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**MANDELA REGRETS OFFENDING JEWS,
SAYS HE IS READY TO VISIT ISRAEL**

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, June 10 (JTA) -- Nelson Mandela told a group of American Jewish leaders here Sunday that he was sorry if any of his past statements on Israel had offended Jews.

In what was described by participants as a "warm, friendly and cordial meeting," the South African black leader also said he hoped to visit Israel soon and looked forward to good relations between it and the new democratic state that emerges in South Africa.

The Jewish delegation expressed its commitment to continue the battle against apartheid and racism in South Africa and extended a warm welcome for Mandela's forthcoming visit to the United States.

"It was an historic event in the common struggle of Jews and blacks against racism and anti-Semitism," said Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, who coordinated the meeting.

Siegman and five other American Jewish leaders met for close to three hours Sunday morning with the long-imprisoned African National Congress leader.

The meeting was the culmination of diplomatic efforts by national Jewish groups and the New York Jewish community aimed at getting Mandela to clarify his views on Israel before his scheduled arrival in the United States on June 20.

The African National Congress leader has on a number of occasions equated the nationalist struggle of black South Africans with the Palestinian struggle. He has been photographed at least twice embracing Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat.

American Jewish leaders were concerned that Jewish protests against such statements during Mandela's visit to the United States could break open old wounds between Jews and blacks, who plan to give Mandela a hero's welcome.

Accepts Israel's Right To Exist

The Jewish leaders attending the meeting, besides Siegman, were Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress; Herbert Wander, chairman of the National Jewish Community Advisory Council's committee on apartheid; Maynard Wishner, past president of the American Jewish Committee; Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; and Albert Vorspan, senior vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

According to Siegman, the South African leader said that the ANC accepts unequivocally Israel's de facto right to exist and its legal right to exist within the pre-1967 borders.

Mandela expressed his gratitude to Jews in South Africa who have been among the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement. He also spoke of his respect for some Israeli leaders, including Golda Meir, who was always outspoken in her opposition to apartheid, and Menachem Begin, whose book "Revolt" he said was used like a textbook by the ANC during its early years.

The anti-apartheid leader expressed regret if statements he made in Cairo and Lusaka, Zambia,

regarding Arafat and Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi led to any misunderstandings in the Jewish community.

Foxman said Mandela expressed his wish to visit Israel and hoped he would soon receive an official invitation.

"Our meeting was an opportunity to straighten out some misconceptions," Foxman said in a statement late Sunday. "I am convinced that Mr. Mandela -- after forthright discussions on these subjects -- understands our concerns, and his sincere apologies for past statements were warmly welcomed."

Statements Hailed In New York

In New York, reports of Mandela's statements Sunday were hailed by the local Jewish Community Relations Council, which said it would join in welcoming the ANC leader to the city.

"I think this very much takes the air out of the sails of the protest movement," Michael Miller, executive director of the JCRC, said, referring to those who had planned either to stage demonstrations or boycott the local celebration that is to be thrown upon Mandela's arrival.

"We are pleased that he (Mandela) has spoken positively about Israel and looks forward to good relations between the State of Israel and non-racist South Africa," Kenneth Bialkin, president of the New York JCRC, said in a statement.

But Miller warned that the success of the Geneva meeting should not be exaggerated. "As much as the outcome of the meeting was very positive, this is one step in a series of discussions with Mr. Mandela on a broad range of issues of mutual concern," he said.

The JCRC is hoping to set up further dialogue with Mandela while he is in New York.

(JTA staff writer Elena Neuman in New York contributed to this report.)

**FIRST CHALLENGE OF SHAMIR COALITION
IS RESOLVING BIDS FOR CABINET POSTS**

By David Landau and Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 10 (JTA) -- Prime Minister-designate Yitzhak Shamir won unanimous approval for his new right-wing government Sunday from the Likud Central Committee and expressed confidence it would serve out a full term, despite its narrow base.

