

AUSCHWITZ CONVENT STAYING PUT AS JEWS ERUPT WITH ANGER

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- The long-promised removal of the Carmelite convent from Auschwitz has been indefinitely postponed by a Polish Catholic cardinal, a move that Jewish leaders say will severely strain Catholic-Jewish relations.

Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, the archbishop of Krakow, announced on Vatican Radio Tuesday that the construction of a proposed inter-religious information center was now "an impossibility."

The center was to have been built off the site of the former death camp, and was to have housed the convent as well.

Macharski attributed his decision to "a violent campaign of accusations and defamation, and offensive -- not only verbal -- aggression, which echoed up to Auschwitz."

The campaign, Macharski said, was the work of "certain Western Jewish circles."

Jewish organizations have reacted with outrage, not only at Macharski's nullification of the agreement to move the convent, but at the wording of his statement.

Numerous Jewish organizations have publicly called for the convent's removal, and demonstrations have been mounted at the convent itself.

Last month, seven New York Jewish activists climbed over the fence surrounding the convent, and asked to speak with the nuns. They were beaten and dragged off the grounds.

This demonstration reportedly incensed Macharski. Sources in Europe say that Macharski called the demonstration "violent and intolerable" in a meeting with local priests.

Freeze In Dialogue Urged

Rabbi Avraham Weiss, who led the demonstration at Auschwitz, called Thursday for Jewish leaders to "freeze dialogue" with the Vatican until the convent is moved.

Weiss, who released his statement from Israel where he is visiting, also said the Polish government should bear responsibility for the convent, and suggested a travel boycott of Poland by Israel and world Jewish organizations if the situation does not change.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who has been deeply involved with the convent-issue, is taking a more conciliatory approach.

He said that Polish leaders had told him in the past few weeks that Macharski's commitment to build the convent and the center by 1990 "was firm."

But, Tanenbaum said, the recent demonstrations have caused a backlash in Poland and "touched off a furious reaction among Polish Catholics, who now support, even insist, that the Carmelite convent not be moved."

Tanenbaum said that he was told by Macharski's personal secretary, Stanislaw Musial, that the statement "does not represent a rupture between the Polish Catholic church and the Jewish people."

Tanenbaum described it as "a temporary interruption, but not a break in the relationship."

He said that Macharski wants to make the point that it is impossible to make plans to move forward as long as the "attacks on the convent nuns" continue.

Kalman Sultani, vice president of the World Jewish Congress, said "Cardinal Macharski's remarks are brutal and violent and constitute a tragic blow to those of us in the Jewish and Catholic world who have worked for so long to foster mutual understanding and respect."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, characterized Macharski's language as "hateful exaggerated rhetoric that is not the language of love and compassion that one would expect to hear from a cardinal."

Macharski is one of four Catholic prelates who negotiated in Geneva with a Jewish delegation the agreement to relocate the convent, first in July 1986 and then in 1987. The representatives agreed on the convent's removal by Feb. 22 of this year and the building of the new convent and interreligious center.

'Lack Of Respect'

In his Tuesday statement, Macharski said he was suspending action on building the center "because of lack of respect for the nuns and for their human and Christian dignity, the peace to which they are entitled was disturbed. Christian conventions, the symbols of faith and of piety, were not respected."

He added that Polish Jews were the only ones who had protested against the demonstrators' "intrusion into the convent and successive attempts to take it over."

Macharski concluded that in an atmosphere of "aggression and disquiet," Jews and Catholic could not cooperate toward "the building of a place dedicated to reciprocal respect."

The archbishop's statement came at a time when there were indications from other church leaders and Polish officials that action on the movement of the convent could be forthcoming.

Israeli officials said last week that the Polish deputy foreign minister had indicated to Israelis that his government would intervene in the matter.

Solemn Promise

Earlier this month, one of the Catholic representatives who signed the agreement along with Macharski also said that progress would be forthcoming.

Albert Decourtray, the French cardinal of Lyon, solemnly promised that the convent will be removed "at its earliest," and blamed the delays on "local bureaucracy" in Poland.

But officials from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, who met with Vatican officials last month, said they were "not surprised" by the announcement.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the center, said that while the Catholic Church was silent during the Holocaust, "they now seek to claim exclusivity over the unmarked graves of their loved ones."

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of inter-religious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said "I sincerely hope that this is not going to be the last word from Catholic authorities."

Rudin is also present chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, a group that deals primarily with relations with Catholics.

Rudin called Macharski's reference to "Western Jewish circles" a "a very ominous kind of statement."

He said that Macharski's comments "reflect the growing seriousness throughout the world of the state of Catholic-Jewish relations."

In Paris, Jean Kahn, president of CRIF, the Council of Representative Jewish Institutions in France, lashed out at Macharski's decision, saying it is a flagrant breach of a negotiated agreement and hinting that anti-Semitism is still rife in Poland.

