DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

© Contents copyright: Republication only by previous arrangement.

PUBLISHED BY JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY · 330 SEVENTH AVENUE · NEW YORK, NY 10001-5010 · (212) 643-1890

VOL. 69 - 74th YEAR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1991 NO. 226

SYRIA FREES FOUR JEWS FROM PRISON, IN FIRST POSITIVE GESTURE ON ISSUE

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- Syria has freed four Jews imprisoned for attempting to leave the country, the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews reported Tuesday.

The release represents the first tangible success of diplomatic and grass-roots efforts on behalf of Syrian Jewry that have been building in recent months. At the same time, it highlights the oppression and restrictions inflicted on the 4,000 Jews living in Syria.

"We hope it portends a change of attitude on the part of the Assad government, leading to freedom of emigration for all Jews," said Gilbert Kahn, executive director of the council.

"We're appreciative, but the fact is that those people should never have been put in prison in the first place," said Abraham Bayer, director of international concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"Why is it a crime in 1991 that people should be free and want to be reunited with their families?" he asked.

Two Jews remain in Syrian jails, where they have been held since 1987: Eli and Salim Swed, brothers arrested after Eli Swed was charged with visiting Israel. The two reportedly have been staging an unprecedented hunger strike in prison.

The four who were released Nov. 28 include Rahmun Darwish and Joseph Raful Sabato. They were arrested Sept. 25, 1990, along with Darwish's fiancee and Sabato's wife, who was seven months pregnant at the time. She gave birth in prison and was later released, as was Darwish's fiancee.

Also freed last week were Subhi and Sa'id Castica, two brothers arrested on or about May 1 of this year, along with their wives and two infants. The women were beaten, then released with the children after three weeks in captivity.

Stepped-Up Diplomacy

The release of the four Jews followed by two days an appeal on their behalf by Israeli representative Ilan Mor to the General Assembly's Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee.

The appeal, which was the first mention of Syrian Jewry at the United Nations in two years and the first major address on the subject ever at the General Assembly, came at a time when the topic of human rights is receiving more serious consideration than ever at the United Nations.

And it came at a time when the plight of Syrian Jewry has assumed an increasingly high profile on the international agenda.

President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker have repeatedly discussed the issue in their meetings with Syrian leaders.

Argentine President Carlos Saul Menem, who is of Syrian descent, has also raised the issue.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said in May that "there can be no talk of a peace process while Syrian Jews are held hostage," and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir mentioned the issue in speeches during his U.S. visit last month.

Before recessing last week, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed resolutions calling on Syria to grant its Jews the right of free emigration and to release its Jewish prisoners from jail.

While Syria detains without trial and tortures its own citizens, particularly political activists and members of banned Palestinian groups, Jews face unique restrictions, including special surveillance.

The emigration restriction is particularly harsh on young Jewish women. The success of men in escaping created a demographic imbalance.

In 1989, the Syrian government promised the State Department that it would look favorably on applications to emigrate submitted by Syrian Jews with relatives abroad or by unmarried women.

"Nothing has happened," said Bayer. "They didn't keep their word. The number who came out and were reunited with their family was less this year than last."

CONFERENCE ON REGIONAL ISSUES CALLED FOR NEXT MONTH IN MOSCOW

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- The United States and Soviet Union have invited foreign ministers from Middle East nations and "other interested parties" to come to Moscow next month for multilateral negotiations on regional issues.

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Tuesday that the two host countries are hoping for "the widest possible participation" at the talks, which are scheduled for Jan. 28-29.

The multilateral talks are the third stage of the peace process that began in Madrid on Oct. 3. The second stage, bilateral talks, which also began in Madrid, was scheduled to resume in Washington on Wednesday, although Israel has said it will not participate until next Monday.

Nevertheless, Tutwiler said that three separate sites in a complex of government buildings will open at 10 a.m. Wednesday for Israeli negotiations with Syria, Lebanon and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

She said the sites will remain open as long as the parties want to use them.

Israel had requested separate sites for the three sets of negotiations, so as not to give the impression that they were part of a single international peace conference.

The multilateral talks were originally envisioned as having the parties to the bilateral talks meet to discuss common problems, such as water, arms control, the environment and refugee resettlement.

But the Bush administration has sought to expand the participation -- both in the region, to include the Persian Gulf states and the Arab North African countries, and outside, to include the European Community, Japan and Canada.

Although Israel has expressed concern about the expansion of the talks, the United States is seeking the wide participation because it hopes that other countries will share the financial burden that may result if agreements are reached.

Syria had announced earlier that it would not attend the multilateral conference until Israel agreed to withdraw from the Golan Heights. But Syria failed to convince other Arab countries to join its rejection.