But the coalition the Likud leader has put together with the Orthodox and right-wing parties could still founder in the Knesset, where a confidence vote was scheduled for Monday.

Shamir read out a list of Likud ministers identical to those serving in the present transitional government.

He did not specify their portfolios. But the fact that David Levy's name was read after his own indicated that Levy may be given the rank of vice premier. He is also widely rumored to be Shamir's choice for foreign minister.

Moshe Nissim's name was third on the list, indicating most likely that he will hold the rank of deputy prime minister.

Moshe Arens, foreign minister in the transitional regime, is likely to be named defense minister in the new government.

Also slated for major posts are two hard-line

Likud ministers who quit the Cabinet in policy disputes with Shamir before the Likud-Labor unity government fell on March 15.

Ariel Sharon is expected to be appointed minister of housing with special responsibility for immigrants from the Soviet Union.

Yitzhak Moda'i will be the new finance minister, the portfolio held in the unity government by Labor Party leader Shimon Peres.

But Shamir, who officially informed President Chaim Herzog late Friday afternoon that he had succeeded in forming a government, faces residual disaffection within Likud that could lose him his two-vote edge in the 120-member parliament.

A Commitment To Peace Process

Several Likud Knesset members have threatened directly or indirectly to withhold their support unless they receive ministerial positions.

Counting on a 62-seat Knesset majority to vote his coalition into office, Shamir said he would decide only on Monday whether to go ahead with his Knesset presentation if these dissenters held their ground.

Likud sources optimistically maintained that the dissent would evaporate as the crucial vote approached and that Shamir would swear in his new Cabinet on Monday night.

Shamir seems to have satisfied his far-right coalition partners on the ideological level. But in doing so, he may have set the stage for a government crisis the first time it must make a major policy decision.

The new governmental guidelines will state that "the government will further the cause of peace in accordance with the Camp David accords and the May 1989 peace initiative."

But the right-wing Tsomet and Tehiya parties have exempted themselves from any such commitment. They were permitted to append to the platform a letter to the prime minister reserving a free vote for themselves on all issues pertaining to autonomy or elections in the administered territories.

NEWS ANALYSIS: **FORMATION OF RIGHT-WING GOVERNMENT BRINGS WORRY (AND RELIEF) TO U.S. JEWS** By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, June 10 (JTA) -- The ascendancy of a narrowly based Israeli government led by Likud's Yitzhak Shamir seems likely to place American Jewry between a U.S. administration and an Israeli government whose policies are profoundly different.

Shamir's government, composed of right-wing and religious parties, appears headed for conflict with the Bush administration on the issues of settlement in the administered territories and the U.S. proposal for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to advance the peace process.

The new coalition's policy guidelines state that the government will "strengthen, expand and develop" settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in contradiction to U.S. policy, which sees expansion of settlements as an obstacle to peace.

The guidelines also make no mention of Secretary of State James Baker's proposal for preliminary talks in Cairo between Israel and a Palestinian delegation.

American Jewish leaders have been anticipating the formation of such a government and have braced themselves for what appears to be a period that will test their loyalties.

"I think it's going to be a very difficult environment and one which will split American Jews as well as Israelis," said Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress.

But others contend that Shamir's new government should be given time to put its policies into action. They say it is wrong to assume the United States and Israel are on a collision course.

A Chance To 'Settle In'

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said that both the U.S. government and American Jewry must give the new coalition an opportunity "to settle in" before they criticize its policies.

The Israeli government "should not be judged by the parties or the platforms, but by what they do," Hoenlein said. "I think everyone will agree that we've got to give this government a chance."

Lifton disagrees. "If the government has enunciated a policy it intends to follow and that policy is to increase settlement in the West Bank and Gaza, parts of the American Jewish community will feel free -- and properly so -- to criticize that stated policy as such," he said.

