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**PLO, WELCOMED IN CAIRO AND AMMAN,
SEEMS TO BE REGAINING ARAB SUPPORT**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 7 (JTA) -- The Palestine Liberation Organization, ostracized by much of the Arab world for supporting Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf War, is once again winning Arab support for its bid to participate in Middle East peace negotiations.

This development has significance in view of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's decision to return to the region this week for another attempt to get Arabs and Israelis to agree on a peace conference.

Baker is now likely to be told by Arab leaders that any peace conference must include the PLO.

Mahmoud Abbas, who is in charge of the PLO's "Israel desk," reportedly got a warm reception when he visited Cairo and Amman this week at the head of a delegation of senior PLO officials.

Egypt, a member of the U.S.-led coalition that fought Iraq, seems to have forgiven the PLO for backing its erstwhile foe.

According to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, the Egyptians have reverted to their pre-Gulf crisis role as go-between for the PLO and United States, whose brief dialogue was suspended last year.

They have accepted Baker's initiative, on condition that the PLO be included in a regional peace conference.

Palestinians Taking Hard Line

Yediot Achronot quoted Palestinian sources to the effect that Egypt is convinced the Israelis will not cooperate, regardless of whether the PLO has a role in the peace process. Therefore, it decided to rehabilitate the PLO.

Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, reportedly had a successful visit in Amman, where he met Sunday with King Hussein.

The Jordanian ruler, who also supported Iraq, had long ago given up on the PLO as a reliable partner in negotiations with Israel.

But he seems to have changed his mind.

A senior government source in Amman said the PLO would have to participate in a Palestinian delegation, because it "has the sole right to represent the future needs of the Palestinians."

When Hussein met with Baker last month, he said Jordan was willing to be part of a joint delegation with the Palestinians, but the decision rested with the PLO.

The Palestinians, aware of their restored respectability in Arab circles, are taking a hard line. Officially, they insist on an independent Palestinian delegation and on the presence of the European Community at a regional conference.

That would give it the aspect of an international conference, which Israel totally rejects. But the Israelis may be amenable to a limited European role if the conference would be no more than a formal prelude to direct talks.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy will discuss this with the 12 E.C. foreign ministers when he visits Brussels this week.

**SHAMIR DOUBTFUL ON PEACE PROGRESS
AS U.S. AND SOVIET VISITS APPROACH**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 7 (JTA) -- As Israel prepared for back-to-back visits this weekend by Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir expressed doubts about the chances of a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process.

Shamir spoke pessimistically Tuesday about "waning signs of an Arab readiness to change their attitudes" toward Israel, which he attributed in large measure to the less-than-conclusive defeat of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Hussein's ability to quickly regain strength at home and even abroad has made the Arab leaders think twice about making bold changes in their stance toward Israel, Shamir said.

He warned that hopes that the allied victory in the Persian Gulf War would produce an atmosphere conducive to Arab-Israeli peacemaking are "quickly fading."

Shamir expressed these views to the visiting foreign minister of Holland, Hans van den Broek. But the Dutch diplomat, who will assume the rotating chairmanship of the European Community's Council of Ministers on July 1, said he saw encouraging developments in the Arab world.

Shamir's downbeat assessment was seen by some observers to be an attempt to lower expectations as the United States and Soviet Union embark on their first joint peace initiative in the region.

His remarks were also seen as an oblique criticism of Washington's handling of Iraq and the Arab world in the wake of its military victory.

And they were read as a message to Syria and Israel's moderate Arab neighbors, Jordan and Egypt, which seem to be re-embracing the recently discredited Palestine Liberation Organization.

Conflicting Domestic Pressures

Shamir faces problems on the domestic political front. Relations between the government and the opposition factions have worsened dramatically, and there is dissension within the governing coalition.

Suspicion and tension is mounting between the parties of the far right and circles within Likud and its religious coalition partners, whom the right perceives to be too ready to offer concessions.

Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, the outspoken Likud hard-liner, and the right-wing Tehiya, Tsomet and Moledet parties have served notice on Shamir that they will not agree to an international peace conference or any forum that extends beyond a formal opening ceremony.

They reject any concessions to the Palestinians and oppose even the limited autonomy arrangement that is basic to Shamir's plan.

Countering pressure from the right is the small, strictly Orthodox Degel HaTorah party, whose two-member Knesset delegation reminded Shamir this week that it is firmly committed to the peace process and will not tolerate Israeli intransigence.

Invective is heating up the Knesset. Yossi

Sarid of the dovish Citizens Rights Movement called Sharon a "fascist Jew" in the course of debate Monday about relations with the United States.

Sharon, for his part, denounced the left-wing opposition as "stool pigeons" for exposing accelerated settlement activity in the administered territories.

The housing minister took a tour Tuesday of new Jewish housing projects in and around Jerusalem, accompanied by right-wing Knesset members of the Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) Front.

