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FAMILIES OF MISSING ISRAELI SOLDIERS PERMITTED TO MAKE CONTACT WITH PLO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Israel has lifted its ironclad ban on contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization, in order to ascertain the whereabouts of missing soldiers.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin disclosed Monday that his ministry had granted permission for representatives of families of soldiers believed held captive in Lebanon to talk to the PLO.

The purpose is to find out where they are and how they are, Rabin said. One family representative has even been allowed to go to Tunis, where the PLO is headquartered, to try to meet with PLO leaders.

"In a matter such as this, there can be no restrictions," Rabin said.

He was referring to the law that provides severe penalties for Israelis who meet with representatives of the PLO or any other group on Israel's list of terrorist organizations.

Addressing students at Tel Aviv University, Rabin said the Israel Defense Force is doing everything in its power to establish the fate of prisoners and their whereabouts.

Defense officials disclosed Sunday that Capt. Ron Arad, an air force navigator who was shot down over Lebanon in October 1986, is being held by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard inside Lebanon.

A statement by his wife, Tamar Arad, that he was in Iranian custody, though not necessarily in Iran, was confirmed by Uri Slonim, a lawyer and special adviser to Rabin on missing soldiers.

In addition to Arad, six IDF soldiers remain listed as missing. They are Yehuda Katz, Zachary Baumel, Zvi Feldman, Yosef Fink, Rahamim Alsheikh and Samir Assad.

JEWISH GROUPS CRITICIZE U.S. ARMY FOR DENYING JEWISH VETERAN A MEDAL

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Jewish groups have criticized a U.S. Army review board for rebuffing World War II veteran David Rubitsky's claim that he singlehandedly killed 500 Japanese soldiers, and for denying him the Congressional Medal of Honor.

But Steve Shaw, executive director of the Jewish War Veterans of America, called verification of Rubitsky's claim "a problem both for the Army and for us."

Rubitsky, 72, has had his case reviewed for a Congressional Medal of Honor for the last two years. The Army said last Friday that there was "incontestable evidence" that Rubitsky did not kill a large number of Japanese in a battle in New Guinea in 1942.

Army Secretary Michael Stone has the power to overturn the review board's decision, "but he's not going to do that," Maj. Joe Padilla, an Army spokesman, said Monday. "It's just that he has reviewed the findings of the review board and concurs with the findings."

For Rubitsky to have received the medal, either Stone or the review board would have had to review Rubitsky's claim positively. In addition,

both houses of Congress would have had to approve legislation exempting Rubitsky's case from a rule that recommendations for World War II deeds be filed by 1951.

Padilla praised Rubitsky for having "served honorably" and noted the veteran received a combat infantry badge and a bronze star. That is "probably what the average soldier received during World War II for their service," he added.

Shaw said there was no evidence of anti-Semitism against Rubitsky by a senior officer who was in a position to write a recommendation, as Rubitsky's superior during the war had claimed.

But Shaw admitted that, in general, "the military is a microcosm of American society and sure, there's anti-Semitism there."

Two Jews were among the Army's 295 Medal of Honor recipients in World War II. In World War I, four Jews were among 95 recipients, none were among the 70 Korean War recipients and one was among the 155 Vietnam War recipients, said Padilla.

Such a medal "shouldn't be given (out) lightly," Shaw said.

But Seymour Reich, president of B'nai B'rith International, said the Army is "better to err on the side of honoring an undeniably brave man than risk begrudging a courageous soldier a grateful nation's debt of honor."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, called the decision "unconscionable" in a letter last Friday to Stone. Foxman said the ADL had "worked on Mr. Rubitsky's behalf for the past two years, since learning of the discrimination."

Besides Rubitsky, Shaw is aware of one other Jewish veteran seeking such a medal.

Tibor Rubin, a disabled Korean War veteran, claims he risked his life to save the lives of 35 fellow prisoners of war. Rubin said he stole food and supplies for his dying comrades and tended to their wounds.

The JWV last year kicked off a nationwide campaign to have the Army issue a medal to Rubin.

SHIMON PERES ACCUSES WORLD JEWRY OF DOING LITTLE TO AID ABSORPTION

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Finance Minister Shimon Peres chastised world Jewry on Monday for not rushing to assist Israel in the upcoming task of absorbing tens of thousands of new immigrants.

"Jewish people, where are you?" Peres demanded, wagging an accusing finger in the Knesset. "Larger sums are allocated in the direction of the local federations, and less and less money reaches Israel," he declared.

Peres, who is vice premier, addressed a special Knesset session devoted to the imminent prospect of absorbing much larger numbers of immigrants than have arrived in recent years.

The magnitude of the problem drew a larger than usual attendance by Knesset members and Cabinet ministers. The galleries were packed with the heads of immigrant associations, representatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel and community leaders.