But some American Jewish critics of Shamir's right-wing policies appear willing to give the new government a chance, at least initially.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, congratulated Shamir, saying he is "gratified that a government is now in place in Israel and that the great task of moving toward peace may now be resumed."

Schindler said that "whatever differences some of us may have with various of Prime Minister Shamir's specific policies, American Jews stand as one with Israel as a free and democratic nation, homeland of the Jewish people, in its struggle to live in security, peace and prosperity with its neighbors."

Concern Over Impact On Immigration

The continuing influx of Soviet Jews into Israel has made American Jewish concern over the political situation even more intense than usual.

Those committed to Soviet Jewry have noted with concern the fact that Ariel Sharon, a strong proponent of settlement in the territories, is set to be named minister of housing, with special responsibility for Soviet Jewish immigration.

The Soviet Union, the United States and various European countries serving as transit points for Soviet Jews bound for Israel have all warned that settlement of the immigrants in the territories could impede the flow of olim.

Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and a member of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, said that American Jews would make clear that they do not want political concerns interfering with the immigration and absorption of Soviet Jews.

But alongside the worries over the future of U.S.-Israel relations, there is also a sense of relief in the American Jewish community that after eight years of Labor-Likud coalitions, the Israeli government will be speaking with one voice -- even if it is a voice with which many disagree profoundly.

"There is now a clear-cut right-wing government and a clear-cut opposition party," said Lifton. "The blending of the two gave off confusing signals."

**JEWISH LEADERSHIP CALLS ON U.S.
TO TERMINATE DIALOGUE WITH PLO**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, June 10 (JTA) -- The top leadership of organized American Jewry has called on the Bush administration to cut off its 17-month dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization, because of a PLO faction's attempted raid late last month on Israeli beaches near Tel Aviv.

The call was issued Friday in New York by Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which represents 46 national Jewish groups.

"Our country has no other course but to terminate its talks with the PLO," Reich said in a statement.

"At stake is the credibility of the American government in the war against terrorism," he said. "Our country cannot lead a campaign against worldwide terrorism while holding ongoing discussions with the world's most notorious terrorist organization."

The Bush administration has not yet decided whether to break off its dialogue, which began in December 1988, after PLO leader Yasir Arafat publicly renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist.

"We are discussing all of that," President Bush said Friday aboard Air Force One as he was flying from Des Moines to Omaha. "I'm not prepared to make an announcement on policy at this point."

Secretary of State James Baker had a similar comment Friday at a news conference ending a NATO ministerial meeting in Turnberry, Scotland.

"When we are satisfied we know all we need to know, we will act in a way which reflects our commitment to promoting peace but being resolute in condemning terrorism," Baker said.

No Statement From Baghdad

Although Arafat has denied any responsibility for the May 30 aborted attack, he has not responded to U.S. demands that he condemn it outright.

Arafat also has not acted to remove Mohammed (Abul) Abbas from the PLO's Executive Committee. It was Abbas' Palestine Liberation Front faction that attempted to attack two Israeli beaches near Tel Aviv on May 30.

Four terrorists were killed and 12 captured in the incident. One of the surviving terrorists later said the group planned to kill as many civilians as possible.

The PLO Executive Committee ended a meeting last Thursday in Baghdad without mentioning the terrorist raid or Abbas, who is wanted in the United States for the 1985 hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro and the murder of a wheelchair-bound American Jewish passenger, Leon Klinghoffer.

"I'd like to see Mr. Arafat speak out" against the latest attack, Bush said. He said the U.S.-PLO dialogue "is predicated on a renunciation of terror. In my view this is sheer terror."

"Terrorism is something that has to be taken very, very seriously," Baker said. "It is important that we pursue peace in the Middle East in a serious manner."

Also speaking at the NATO news conference was British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. He urged Arafat to be "more precise and specific in condemning the beach attack."

