

WEST BANK SETTLEMENT ISSUE CROPS UP AS U.S.-ISRAELI TALKS GET UNDER WAY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- Israel's on-going settlement program in the administered territories should have no bearing on progress in the Middle East peace process, a senior government official asserted here Wednesday.

Yosef Ben-Aharon, director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, made the comment on army radio as U.S. and Israeli teams of negotiators began drafting a joint memorandum of agreement on terms for convening the proposed Middle East peace conference.

Sources said the Israeli team, which includes Cabinet Secretary Elyakim Rubinstein, Foreign Ministry aide Salai Meridor and Ben-Aharon, has already submitted a draft summing up the understandings reached between Secretary of State James Baker and the Israeli government during his recent trips here.

The American team is led by Dan Kurtzer, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, and Aaron Miller of the State Department's policy planning staff.

The Americans also propose holding talks with Baker's Palestinian interlocutors, with a view to formulating a separate U.S.-Palestinian paper.

But Israeli officials say they have been assured that Washington will not make separate agreements with the Palestinians or any other Middle East party behind Israel's back.

Ben-Aharon's statement on Israel's settlement policy came in response to two actions taken in the West Bank by the Defense Ministry.

The ministry gave the Gush Emunim settlement movement Amana permission to convert a paramilitary outpost in Eshkolot into a civilian settlement. And it allowed the Shavei Hebron yeshiva in Hebron to take over an army facility housed in the predominantly Arab city's former bus station, pending repairs at the yeshiva's premises nearby.

Foreign Minister David Levy denied that the actions were in any way an infringement of Israeli commitments made to Washington.

Opponents of the moves fear this is only the beginning. Amana is now reportedly pressing for permission to move into other army posts, including Ginat, near the town of Jenin, and Har Manach, near Hebron.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**PLO UNLIKELY TO BAR PALESTINIANS FROM PEACE CONFERENCE, SAY EXPERTS**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- The Palestine Liberation Organization will not block a Palestinian delegation from attending the Middle East peace conference the United States and Soviet Union are trying to arrange, Middle East experts predict.

PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat told The New York Times in an interview published Wednesday that he wants to be able to pick the delegates to the conference.

Arafat also disavowed a statement made Sunday by one of his top political advisers,

Bassam Abu Sharif, that there should be no problem selecting a delegation that would satisfy both the PLO and Israel.

The State Department had no official reaction Wednesday to the Arafat interview.

But Middle East experts say Arafat has little influence at this point over the convening of the conference, since Arab states have already agreed to participate individually, without seeking the Palestinians' agreement.

Daniel Pipes, director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, said he strongly doubts the PLO will be able to block Palestinian participation in the planned conference.

"I don't see that that's in the cards," he said. "The mechanisms are there for face-saving devices."

He cited the fact that Syria has said it will go to the conference without giving the Palestinians a veto over Syrian participation. Previously, Syria had linked its participation in discussion of the Palestinian question.

In that regard, said Pipes, Syrian President Hafez Assad has gone even further than the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who agreed to negotiate with Israel only if the Palestinian issue could be discussed as well.

Parties Will 'Find A Way Out'

Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans, predicted there "will be a Palestinian delegation" at the planned peace conference.

"It will be approved by the PLO. It will be acceptable to Israel, and all parties would find a way out to say that this is not a PLO delegation," he said.

Jahshan, who previously headed the PLO's Washington office, couched Arafat's disavowal of Abu Sharif's statement as an attempt at "jockeying for position."

"Each party is trying to place its demands on the table for the pre-negotiations that are taking place right now." The preconditions of Israel and surrounding Arab states have been alleviated, he said. "Now it's the Palestinians' turn."

Experts agree that it should not be difficult to find Palestinian delegates who are acceptable to both Israel and the PLO.

Arafat went on record in the Times interview as supporting the inclusion in the Palestinian delegation of West Bank Professor Hanan Ashrawi and Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij, who are also acceptable to the Israeli government.