Meanwhile, it is assumed here that Baker and Bessmertnykh will not plunge uncoordinated into the parlous thickets of Middle East diplomacy and certainly not in competition with each other.

The likelihood is that Baker, who will be making his fourth tour of the region since March, has persuaded the Soviets to join him in a final all-out push for the regional peace conference he has been promoting but which has been blocked by disagreements over procedural details.

According to some Israeli sources, the two statesmen plan to issue a joint challenge to their respective friends and allies in the region, daring them not to attend.

Baker, who is due here early next week, and Bessmertnykh, who arrives Friday, will meet in Cairo on Sunday to discuss peace prospects, following the Soviet minister's visit to Israel.

The itineraries of both men include Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

DOVISH KNESSET DELEGATION ARRIVES IN U.S. TO PROMOTE PEACE PROSPECTS By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, May 7 (JTA) -- Yossi Beilin, a Knesset member from Israel's left-leaning Labor Party, describes the Palestine Liberation Organization in terms that would make even the most right-wing Knesset member proud.

"Amos Oz described the PLO as the ugliest national movement in the world, and I subscribe to that," said Beilin, quoting one of Israel's foremost writers and peace activists.

"But we are not nominating our partners, and I'm afraid that if the PLO is not there, it won't be a moderate wing that will represent the Palestinians, but a more extreme one," he explained in an interview Monday evening. "We can't continue the situation as is."

Amid sharp criticism from Israel's Likud-led government, Beilin and six other Israeli lawmakers representing opposition liberal parties are touring the United States this week, trying to promote the seemingly stalled Middle East peace process.

The tour was attacked for taking place in the midst of Secretary of State James Baker's attempts to reach an agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors on peace negotiations, and for advocating a position that threatens Israel's land holdings.

"I've asked myself, why were we attacked so bitterly?" said Knesset member Dedi Zucker of the Citizens Rights Movement.

"I think that the government is really afraid of people like ourselves being exposed to the Jewish community and exposing the very well-known fact that the majority of Jews and Israelis support land for peace," he said.

The seven Knesset members have come here ready with the results of a new poll showing that in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, 58 percent of Israelis favor the principle of "terri-

ories for peace," while 34 percent support the creation of a Palestinian state.

The poll, whose findings were released April 14, was conducted under the auspices of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University.

An Unusual Offer To Shamir

Shuttling between Washington and New York, and between the East and West Coasts, the Knesset members have scheduled back-to-back meetings with an array of opinion-makers, including members of Congress, major Jewish organizational leaders, labor activists and their own ambassador to Washington.

"We came here to say there is a real willingness to start the process toward peace, and to tell the administration that it shouldn't despair," said Tzali Reshef, a lawyer and spokesperson for Peace Now, whose American arm -- Americans for Peace Now -- is sponsoring the tour.

The seven have also come with an unusual promise: to support Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir if he actively pursues peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

"If Shamir says he doesn't have a majority in his own party, we promise our own votes and we won't topple his government," said Beilin.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, called this offer an "extraordinary political commitment," and said it would "flush out" the Shamir government on its true commitment to the peace process.

Besides Beilin and Zucker, the visiting Knesset delegation includes: Avrum Burg and Arieh (Lova) Eliav of Labor, Avraham Poraz of the Center-Shinui Movement, Yair Tzaban of Mapam and Mordechai Virshubski of the Citizens Rights Movement.

LAWMAKERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD URGE CREATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, May 7 (JTA) -- The Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union concluded its 85th conference in Pyongyang, North Korea, with a resolution unequivocally endorsing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on territory evacuated by Israel.

The resolution, passed Saturday, urges Israel to withdraw unconditionally from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. It also calls on Israel to stop building settlements in the territories and to dismantle existing ones.

An Israeli delegation participated in the resolution drafting committee but apparently was unable to modify the anti-Israel language of the resolution. Also serving on the committee were delegates from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Egypt and Algeria.

Members of the Israeli delegation, which was headed by Knesset member Yehoshua Matza of Likud, included Haim Corfu, also of Likud, and Raanan Cohen and Edna Solodar, both of Labor.

They traveled to North Korea after a historic trip to China, where they were guests of Israel's Academic Liaison Office, the only presence Israel has in Beijing.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, which meets semiannually, was founded in 1889 to promote personal contacts among members of the world's parliaments, with a view to the establishment and development of representative institutions and advancing international peace and cooperation.

**GROUPS BACK CIVIL RIGHTS BILL,
DENYING IT WILL LEAD TO QUOTAS**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, May 7 (JTA) -- Representatives of several major American Jewish organizations tried Tuesday to put to rest the notion that the civil rights bill proposed by Democrats in Congress would result in the use of minority hiring quotas by employers.