The European Union of Jewish Students also expressed outrage at Macharski's comments.

In their statement, the students noted that Macharski's remarks, coming at a time when there is controversy over comments by the pope on the Jews, was particularly upsetting.

Sermons by Pope John Paul II over the past two weeks seem to imply that the Christian covenant with God superseded the Jewish covenant with God, and that the Christian covenant was forged because of "Israel's infidelity."

This conflicts with previous statements by the pope that God's covenant with the Jews was "never revoked."

The students said in their statement that the combination of the pope's remarks and Macharski's announcement "seems to imply that the Catholic church believes that the Shoah was retribution for the Jews' infidelity."

(JTA Paris bureau chief Edwin Eytan contributed to this report.)

U.S. SAYS AL FATAH STATEMENTS CONTAIN 'DEROGATORY RHETORIC' By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- The political program issued this week by Yasir Arafat's Al Fatah branch of the Palestine Liberation Organization contains "derogatory rhetoric" that "raises questions about Fatah's commitment to accommodation, understanding and peace," the State Department said Thursday.

A Fatah congress that met in Tunis this week approved a program that advocated "intensifying and escalating armed action and all forms of struggle to eliminate the Zionist Israeli occupation of our occupied Palestinian land."

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler, at her daily briefing, said "the statement's derogatory rhetoric on Israel, its tone of confrontation and violence, and its preference for unrealistic principles and solutions, instead of practical ideas for peace, are unhelpful."

She said the full document has not been analyzed, and that it is being studied further "in an effort to have a clearer understanding."

The Israeli Embassy here released a statement Thursday that also noted how Al Fatah was forming a special committee "with the objective of preventing Jewish immigration to Israel. Thus, Fatah seeks to strike at the very essence of Israel as the home of the Jewish people. Fatah's aim is clear: to undermine the seeds of Israel's demise."

Tutwiler said that the United States "will continue our dialogue with the PLO to determine whether the PLO is committed to the undertakings of last December."

WAIVE JACKSON-VANIK NOW, AJCONGRESS URGES BAKER By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- In a major departure from the stance adopted by National Conference on Soviet Jewry and its constituent groups across the country, the American Jewish Congress has urged an immediate one-year waiver of Jackson-Vanik Amendment sanctions against the Soviet Union.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Secretary of State James Baker, the group disputes claims from an unnamed "national Jewish organization" that the Jewish community supports a waiver of Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions only if President Bush receives "additional Soviet assurances" of improvements in Soviet emigration policy.

Instead, AJCongress and "several other major American Jewish organizations are in support of a one-year waiver of Jackson-Vanik now," writes Maurice Tempelsman, chairman of the AJCongress Commission on International Affairs.

"There is no question that during the last few months, Soviet deeds have fully merited a waiver," he writes, noting that under the amendment, such a move is "a reversible act."

The 1975 Jackson-Vanik Amendment denies the Soviet Union most-favored-nation trade benefits until it makes substantial improvements in its emigration policy.

Tool For Prodding Soviets

The amendment has been seen by Jewish organizations as a main tool in prodding the Soviets to make emigration reforms.

On June 13, the National Conference's Board of Governors, representing 47 national Jewish groups and close to 300 Jewish community relations councils and federations, adopted a statement saying it was "prepared to support a waiver" of Jackson-Vanik sanctions, if President Bush received "appropriate assurances" from the Soviet Union in four key areas.

NCSJ Chairwoman Shoshana Cardin outlined the group's position in a meeting with White House officials, and followed it up with a letter to Baker.

A spokesman for AJCongress confirmed that the group's letter to Baker on Tuesday was an explicit departure from a "communication" from NCSJ to Baker.

Asked about the AJCongress move, Martin Wenick, executive director of the NCSJ, said "Jewish organizations have traditionally worked on the thesis of consensus. We recognize the right of any organization to its own views, and (the American Jewish) Congress has chosen to do this at all times."

But "the administration knows where the mainstream of the American Jewish community is, and it has acknowledged that in a positive sense," he said.

AJCongress, however, feels that recent dramatic gains in the emigration of Soviet Jews, Armenians and ethnic Germans warrant an immediate waiver. In the last two years, the number of Soviet Jews being allowed out of the Soviet Union rose from fewer than 100 a month in 1986 to more than 4,000 a month since March.

AJCongress also indicates in its letter that a "full 99.6 percent of all emigration applicants are allowed to leave," and that the number of long-term refusniks has decreased from 11,000 in 1986 to under 2,000.

**COOPERATION, NOT COORDINATION,
IS U.S.-ISRAELI HOSTAGE STRATEGY**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- The United States and Israel are cooperating in the effort to release hostages being held in southern Lebanon, but are not coordinating their effort, a White House spokesman said Thursday.