But Marvin Feuerwerker, senior strategic fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank, said that if the Palestinian delegates say at the conference that they were selected by the PLO, "this could jeopardize the process" because Israel might object.

The PLO's objection at this point, said Pipes, is "not so much that they don't like the people" who would represent the Palestinians but that "they don't like to be told by the Israelis who it will deal with and who it cannot."

To the Palestinians, "it appears that the Israelis have basically won with the Americans and the Arab states about what this thing should look like," said Feuerwerker.

But Feuerwerker expressed concern about the

U.S. memorandum of agreement now being negotiated in Jerusalem with Ashrawi and fellow activist Faisal Husseini to clarify the Palestinian role in the conference.

The problem with any U.S. assurances to the Palestinians is that the United States might find them "logical" but Israel might object, thereby jeopardizing Israel's assent to participate in the conference, he said.

For example, Feuerwerker cited Secretary of State James Baker's support last year for including in a Palestinian negotiating delegation residents of East Jerusalem and former residents of the West Bank or Gaza Strip who had been deported.

Disagreement between the Likud bloc and the Labor Party on this issue ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Israeli government.

"There seems to be (more) understanding this year" of Israel's sensitivities, an Israeli Embassy official commented.

ISRAEL AGAIN OFFERS PRISONER SWAP, AS SPECULATION MOUNTS ON HOSTAGES By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- As speculation mounted that one or more of the Western hostages held by Shi'ite groups in Lebanon would soon be released, Israel reiterated its readiness to exchange Shi'ite prisoners in Israeli jails for Israeli soldiers being held in Lebanon.

Israel would "welcome" a prisoner swap, Danny Naveh, media adviser to Defense Minister Moshe Arens, said in a statement.

"As we have said repeatedly, if the Red Cross will allow Israel access to its soldiers, we will be prepared to negotiate. In this framework, we will free Lebanese prisoners in exchange for missing Israeli prisoners," Naveh said.

Hopes about a hostage release were raised Tuesday, when the Islamic Jihad group in Lebanon issued a statement saying that in the next 48 hours it would dispatch to the United Nations "a special envoy carrying a message of extreme importance" for U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar.

The message, released to a Lebanese news agency and also reported in Iran, was accompanied by a photograph of Terry Anderson, former Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut, who has been held the longest of any Western hostage.

In Washington, the White House on Wednesday said it had received numerous reports from diplomatic sources in the Middle East about an imminent hostage release.

Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said that most of the reports spoke of an American and a British hostage being released.

Israel has seven soldiers listed as missing in Lebanon, some of whom have not been heard from for as long as eight years.

Israel's traditional policy has been that it will not make concessions to effect the release of hostages from other nations. But it will do whatever is necessary to secure the release of its own soldiers missing in action.

Lawyer Amnon Zichroni, who has been involved in the past in negotiating prisoner swaps between Israel and the Arabs, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that in his opinion, any statements made by Islamic Jihad on the hostage situation have been coordinated with its patron, the Iranian government.

"If anything is going on, then it is on a

state level, between Iran and the Western countries," he said.

Zichroni added that Israel should be encouraged by the possibility of the release of Western hostages, since once the process of freeing prisoners begins, it will likely continue.

ISRAEL'S LARGEST RECRUITMENT EVER INCLUDES OLIM, 100 CHRISTIAN ARABS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- Some 100 Christian Arabs have volunteered for regular service in the Israel Defense Force within the past week, according to military sources.

The new recruits, who were inducted Tuesday, responded to a recently enacted IDF policy that Christian Arabs can choose to serve in the Israeli army.

They joined during the summer recruitment period.

The new soldiers boost to 300 the number of Christians now serving in the army, the sources said.

Until the new policy went into effect, the only Arabs allowed to serve in the Israeli army were Bedouins, who normally are engaged as expert trackers, and Druse. A tenet of the Druse religion, which split from Islam centuries ago, is fealty to the country of residence.