Peres maintained that Israel has the right to demand that the Jewish people share a greater part of the aliyah burden.

Instead, he said, they "shrug off responsibility and do not contribute to the efforts that Israel faces. Never before has there been such detachment from the joint responsibility for the absorption of immigrants," he said.

In New York, news of the finance minister's remarks surprised leaders of the United Jewish Appeal, who pointed out that their special Passage to Freedom campaign has so far raised more than \$47 million, with more than 50 percent going to help absorption needs in Israel.

UJA is also in the midst of planning a far more ambitious campaign, due to begin early next year, that would be devoted entirely to the absorption of immigrants in Israel.

Monday's Knesset session was convened to help address concerns arising from the unusually large influx of immigrants expected to arrive from the Soviet Union in the immediate future.

PROJECT RENEWAL CONCEPT COULD BE USED TO ABSORB SOVIET JEWS, SAYS SHARANSKY By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Natan Sharansky is proposing a special fund-raising drive in North America, along the lines of Project Renewal, to finance the large-scale absorption of Soviet Jews in Israel.

At the same time, he is seeking to convince the Sephardic community that efforts for Soviet Jews will not be made at the expense of Israel's underprivileged population, consisting largely of Jews of Sephardic origin, who are the main beneficiaries of Project Renewal.

Sharansky explained to a group of Sephardic activists here Thursday that the money needed to absorb the unprecedented numbers of immigrants expected to arrive from the Soviet Union in the next few years is available in North America.

But the potential donors must be certain their contributions are being put to a specific use, as is the case with Project Renewal, Sharansky said.

He also indicated that the Jewish Agency for Israel, which plays a major role in the absorption of immigrants in Israel, might not necessarily go along with the idea.

Project Renewal is a partnership between the Jewish Agency and the United Jewish Appeal, which has successfully raised funds to rehabilitate slum areas in Israel.

Under the program, individual Jewish communities in North America provide direct funding and to economically depressed communities in Israel that they "adopt."

Sharansky, who came to Israel in 1986 after serving nine years in the Soviet Gulag, spoke in his capacity as head of the Soviet Jewish Zionist Forum, the umbrella body of Soviet aliyah organizations here.

He said he has proposed a Project Renewal-type campaign to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, in the hope that Israel will undertake a dramatic project to attract the thousands of Jews expected to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

"Whether that wave is 50,000 or 500,000 depends principally on us," he said.

He said he is willing personally to crisscross America to raise funds for the project, if the Jewish Agency agreed.

Sharansky was critical of the Jewish Agency

and the government's Immigration and Absorption Ministry, implying that those bureaucracies impede the absorption process.

He said immigrants who arrived during the past year were becoming anxious over the unavailability of housing as their stays at absorption centers neared the end.

But David Levy, the minister of construction and housing, said Monday that the government would build 20,000 new housing units next year, which should be sufficient to absorb about 70,000 newcomers.

CLOSING OF ROMANIA'S BORDERS NOT DISRUPTING SOVIET ALIYAH By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- The immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel by way of Bucharest has not been disrupted, despite Romania's decision to close its international borders, Israel Television reported Monday night.

But it was unclear whether new groups of immigrants would be allowed to land there, as long as the present state of emergency continues.

Bucharest has been for some time the favored route taken by Soviet Jews immigrating to Israel. Direct flights have been provided from Moscow to Bucharest and then to Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile, El Al Israel Airlines advised passengers booked on its flights to Bucharest that they must have special permits, because the borders have been closed to ordinary tourists.

Romania appears to be in the throes of popular upheaval against the 24-year rule of President Nicolae Ceausescu, and the outcome remains in doubt.

Unlike similar recent developments in the other Communist countries of Eastern Europe, the Romanian revolt is being suppressed by force, according to reports reaching here.

ISRAEL REOPENS ITS ETHIOPIAN EMBASSY, FORMALIZING RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Israel, without fanfare, reopened its embassy in Addis Ababa on Monday, signaling the restoration of diplomatic relations after 16 years.

The event was confirmed by a Foreign Ministry official, after a story in the French daily Le Figaro said it was imminent.

No explanation was given for the extremely low-key nature of this development.

Nor would officials comment on recent foreign reports that Israel is providing weapons and training for the Ethiopians against Eritrean rebels, or that Israelis would man an intelligence-gathering station on the Ethiopian coast.

Officials stressed, however, that Israel's top priority in Ethiopia is to resume the emigration of Jews, which was halted when the "Operation Moses" airlift from Sudan had to be abandoned in early 1985.

The embassy in Addis Ababa will be headed for the time being by a charge d'affaires, Meir Yoffe.