Marlin Fitzwater made those remarks while commenting on the 12-minute telephone conversation Wednesday between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and President Bush, which both sides later called "candid and friendly."

Shamir, who initiated the call, promised Bush that Israel would seek to gain the release of all the hostages -- including eight Americans -- being held in southern Lebanon by Islamic fundamentalists, while trying to gain the release of three Israeli soldiers there.

Israeli reports of the telephone conversation said that Shamir endorsed Bush's insistence that there be coordination in their efforts.

In denying this, Fitzwater stressed that the conversation was "a general discussion of the hostage situation," and did not deal in specifics.

"I don't believe the conversation was that direct," Fitzwater said.

Israel has offered to release Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, the Hezbollah leader it captured July 28, and 150 other Shiites held in Israel, in exchange for the three Israeli soldiers and all other foreign hostages.

The Bush administration has said that U.S. policy is never to negotiate for hostages, but it has not objected to the Israeli effort.

"They have their policy, we have ours," Fitzwater reiterated.

Asked why Bush had not telephoned Shamir since the hostage situation began, even though he made calls to other leaders in the Middle East and elsewhere, Fitzwater replied that discussions were ongoing with Israel on so many levels that there was no need for the two leaders to talk.

Meanwhile, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, denied a published report that Shamir's call to Bush had been at the urging of American Jewish leaders.

Jewish leaders met with Bush on Tuesday to express concern that the hostage situation could adversely affect public support for Israel.

"We are in regular communication with both American and Israeli leaders," Hoenlein said. "The White House does not need our prompting to be in touch with the prime minister or the prime minister our prompting to be in touch with the president."

(JTA Jerusalem bureau chief David Landau contributed to this report.)

**HEZBOLLAH: WE'RE HOLDING ISRAELIS,
BUT THEIR RELEASE IS IMPOSSIBLE**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Hezbollah, the Islamic Party of God, has issued a statement saying that the group is holding two Israeli soldiers, but that the abduction of Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid had made their release impossible.

The statement, the first of its kind, was released at midnight Wednesday via Arab-owned Radio Monte Carlo.

The statement did not address the question of the release of hostages other than Israelis.

The Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv on Thursday quoted Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir as telling President Bush in a telephone conversation Wednesday evening that the American hostages would be included in any prisoner exchange deal.

Meanwhile, commentators here in Israel have pointed out that Hezbollah's coupling of Wednesday's suicide truck-bomb attack on an Israel Defense Force convoy in southern Lebanon with the capture of Obeid did not necessarily mean the two events were directly linked.

On Wednesday, a truck packed with explosives blew up in the path of a convoy carrying both IDF and South Lebanon Army soldiers.

Five IDF soldiers and an SLA militiaman were wounded while the two people driving the truck were killed.

It would have been too difficult, analysts say, for the attack to have been planned and executed only after the abduction of Obeid, as preparation for such an attack takes considerable time.

**TISHA B'AV PRAYERS GO ON UNDISTURBED
DESPITE TUMULT OVER TEMPLE SERVICES**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Tisha B'Av prayers at the Temple Mount passed without disturbance on Thursday, despite attempts by the "Temple Mount Faithful" to hold prayers on the mount itself.

Police arrested one member of the Kach movement, Rabbi Meir Kahane's right-wing party, who is suspected of having incited the worshipers to violence.

Several thousand worshipers came to pray at the Western Wall, despite the oppressive heat. But police -- and the press -- were attracted to several dozen members of the radical nationalist Temple Mount Faithful organization.

The group has been active for years lobbying to allow Jews to pray on the Temple Mount.

Whereas in the past police refused to allow the group to set their feet on the mount, on Thursday they allowed members of the group to enter the mount area in pairs, but only a few yards away from the gate.

But the group faced difficulties not only from police but also by ultra-Orthodox Jews, who cited rabbinical bans on walking on the grounds of the Temple Mount.

All Jews today are considered ritually impure and therefore are forbidden to tread on the holy ground.

In Gaza, meanwhile, two residents of the Shati refugee camp were killed Wednesday, including an 8-year-old boy, Yussuf Raji Salemi, and Ali Mohammad Khalil, 23.

At least five were wounded, according to official figures, while hospital sources said at least 19 were wounded.

Wednesday, the day marking the end of the 20th month of the intifada, began quietly. But around 2 p.m., Salemi was shot under unclear circumstances at the edge of the camp.

Although the army insisted that the boy was not shot by soldiers, because there were no soldiers there at the time, news of the child's death ignited the camp.

Within minutes, residents were out in the streets, pelting the soldiers with stones. The soldiers returned with live bullets, killing the 23-year-old man. A curfew was clamped on the camp, and quiet gradually returned to the scene.