Israelis are granted substantial economic, pension and health benefits for army service, making it an attractive option.

Tuesday's ceremony inducted the largest-ever number of new recruits. Included were more than 300 new immigrants from the Soviet Union and 150 from Ethiopia, countries from which Jews have recently come in tremendous numbers to the Jewish state.

Col. Natan Rosenbaum, the IDF's chief draft administrator, said that 15 percent of the new immigrants will serve abbreviated periods between a year and a year-and-a-half, 28 percent will be sent to complete their academic studies and 57 percent will join the military system.

Rosenbaum indicated this group of inductees is of particularly fine mettle, attested to by a considerable number of volunteers for elite positions. He said some 20 applicants are vying for each spot in the IDF's reconnaissance units, more than 87 percent of whom are high school graduates.

The commander of the induction center, Col. Moti Shapira, said the IDF integrates new immigrants into combat units as much as possible.

LENINGRAD WANTS ISRAELI CONSULATE By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- The city of Leningrad hopes Israel will open a consulate there, Leningrad Mayor Alexander Belayev reportedly told visiting Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz this week.

He spoke Tuesday during a reception held in Dinitz's honor at the Leningrad City Hall. At the reception, Dinitz was granted permission for the agency to open offices in Leningrad.

A Jewish Agency spokesman said Belayev told Dinitz he is interested in fostering Jewish cultural activities, including Hebrew studies.

During his visit to the city, Dinitz held a three-hour meeting with some 1,000 Leningrad Jews who have applied for permission to immigrate to Israel.

POLISH JEWS, GOVERNMENT FIGURES, UPSET BY DESECRATION OF CEMETERY

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- Polish state and local leaders have come out strongly in support of the country's tiny Jewish community in the wake of the desecration of Warsaw's historic Jewish cemetery last Friday night.

President Lech Walesa conveyed his sympathy to the Jewish community in a letter sent Tuesday to the cemetery director. And Arkadiusz Rybicki, head of Walesa's committee on Polish-Jewish relations, laid a wreath at the vandalism site and appeared on Polish television condemning the action.

"He said that if this was just vandalism, it was vandalism of the worst kind," a Jewish source in Warsaw said in a telephone interview.

"He added that if it was politically motivated vandalism, it was harmful to Poland," said the source, who requested anonymity.

Local political leaders in Warsaw also placed wreaths and flowers at the site.

The vandalism was played up in the Polish media, which showed pictures of a smashed tombstone and numerous anti-Semitic slogans scrawled on graves. A monument to Jewish soldiers was also defaced.

"It seems to be part of a rising tide of violence -- not just anti-Semitic, but anti-Gypsy, too," said the Jewish source in Warsaw. "There is something unpleasant in the atmosphere."

"Not long before the cemetery was vandalized, a group of Skinheads roughed up Warsaw Rabbi Menachem Joskowicz," the source reported. "The elderly, white-bearded rabbi fortunately was not seriously injured."

Stanislaw Krajewski, a Polish Jewish leader and Warsaw representative of the American Jewish Congress, said of the cemetery desecration: "This is a very bad kind of vandalism. It is of concern to all Jews here, as Jewish cemeteries are such an important part of the Jewish reality in Poland. I am very glad of the clear official reaction, which has been well publicized."

"This is a correct change from the earlier official attitude," he said, "which was to remain silent in the face of such occurrences, reasoning that it would somehow be bad to speak of such things openly, that speaking about them would play into the hands of anti-Semites."

THOUSANDS OF CATHOLIC TEEN-AGERS EXPECTED TO TOUR NAZI DEATH CAMPS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- Tens of thousands of Catholic teen-agers are expected to visit the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps this month for tours and seminars on the Holocaust. The program in which they will participate will include material on the uniquely Jewish character of the event.