Ethiopia, like most African nations, broke relations with Israel in an act of solidarity with Egypt after the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

But relations have improved in recent years. A ranking emissary of President Mengistu Haile Mariam visited Israel in October and announced the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

**FRENCH PREMIER TELLS ISRAEL
HIS COUNTRY IS NOT PRO-ARAB**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Michel Rocard of France sought to assure Israelis on Monday that his country has not taken a pro-Arab tilt.

But he expressed concern to President Chaim Herzog over the slow progress of Middle East peace diplomacy and promised Palestinian leaders that France would play a more energetic role in the region.

Rocard wound up his daylong private visit Monday afternoon, after participating in a ceremony in Jaffa naming a street after a former predecessor, Pierre Mendes-France, who was Jewish.

Although Rocard's trip was described as private, his schedule was filled with top-level discussions.

After touring the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum on Monday morning, Rocard met with Herzog, who told the French statesman that, contrary to his perception, the peace process is accelerating.

According to Israeli sources, Herzog said the parties are focusing on the "nuts and bolts" of the process, and that progress so far should be a source of optimism, when viewed against the broader context of regional affairs in the last 20 years.

Rocard also conferred with Foreign Minister Moshe Arens.

No Need To Fear Euro-Arab Talks

The French prime minister dined with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir at his home Sunday night, shortly after he arrived. The other guests included Arens, Deputy Premier David Levy, Justice Minister Dan Meridor and officials of the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry.

In his conversations with Israeli policymakers, Rocard stressed that Israel has nothing to fear from President Francois Mitterrand's initiative to revive the long-moribund Euro-Arab dialogue.

At the French president's invitation, the foreign ministers of the 24 Arab League countries will meet in Paris with the 12 European Community foreign ministers on Friday.

The Palestine Liberation Organization was also invited.

Rocard insisted that Israel need not worry about the economic integration of the E.C. that will begin in 1992.

Rocard met at the French Consulate General on Monday with 13 Palestinian leaders and, in response to their strong urging, promised that his government would seek a more active role in regional peacemaking.

Spokesmen for both sides said they discussed the current diplomatic efforts centered on U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's five-point proposal for dialogue, but gave no details.

The Palestinians invited to meet Rocard represented all sections of the nationalist movement, except the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas, whose representatives reportedly were not asked to the meeting.

Those who met with Rocard included Faisal Hussein, Hanna Siniora and Sari Nusseibeh of East Jerusalem; Fayed Abu-Rahmen of Gaza and Radwan Abu-Aish, head of the Palestinian Journalists Association.

**MEDIA, CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS PROTEST
CHARGES LEVIED AGAINST 3 JOURNALISTS**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- Security authorities unleashed a storm of protest from civil rights activists and the media this week by bringing charges against three Israeli journalists for failure to leave a closed area of the West Bank.

The reporters are Joel Greenberg of the Jerusalem Post, Ori Nir of Ha'aretz and Oren Cohen of Hadashot.

The military authorities say they entered Nablus on Nov. 15, 1988, the day an independent state of Palestine was proclaimed at the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers.

The IDF, expecting trouble, put the city under curfew and declared it a "closed military zone," which is standard procedure to keep out the news media.

According to the charge sheet, the reporters stayed in Nablus even after hearing on radio that it was a closed area. They allegedly hid in a local hospital, where they were found by the IDF, detained and later released.

The journalists said they were allowed access to Nablus, unhindered by IDF roadblocks. They said they entered the hospital not to hide but to avoid violating the just-declared curfew.

The Civil Rights Association and the National Journalists Association expressed outrage that reporters would be charged for acting in their professional capacity.

Videotapes Confiscated

Knesset member Ran Cohen of the Citizens Rights Movement called on the attorney general to suspend the proceedings.

Hadashot published a stinging editorial Monday, rebuking the military authorities for "trying in effect to dictate to the journalists their thoughts and opinions."

The IDF is also in trouble with the Foreign Press Association.

Eight reporters for foreign news organizations accused the security services of unwarranted detention for seven hours at Bani Naim in the West Bank on Dec. 9, and the confiscation of their videotapes.

The date was the second anniversary of the start of the intifada. Bani Naim, near Hebron, was sealed off after a clash in which the IDF opened fire, killing a man and a woman.

The reporters were released after each signed a personal bond in the amount of \$1,500.

An official statement by the IDF said, "The reporters were in a closed military zone, and therefore the films were taken for inspection" and returned the next day.

The reporters, representing ABC, Visnews and the Associated Press, said they were not notified the area was being sealed off and, in any event, were on their way out when they were detained.

They complained that the seizure of their videotapes made them suspect in the eyes of Arabs, who have accused foreign correspondents in the past of cooperating with the Israeli authorities.