REPUBLICAN COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN LEARNS ABOUT ISRAEL FIRSTHAND

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Lee Atwater, chairman of the Republican National Committee, has always considered himself a good friend of Israel.

But it was not until he made his first trip to Israel last week that he clearly understood Israel's "fragile" geopolitical situation as a small country surrounded by enemies.

"The trip probably had as much impact as anything I can remember in my life," Atwater told a group of reporters from the Jewish-media Tuesday, two days after he returned from the weeklong visit.

Atwater said the smallness and precariousness of Israel was brought home to him in visits to the Golan Heights, the Allenby Bridge across the Jordan River and especially Masada.

Atwater said that the Jews at Masada were isolated 2,000 years ago, and that he sees Israel today isolated in a similar way, except that Israel has allies. "I'm proud to say that their best ally is us," he said.

Atwater said he got a sense of the situation within minutes after he was greeted at Ben-Gurion Airport on July 30 by Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu pointed to the mountain ridges they could see from the airport and said that was Jordan before 1967.

While driving along the road to Jerusalem, they stopped at the spot where an Arab from the Gaza Strip had forced a bus off the road, killing 16 passengers.

Responds To Invitation

The situation was further reinforced when Atwater went jogging shortly after checking into his hotel in Jerusalem, as is his normal custom.

He was joined by Howard Kohr, an official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, who pointed out to him the walls of the Old City just 70 yards away and said that they would have been "sitting ducks (from snipers) had I made the same run in 1967."

Atwater visited Israel after receiving an invitation from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, when the two met in New York in April.

Atwater and his wife, Sally, were accompanied by five American Jews. In addition to Kohr, they were Gordon Zachs, an Ohio businessman who has close ties to President Bush; Marshall Breger, chairman of the Administrative Conference of the United States and a former Jewish liaison for President Reagan; Ben Waldman, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition; and Leslie Goodman, the Republican National Committee's press secretary.

The group arrived in Israel as the hostage crisis was unfolding, and while Atwater was meeting with Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, word came informing them that an Islamic fundamentalist group had claimed to have killed Lt. Col. William Higgins.

"It was very moving," Atwater said. "The guy was very upset about it."

He would not talk about the hostage situation itself, except to say that Israel was cooperating with the United States.

Atwater said that despite the crisis, none of his appointments was canceled and he met with everyone from Shamir on down, including virtually

every leader of the various parties.

While he found diverse opinions, he said, there was nevertheless an "absolute unity of national goals and of their perception of the United States as an ally. The point was made over and over again -- they are the No. 1 ally of the United States."

Atwater said he likes to wander around when he visits a new city, and spoke warmly of the ordinary citizens of Israel.

"I have never been in a foreign country where virtually every person I've talked to was pro-American, I mean in a very warm sense," he said.

Atwater said that this feeling was reciprocated in the United States, especially by Bush, whom Atwater said had always been steadfast in his support of Israel. He has known the president since 1973.

A True Friend

"After a couple of years, the people of Israel are going to know that George Bush is their friend," Atwater said. "Maybe a couple of times they will be irritated because that's what happens among friends from time to time."

To further illustrate that "that there is no better friend to have than George Bush," Atwater told of the numerous times Bush was advised to drop him from the presidential campaign last year and refused.

"When he's a friend, he is a friend," Atwater said of Bush. "He considers Israel a friend and ally."

Atwater also spoke of the impact that a visit to Yad Vashem had on him, even though he had believed he knew about the Holocaust. "I was like an entirely different person when I walked out of there after an hour and a half."

Atwater also spoke of his talks with Natan Sharansky on a Jerusalem park bench, a visit to an absorption center where Ida Nudel lives and his visits with Ethiopian Jews.

The tour, which was organized by the Israeli government, also went through the West Bank. Atwater said he visited an absorption center near Bethlehem expecting to see squalor and overcrowding, and instead saw what looked like an apartment complex.

Victim Of The Intifada

His one experience with the Arab uprising came when a group of youngsters, about 13 years old, planted a device made out of nails which blew out a tire of their tour bus. "It just hit home that we were victims of the intifada, teenage terrorism," he said.

Atwater and his wife also enjoyed visits to Christian holy places, even taking time to enjoy a tire tube ride down the Jordan River.

During a visit to Zionist Ze'ev Chafets' home, Atwater played the guitar in a "jam session" of 1960s and 1970s rhythm and blues tunes with Israel's top rock 'n' roll star Danny Sanderson.

Atwater, who led a band when he was in college, noted that his was the "cool" group to have for Bar Mitzvahs in South Carolina at the time.

The conservative Republican visited two kibbutzim and was impressed. It was at one of them on a Friday night he had his first taste of gefilte fish. He carries tabasco sauce with him and puts it on everything.

"Next time you have gefilte fish, get yourselves some tabasco sauce," he advised.