"The issue of quotas is one to which we are especially sensitive, having suffered the consequences of quotas so powerfully," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"We are offended by the characterization of this bill as a quota bill, and we view the allegation that it is a quota bill as no more than a red herring" used to "exploit people's fears."

Saperstein was one of six representatives of Jewish organizations who spoke at a Capitol Hill news conference in support of the civil rights bill, which the House of Representatives is expected to vote on next week.

The Senate is waiting for the House vote before it introduces the bill, which is designed to circumvent five 1989 Supreme Court decisions that make it more difficult for people to prove that they are victims of job discrimination.

President Bush has charged that if the civil rights bill becomes law, employers will impose minority hiring quotas to avoid costly lawsuits alleging discrimination.

The president cited this reason when he vetoed a similar bill last year. But Democrats reintroduced it in January as the first piece of legislation submitted to the 102nd Congress.

"I don't think there is any issue that I have seen on the American domestic agenda to which the Jewish community is as unified as it is on this," said Diana Aviv, associate executive vice chair of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, which coordinates policy for national and local Jewish organizations.

She said that 12 of NJCRAC's 13 national member agencies and all 117 of its local community relations councils support the bill.

Doubts From Orthodox Groups

The one NJCRAC member that believes the bill will result in quotas is the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Leaders of that group are meeting Wednesday night to discuss whether to remain neutral, as the Orthodox Union did last year, or publicly oppose it.

The only major Jewish organization to oppose the bill so far is Agudath Israel of America, another Orthodox group.

At the news conference, representatives of Jewish organizations stressed they have special "credibility" in denying the bill would result in quotas because of the past experience American Jews have had with quotas, which were once used to limit Jewish enrollment in colleges.

Michael Lieberman, associate director and counsel of the Washington office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said that as the bill was drafted, "ADL made clear its strong opposition to any remedial legislation which could lead to the imposition of quotas."

"The bill's drafters attempted to avoid a divisive debate and introduced a bill which we and other longtime opponents of quotas could endorse," Lieberman said.

While the Orthodox groups claim employers

would introduce quotas to prevent costly litigation, Lieberman argued that those employers who do so "may well find themselves subject to the very litigation they seek to avoid."

"ADL believes that it is illegal, ineffective and immoral for employers to hire or promote on the basis of any individual's race, ethnicity or gender," Lieberman said.

Offers Protection For Women

Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress, said those opposing the bill "have not offered one shred of evidence that employers resorted to hiring quotas" under the standards used for 19 years before the 1989 Supreme Court decisions.

The bill would also allow persons discriminated against because of their sex, religion or national origin to sue for monetary damages. While victims of racial discrimination currently can seek compensatory and punitive damages, women and religious minorities can only receive back pay and reinstatement in their jobs.

Sammie Moshenberg, director of the Washington office of the National Council of Jewish Women, said, "In this day and age, it is unconscionable that women suffering from intentional discrimination are not allowed the same redress as other victims of workplace discrimination."

Moshenberg charged that the Bush administration has used the "emotional" quota issue to oppose the bill because if "they say they are opposed to women receiving equity in treatment when they are victims of intentional discrimination, the American voters will repudiate that stand" in the 1992 election campaign.

Meanwhile, Agudath Israel has issued a study of the bill, conducted by two members of its legal staff, which expresses particular concern about the bill's penalties for unintentional discrimination.

David Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's general counsel, and Abba Cohen, director of its Washington office, said the "law should come down hard on employers who are found to have engaged intentionally in unlawful discriminatory employment practices."

Complaints Of 'Reverse Discrimination'

But they warned that when an employer's practices have merely resulted in "disparities between the composition of his work force and the general population of qualified employees, the law should proceed with extreme caution."

They acknowledged that quotas today seek to promote "a commendable goal of increasing opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities." But they pointed out that Jews could be "victims of quotas today no less than they were a generation or two ago."

The report noted that "for every call Agudath Israel receives complaining of religious discrimination, another one comes in complaining of 'reverse discrimination.'"

Also present at Tuesday's news conference supporting the civil rights bill were representatives of the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, B'nai B'rith Women, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Jewish Labor Committee, Na'amat USA, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of America.

The Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot and the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism also endorsed the bill.

SECRET EFFORT TO AID SOVIET JEWS OFFICIALLY REVEALED AFTER 40 YEARS

By Charles Hoffman

JERUSALEM, May 7 (JTA) -- About 40 activists from all over the world were saluted here Monday night for their contributions to the long struggle to liberate Soviet Jewry.

But the man in many ways most responsible for the triumphal occasion was probably the least known to the thousands of Soviet emigres, Israelis and visitors who packed the Binyanei Ha'uma, Jerusalem's huge convention center.

His name is Nehemia Levanon, an elderly Estonian-born Jew and ex-kibbutznik who stepped modestly onto the stage, wearing a sports jacket and open collar.

