the opera-

tions, failures, shortcomings and errors of the government since the comptroller's office was established 39 years ago.

The report charged that 60 percent of the failings cited in past comptroller's reports had gone unaddressed and uncorrected.

Ben-Porat, a retired Supreme Court justice, said her investigation uncovered many instances of negligence, politicization of the economy, election fraud and disregard of the public interest.

She was especially hard on the politicization of the civil service, citing many instances of politicians favoring members of their own parties, regardless of qualifications.

She was equally tough on Labor and Likud, naming top ministers of both coalition partners, whom she accused of blatant favoritism.

JACKSON URGES BLACKS AND JEWS TO OVERCOME 'FEARS AND PREJUDICES'

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, May 16 (JTA) -- The Rev. Jesse Jackson, invoking past alliances and biblical imagery, issued a strong appeal here last week for reconciliation between Jews and African-Americans.

The black leader and former presidential hopeful, who has offended many Jews through an ethnic slur and pro-Palestinian statements, urged 400 guests attending a May 11 American Jewish Committee awards dinner to help heal racial divisions in the United States and the world.

Reminding his audience of the common sacrifices by blacks and Jews in the civil rights struggle, he proposed a joint effort to create an "American investment bank" to help poor communities and create new jobs.

"Tonight we are called to reason, to shift from racial and religious battlegrounds to economic common ground and higher ground," Jackson said.

"The cause is to move beyond racism, sexism, elitism, anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, anti-Hispanicism, to move beyond ancient fears and prejudices," he added.

GREECE DEFERS EXTRADITION MOVE

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, May 16 (JTA) -- Justice Minister Yiannis Skoularikis said Tuesday he will wait until after the June 18 general elections here to decide whether to extradite alleged Palestinian terrorist Mohammad Rashid, who is wanted in the United States for a fatal airliner bombing.

Skoularikis said he informed U.S. Ambassador Robert Kelly of the delay.

The Greek Supreme Court ruled 4-1 last Friday that Rashid should be extradited. But under Greek law, the justice minister can uphold or override the court's decree.

By postponing a decision until the elections are over, Skoularikis avoided an embarrassment for the Socialist government, which is expected to lose the elections.

The Socialists thereby will antagonize neither the United States nor their Arab friends, since a new justice minister, most likely from a different party, will have to decide on extradition.

Rashid was indicted in the United States for the 1982 bombing of a Pan American Airways jet, in which one passenger was killed and 15 were injured.