**COURT RULES KLINGHOFFER FAMILY
CAN SUE PLO OVER ACHILLE LAURO**
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 10 (JTA) -- The Palestine Liberation Organization suffered a legal blow last week, when a U.S. court in New York said it had the right to rule who was responsible for tossing a crippled American man into the Mediterranean Sea in 1985.

Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound Jewish man from New York, was shot and thrown off the Achille Lauro cruise ship by members of the Palestine Liberation Front who had seized the cruise ship in the Mediterranean.

The front, a PLO constituent group headed by Mohammed (Abul) Abbas, has also been linked to a failed terrorist attack May 30 on beaches outside of Tel Aviv.

The June 7 ruling, by U.S. District Court Judge Louis Stanton in Manhattan, marks the first time a federal court has accepted jurisdiction to rule on international terrorism incidents. A trial date has not been set.

Previously, a U.S. court in the District of Columbia had dismissed a suit by Americans against Libya and the PLO for damages resulting from an attack on an Israeli bus.

U.S. courts rarely consider claims against foreign governments, but in the PLO's case, Stanton rejected the legal existence of the PLO's proclaimed "State of Palestine."

The U.S. definition of what constitutes a foreign country, Stanton ruled, "does not fit the PLO closely enough to justify treating it as a foreign sovereign or state in this litigation."

"Rather, as its name indicates, the PLO is an organization. It is composed of individuals without a legal identity apart from its membership, formed for specific objectives."

Arafat May Be Put On Stand

Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, who represented the PLO, had asserted that it was immune because of its relationship to the United Nations, where it has the status of permanent observer.

The State Department was not involved in the case. But one department official said, "We've always maintained that the PLO had extremely limited privileges and immunities" in the United States, and only for "official" activities at the United Nations.

The Achille Lauro suit was filed in November 1985 by Klinghoffer's widow, Marilyn, who died of cancer in 1986.

Lisa Arbritter, one of Klinghoffer's two daughters, said she was "very gratified that finally the PLO will be held responsible and accountable for my father."

Jay Fischer, the New York lawyer who handled the Klinghoffer suit, said the ruling "significantly demeans" the PLO. The next step will be taking depositions of people "who can shed any light on the PLO," he said.

Fischer said he may try to have Abbas or PLO leader Yasir Arafat take the stand at the trial if he thinks they have any "relevant" information.

Abbas is wanted by the United States for the Achille Lauro hijacking and the murder of Klinghoffer.

But for Arafat to gain entry to the United States, the Bush administration would have to grant him a visa.

**WALESA CONDEMNS ANTI-SEMITISM
IN MOVE MANY HOPE WILL BE ECHOED**
By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW, June 10 (JTA) -- The American Jewish Congress has expressed hope that Eastern European political and church leaders will follow the example of Lech Walesa's recent unequivocal condemnation of anti-Semitism.

"Your clear statement, calling things by their names, is an important contribution to better Polish-Jewish relations, based on truth," the AJCongress' Warsaw representative, Stanislaw Krajewski, wrote to the Polish Solidarity leader June 7.

"Your condemnation of anti-Semitism will help in the 'necessary,' as you have written, defense against its resurgence," Krajewski wrote.

The letter was sent on behalf of Robert Lifton, president of the AJCongress, and Henry Siegman, executive director, in praise of Walesa's statement last week urging that Poles mark the 44th anniversary of the pogrom in Kielce, the worst pogrom of the post-Nazi era.

Walesa proposed that a memorial plaque be erected at the site of the pogrom, which occurred on July 4, 1946. On that day, a crowd of Poles, incensed by a recurrence of the old blood-libel rumors against Jews, attacked the building that housed the Jewish Committee.

Almost all the Jews who were in the building were shot, stoned or hacked to death with axes or other blunt instruments.

In other parts of Kielce, Jews were murdered in their homes or dragged outside and slain in the streets. A total of 42 Jews were killed that day.

Following the Kielce pogrom, 100,000 Polish Jews, more than half of them survivors of concentration camps, fled the country.