Most of the more than 50,000 youth from France, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Soviet Union and Poland will stay for only a few hours during their visits, which began this week and continue until Aug. 17.

But many will stay overnight in the recently completed administration building of the new Carmelite convent a short distance away from the Auschwitz camp border, and in a tent city being built specially to accommodate the visitors on the grounds of the new complex.

The largest number of young people will be

arriving for an overnight stay on Aug. 16, after spending several days in Czestochowa, some 130 miles southwest of Warsaw, where they will be celebrating the sixth World Youth Day.

More than a million young Catholics are expected to take part in the gathering there.

The highlight will be a rally with Pope John Paul II, who is making the stop on his Aug. 13-20 trip to Poland and Hungary, during which he will also meet with Jewish leaders.

The young Catholics who visit the area for a few hours will tour Birkenau, about two miles away from the convent. Those who stay overnight will see Auschwitz and listen to lectures being organized by local Polish church authorities. Some of the lectures may be presented by Jews, according to Shimon Samuels, European representative of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Samuels met with senior Vatican and Polish Church officials last month to ensure that the gatherings at Auschwitz are conducted with the appropriate respect for the meaning of the site, and that information about the Jewish nature of the Holocaust is included in the program.

"It's one thing if the purpose is to expose the young people to the horror of Auschwitz, including the fact that 90 percent of all victims gassed there were Jews," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Los Angeles-based Wiesenthal Center.

"If the true facts were to be heard, that could be very positive," he said. "But if it is allowed to be turned into a Woodstock-type jamboree on the periphery of the largest Jewish cemetery in the world, it would certainly be viewed as a highly explosive and insensitive act."

'Genocide' Film To Be Shown

While meeting with Samuels, Monsignor John Radano, a senior member of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, acknowledged that since "Czestochowa was the main event, and Auschwitz a side event, this could psychologically reduce the significance (of the death camp visit) to the young visitor."

Cardinal Pio Laghi, the Vatican official in charge of Catholic education, told Samuels that "it would be difficult to control any extremists if they aimed to misuse" the gathering at Auschwitz, and that "damage control can only be through education," according to Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center.

The youths will receive guidebooks to the Auschwitz Museum in their native languages.

But after several meetings with Samuels, the Catholic authorities agreed that the educational program should include additional information about the Jewish character of the Holocaust.

"Genocide," a 108-minute Wiesenthal Center film, will be shown in English, French, German and Spanish, and a 40-panel exhibit, titled "The Courage To Remember," which illustrates the history of the Holocaust, will be displayed at several sites around the convent tent location.

The willingness to integrate into the program information from the Jewish perspective "assures us that the authenticity of the Jewish experience is included, that it's not just a Christian pilgrimage," Samuels said in a telephone interview from Paris.

"It's a very encouraging sign for the future, and it will go a long way. If (the Catholic youths) come back with a clearer understanding of what happened in Auschwitz, that could lead to a greater sensitivity to Jews in their own countries," he said.

CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP OPPOSES THOMAS, JEWISH GROUPS LARGELY UNCOMMITTED

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- Jewish organizations were visibly absent when the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights announced Wednesday that it "strongly opposes the confirmation" of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.

Ralph Neas, the conference's executive director, announced the 185-member umbrella organization's decision at a news conference at which he was flanked by representatives of black, labor, senior citizens and women's organizations.

Only two of the 19 Jewish organizations that are members of the conference have come out against Thomas, who is currently a federal appellate court judge. They are the National Council of Jewish Women and the Jewish Labor Committee.

Agudath Israel of America, which is not a member, has announced its support of Thomas, the black conservative nominated by President Bush to replace Justice Thurgood Marshall, the high court's first African-American.

Most Jewish organizations traditionally do not take positions on Supreme Court nominations. Neas said that for that reason the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish War Veterans asked that they not be listed as joining in the league's statement.