Palestinians have charged that reporters allow the IDF to view the film to confirm the identities of intifada activists. They say all journalists are suspect, because Israeli security operatives often impersonate reporters by putting press signs on their vehicles.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: COURT DECISIONS SETTLE LITTLE ON ISSUE OF HOLIDAY DISPLAYS

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- 'Tis the season for menorahs and creches, and that means Jewish groups and municipal authorities across the country are once again entangled in the debate over the constitutionality of religious displays on public property.

Lined up on one side of the controversy is the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, which sponsors large menorahs displayed on public grounds in locations around the world.

Opposing the menorah displays along with civil liberties groups are a number of Jewish organizations who object to any religious display on government property. They include the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the Reform movement of Judaism.

At the center of the controversy in the Jewish world is the issue of whether a menorah is a religious symbol or if it has enough non-religious connotations to be considered a secular symbol.

"Chabad has always maintained that the menorah is a religious symbol, but with secular connotations," explained Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, a Chabad spokesman.

The menorah "inherently symbolizes a universal message of freedom, of right over might, the miracle of victory of the few over the many, and the righteous over the wicked," said Krinsky.

But Albert Vorspan, senior vice president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, believes that such a view "belittles" the Chanukah menorah's religious significance.

"Most Jewish groups have opposed Lubavitch, arguing that the menorah is one of the most important and historic of Jewish religious symbols," he said in a statement issued last week.

Pittsburgh Won't Allow Menorah

Cities find themselves in the middle of this debate when Chabad asks permission to put up a menorah and other Jewish groups urge that such permission be denied. Whether cities allow the menorah displays or forbid them, they run an equal risk of finding themselves in court.

Last Friday, Chabad filed suit against Pittsburgh city officials, to challenge their refusal to allow the Hasidic Jewish group to erect a menorah on the steps of City Hall.

Pittsburgh was the city in question in the Supreme Court's *Allegheny vs. ACLU* case last July. The court, at that time, permitted the Lubavitch menorah to stand on the City Hall steps alongside a Christmas tree.

But it ruled that a nativity scene standing alone in the county courthouse implied government endorsement of religion and was therefore unconstitutional.

The Pittsburgh city administration, under the leadership of Mayor Sophie Masloff, who is Jewish, decided this year that if there could be no nativity scene in the courthouse, there would be no menorah at City Hall.

So, the Christmas tree remains on the City Hall steps, and Lubavitch is in court to force the city to permit the menorah to stand beside it.

"I think it is absolutely ridiculous that after the city spent all that money defending itself (in

the Supreme Court case) and the Supreme Court ruled in our favor to put the menorah up, that they are now turning around and not allowing the display," said an attorney who formerly represented Chabad in the case.

Pittsburgh City Solicitor Dan Pellegrini believes the city has the right to block the menorah display.

"No one has the right to put anything on city steps," he said. "They're not a public forum -- this is a public building, but the steps and the side of the building are not."

Burlington Circumventing Ruling

In order to try to avoid the type of turmoil that the menorah displays have caused in Pittsburgh, groups such as AJCongress and ADL are recommending that local governments not allow religious displays on public grounds. They are urging that religious symbols be displayed on private land instead.

In literature sent to ADL regional directors, the organization's legal department suggests that ADL leaders remind local officials that while religious displays are permissible if "accompanied by secular symbols," municipalities are "not required to allow religious symbols to be displayed at courthouses, statehouses and city halls."

The reminder was sent anticipating that "the Lubavitch movement likely will try to erect menorahs at many government buildings this year."

Nathan Lewin, an attorney for Chabad, said that the efforts to put up menorahs are succeeding this year, thanks to the July Supreme Court ruling.

He said "a substantial number of communities," including Teaneck, N.J., and several California cities, have agreed to allow Lubavitch to put up menorahs, usually in conjunction with a Christmas tree or another type of holiday display.

One municipal government that appears sympathetic to the Lubavitch position is that of Burlington, Vt.

The city is allowing a menorah to be erected, despite a Dec. 12 federal appeals court ruling that the menorah could not be displayed standing alone in a park adjoining City Hall.

Burlington officials say that the menorah will now be displayed alongside a Christmas tree that a downtown business association has decided for the first time to put up in the same park.

'Law By Interior Decorator'

John Franco, Burlington's assistant city attorney, blames the federal courts for saddling city governments with both unending controversy and crippling legal costs.

And what makes it especially absurd, he said, is that after two years of litigation, the constitutionality of the menorah display has ended up turning on whether or not there is a Christmas tree standing beside it.

Pittsburgh Solicitor Pellegrini also commented on the absurdity of the situation, but said that his city would stand by its decision to display only a Christmas tree.

"What we're getting is constitutional law by interior decorator," Pellegrini said. He interpreted Pittsburgh's decision to have only a Christmas tree as "our 'interior decorator' saying that this year, we'd just go simple."

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum and Iris Sampson of the Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle contributed to this report.)