The remaining Jewish population was reduced several times afterward when anti-Semitic campaigns purged government positions of Jews.

Anti-Semitism In Election Campaign

Walesa issued his statement after anti-Semitic expressions and accusations surfaced in the campaigning for local elections held May 27. It was prominently displayed June 5 in the entire Polish press, including front-page space in leading newspapers.

"Anti-Semitism has not disappeared from our communal life," the Solidarity leader said. "We have to fight its relics and defend ourselves against its coming back."

He reminded Poles that "whoever and in whomever's interest provoked this pogrom, it was our compatriots who did it and they did it on Polish soil."

Walesa described the Kielce pogrom as "the most mournful ever in the history of relations between Poles and Jews in the last half-century."

Krajewski responded, "Your words have not only a moral but also a political significance. Alarmingly, many persons try now to use anti-Semitism as an instrument in political battles, represent the number of Jews in ridiculously enormous proportions and perceive an enemy in everyone who has some Jewish ancestors."

The letter said Walesa's influence was a buttress against the resurgence of anti-Semitism.

Krajewski said AJCongress hoped that "Following the condemnation of anti-Semitism by Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and yourself, other East European political and ecclesiastical leaders will make statements in a similar spirit."

**IN LANDMARK CZECHOSLOVAK ELECTIONS,
JEWS OVERWHELMINGLY BACK CIVIC FORUM**
By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, June 10 (JTA) -- President Vaclav Havel's Civic Forum, which won a substantial victory this weekend in Czechoslovakia's first free parliamentary election in 50 years, appears to have had overwhelming support in the small Jewish community.

But until the ballots cast Friday and Saturday are carefully analyzed, it will be hard to say whether 90 percent of Czechoslovak Jews did, in fact, vote for Havel's party, as predicted by Desider Galsky, head of the Czech Jewish community.

Czechoslovak voters had to elect 300 members of the two chambers of the country's Parliament, the House of the People and the House of the Nations. In addition, they selected 200 members of the Czech National Council, in Bohemia and Moravia, and the Slovak National Council, in Slovakia.

Questioned at a polling station about the significance of the elections for Czechoslovak Jews, Galsky said the return of freedom and democracy to Czechoslovakia brought new life to the country's small Jewish community.

"We hope that this election will support the trend that began last November. After many years of living in a totalitarian system, we are for the first time free people, not controlled and manipulated by anybody," Galsky said.

Galsky was returned to the leadership of the Jewish community of Czechoslovakia in early December, after the downfall of the country's Communist regime. Until the "velvet revolution" overturned the government in late November, hard-line Communists were appointed by the government as leaders of the Jewish community, which was unable to freely express itself.

Anti-Semitism In Slovakia

Galsky, who was a leader of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities from 1980 to 1985, frequently defied government strictures and was ousted and for years publicly shunned.

"I am convinced that at least 90 of each 100 Jews in this country will vote for the Civic Forum," Galsky said, confirming that he himself had "of course" voted for the party's candidates.

Galsky, a professor of history, said he has known the playwright president since his days as a dissident during the Communist regime.

Galsky was one of the Czech Jewish leaders invited to accompany Havel on his three-day visit to Israel in late April and was a member of the official delegation. It was the first trip to Israel by a Czechoslovak chief of state.

He said Havel and his advisers appreciate the problems and needs of the Jewish community, as does the Czech prime minister, Petr Pithart. Galsky said Pithart has promised him government assistance to maintain abandoned Jewish cemeteries in the country.

Galsky takes seriously the manifest anti-Semitism in the ranks of the clergy and nationalistic forces, which have a large following in Slovakia, the eastern constituent of the Czechoslovak federation.

Some groups make use of the newly gained freedom to speak out openly against Czechs, Gypsies or Jews, he explained.

But Galsky said he is "convinced that they are not the mainstream in Slovakia and that democratic forces will have the upper hand there."