His clandestine exploits, abetted by the young State of Israel in one of its more delicate covert undertakings, helped keep the spark of Judaism alive and encouraged Zionism among Soviet Jews as far back as the Stalin era.

Levanon's 40-year secret, recounted in a stirring audio-visual presentation, gave an intriguing slant to the elaborate two-hour pageant titled "The Dream and the Struggle -- The 40-Year Campaign for Soviet Jewry," which the World Jewish Congress staged at its ninth plenary assembly here.

On hand also were famous names in the lexicon of Soviet Jewry activism and former prisoners of Zion.

Nobel laureate Eli Wiesel, one of the foremost chroniclers of the Holocaust, pursued his quest for answers, and activist Natan Sharansky, who spent nine years in the Soviet Gulag, supplied a few.

Wiesel had a questions for Soviet Jews: "Where did you get the courage to stand up to what was then an empire of fear and terror?"

"You had no way to learn about Jewish history. Even before (Andrei) Sakharov and the dissident movement, you dared to come out and claim allegiance to our people and to its history and tradition. How did you do it?"

Began In Stalin's Time

Sharansky replied: "Where did we get our strength? Even if you know nothing (about Judaism) and are separated from your people, when you realize that history didn't start for you with your birth or in 1917, but thousands of years ago; when you realize that history is on your side and God is on your side, you are never alone."

If Sharansky provided inspiration, Levanon provided the nuts and bolts of the Soviet Jewry movement.

In what was one of the darkest periods for Soviet Jewry, he directed a secret unit in Israel known as the Lishkat Hakesher (Liaison Bureau). It had its antecedents in 1952, when faint cries of distress were heard from the Soviet Union.

In Moscow, Stalin was about to launch his campaign against Jews. In Tel Aviv, Isser Harel, then head of the Mossad, and Shaul Avigur, who headed the illegal immigration movement before 1948, pondered what the young Jewish state could do to save Soviet Jews.

After secret consultations, Levanon, an immigrant from Estonia, was summoned from his kibbutz, Kfar Blum. He estimated that a nucleus of hundreds, possibly thousands of Zionist-oriented Jews remained in the Soviet Union and had to be reached.

The prime minister at the time, David Ben-

Gurion, approved a plan, and in 1953 the secret struggle for Soviet Jewry began under the code name "Bilu," an acronym from a verse from Isaiah.

Levanon, his wife and two other families joined the Israeli Embassy staff in Moscow. Levanon was officially listed as agricultural attache. All were Bilu agents.

Their task was the secret distribution of prayerbooks, Bibles, dictionaries and pictures of Israel to Soviet Jews.

Protests During Khrushchev Visit

In 1955, however, the Soviets arrested 30 Jews and expelled the Bilu diplomats.

The Israeli government decided to arouse world opinion to the plight of Soviet Jews and it set up the Liaison Bureau in 1955 for that purpose, attached to the Prime Minister's Office.

Attaches at Israeli embassies around the world were assigned the job of organizing local activities on behalf of Soviet Jews.

In 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin visited the West, they were met by hecklers and protesters organized by Levanon and his team.

The struggle became a battle of wits with the Soviet authorities.

Thousands of tourists went to the Soviet Union as clandestine envoys of Zionism and Jewish culture. They carried the materials concealed in their luggage, which they handed over to activists at secret rendezvous. Few knew it was Israel and Levanon who were behind the effort.

In 1967, Soviet Jews were emboldened to openly challenge the Kremlin.

A turning point in the struggle was reached in June 1970 with the failed attempt by Jewish activists in Riga and Leningrad to hijack an airplane and fly to Israel.

The world was outraged by the severity of the sentences imposed on those caught. As a result, the first World Conference of Jewish Communities for Soviet Jewry was held in Brussels in 1971.

Israel Knew Of Hijacking Plot

Officials confirmed for the first time here Monday night that the hijackers had sought Israel's prior approval for their bold move, though this fact was reported in Howard Sachar's 1985 book "Diaspora." A code was arranged to indicate either go-ahead or abandon the enterprise.

Levanon consulted with then Prime Minister Golda Meir, who decided in the negative. The mission was scrapped, but the hijackers were caught anyway. All were released from prison between 1976 and 1981.

The 1970s was the decade of the refuseniks. Levanon devised ways to dramatize their plight and was a key figure in mobilizing foreign governments and Jewish communities to join the struggle.

He went into semi-retirement in the 1980s. A few years ago, he visited the Soviet Union.

At the awards ceremony, he summed up his activities, saying "it was the historic triangle of Israel, world Jewry and Soviet Jewry that succeeded in redeeming Soviet Jews."

As for the problems of absorbing tens of thousands of Soviet Jews in Israel, Levanon observed, "All my life I have been an optimist. We will find a way, but we still need the forces of the triangle to succeed."