But some Jewish groups, including the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the American Jewish Congress, are expected to decide soon whether to take a position and, if so, whether to do it before Sept. 10, when the Senate Judiciary Committee is to begin confirmation hearings.

Meanwhile, Rabbi David Saperstein, co-director of the UAHC's Religious Action Center here and the only representative of a Jewish organization on the conference's 25-member executive committee, said he supported the committee's decision when it was made Monday.

He explained, in a telephone interview, that because of the conference's central role in the civil rights movement, "it was appropriate for the Leadership Conference to be out in front even if my own organization has not yet made a decision."

'Hostility' To Civil Rights Rulings

Saperstein said that the umbrella group "deals primarily with the issue of civil rights on which this candidate's record is clearly an extreme one."

But Jewish organizations have a very broad agenda, of which civil rights is an important-but not exclusive -- part, Saperstein said.

At the news conference, Neas said that Thomas, as chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission from 1982 to 1989 had "repeatedly and unilaterally decided to enforce those laws and court decisions with which he agreed and to ignore or defy those with which he disagreed."

Neas also said that Thomas, "in his speeches and in his articles, has demonstrated a consistent hostility to many of the Supreme Court's most fundamental civil rights decisions."

While the National Council of Jewish Women came out against Thomas last month, the Jewish Labor Committee announced its opposition Aug. 1 in a statement from Martin Lapan, its executive director.

"Judge Thomas' biases, including his attacks on affirmative action programs, his endorsement

of anti-abortion positions of fellow conservatives and his support for ideological positions that embrace unfettered markets and private property as sacrosanct, make him incapable of rendering the impartial justice that we expect of the Supreme Court," Lapan said.

One issue that has not yet been raised is Thomas' view on the separation of church and state. But the ADL, AJCommittee, AJCongress and other organizations have sent suggested questions to Judiciary Committee members, including questions on church-state issues, which they expect the senators to quiz him on.

Farrakhan Concern Diminishing

Thomas is also expected to be asked about speeches he gave praising Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan.

But this issue, at one time thought potentially damaging to Thomas' support within the Jewish community, seems to have disappeared as Jews who know Thomas stepped forward to assure Jewish organizations that he does not share Farrakhan's anti-Semitic views.

Recently, Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director, said he received assurances that Thomas understands the danger of voicing any support for Farrakhan. These assurances were communicated in writing by Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.), who is marshaling support for Thomas' confirmation by the Senate.

Foxman expressed concern when it was revealed that Thomas had praised Farrakhan in a 1983 speech for his espousal of black economic self-help.

When the speech was revealed, Thomas said that he opposed anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry.

But Foxman warned at the time of the "danger in attempting to distinguish elements of a bigot's program which might be considered positive from an overt message of vicious racism and anti-Semitism."

In response to Foxman's concerns, Danforth wrote him that "in recent conversations, Judge Thomas informed me that he understands clearly that praise of any portion of Farrakhan's message is dangerous and inappropriate" because it "risks legitimizing Farrakhan's overall message of hate."

WOMAN CAUSES STIR ON EL AL FLIGHT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 7 (JTA) -- An El Al flight from Berlin to Tel Aviv took an unusual turn Tuesday, when a 30-year-old Argentine passenger suddenly tore off her dress and began running wildly up and down the aisle, shrieking, "Bring me Shamir. I want Shamir."

Cabin attendants who tried to calm her said she bit several of them before being overpowered.

The pilot radioed ahead, and police were at the aircraft steps to escort Julia Lillan away for interrogation. Eyewitnesses said she "jumped and danced her way merrily" to the Ben-Gurion Airport police post.

Passengers described the woman as "clearly drunk," after having finished a large bottle of whiskey during the flight. But the police released her on her own bond, reportedly finding no evidence that she was inebriated.

The woman's only baggage was a plastic bag she carried containing \$30,000, more than enough to pay for her release bond, but no clothes to replace the dress she had torn off.