U.S. SAYS IT WILL PRESS FOR REPEAL OF ZIONISM RESOLUTION THIS MONTH

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- An announcement that the United States will undertake a "full court press" in the next two weeks to repeal the 1975 U.N. resolution on Zionism was greeted with satisfaction and relief by Jewish organizations, which have been chomping at the bit to step up their own lobbying activities.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said that the United States would push for a vote to repeal the resolution, which branded Zionism as racism, before the General Assembly ends its session on Dec. 17.

"As President Bush indicated in September to the U.N. General Assembly, to equate Zionism with the intolerable stench of racism is to twist history," said Tutwiler.

"By repealing this resolution unconditionally, the United Nations will enhance its credibility and serve the cause of peace," she said.

An informal count taken by the World Jewish Congress indicates that the drive to repeal the resolution has the backing of more than the two-thirds majority of General Assembly members that may be required to overturn it.

"With a strong U.S. commitment, it will happen," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The conference is launching a major effort to repeal the 1975 resolution, lobbying country by country through visits to U.N. missions and embassies of U.N. member nations.

"This will be a critical test of the new world order articulated by President Bush," said Shoshana Cardin, the conference's chairman. "It will show whether other governments are serious about joining the U.S. in rejecting extremism and anti-Semitism."

The conference plans a daily tally of support, to begin later this week.

The World Jewish Congress, in coordination with the conference, will continue its international lobbying effort for the repeal.

Egyptian Confirmed As U.N. Chief

Last week, Isi Leibler, co-chairman of the WJC, received assurances from Japan that it would back the repeal effort. During a swing through Asia, he also received a promise from Thailand that it would give "sympathetic consideration" to the repeal effort, and South Korea said it would consider the issue in a "positive way."

Tuesday's State Department announcement came shortly after the General Assembly elected Boutros Ghali of Egypt for a five-year term as U.N. secretary-general, beginning Jan. 1.

Egypt has been a leading opponent to the repeal drive. Some Jewish observers at the United Nations have expressed hope that having achieved the coveted post, Egypt might now ease up on what may have been an effort to win support for Ghali from more extreme Arab states.

"I'm hoping they realize they have to adjust to a position that's good for the United Nations, and that means taking the burden of 'Zionism is racism' off the back of the secretary-general, before he gets into office," said Harris Schoenberg, director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith International.

But so far, Egypt has not publicly changed its view that a repeal now would be disruptive to the Middle East peace process. "Our position is known," said a spokesperson at the Egyptian Mission here.

The State Department announcement also followed shortly after a meeting between WJC President Edgar Bronfman and President Bush. According to the WJC, Bush told Bronfman he was unaware that U.S. efforts on the repeal drive had not yet moved into high gear.

Tutwiler said that since Bush's Sept. 23 U.N. speech, Secretary of State James Baker and other senior officials have been "working actively and quietly on this issue."

But till now, instructions have not gone out to the American Mission here to lobby support.

This lack of a top-level go-ahead kept American Jewish groups, as well as Israeli diplomats, in suspense for much of the past two weeks, even leading one Jewish organizational official to worry about a possible administration "double-cross."

"There's been a lot of back-and-forth between us all, but we are pleased that the commitment and repeated promises are being carried to fulfillment now," said Hoenlein.

(JTA correspondent David Friedman in Washington contributed to this report.)

NEW SETTLEMENT SET UP IN WEST BANK HAD ENDORSEMENT OF LIKUD GOVERNMENT

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- The new Jewish settlement established south of Nablus on Monday appears to have been a calculated act of defiance of U.S. policy by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's government, not the spontaneous reaction of Jews enraged by a terrorist act.

The settlement, called Rahelim, was authorized by the Inner Cabinet at its Nov. 27 meeting and formally approved by Defense Minister Moshe Arens, who said it would be a paramilitary Nahal outpost for the time being.

The widespread belief was that the settlement, consisting initially of two mobile homes, was a hastily set up response to the death of Zvi Klein, a settler from Ofra who was fatally wounded Sunday evening while driving through the Palestinian town of El-Bireh.

But by stressing Tuesday that the settlement had his government's official stamp of approval, Shamir seemed to be signaling the United States that Israel is determined to pursue its policy of aggressive settlement-building regardless of the added strain it puts on U.S.-Israeli relations and the Middle East peace process.

The United States has tried in vain to convince Israel to freeze settlement building while peace talks are under way.

Addressing a Chanukah torch-lighting ceremony in Modi'in, the ancient home of the Maccabees, Shamir vowed Wednesday that despite obstacles, Israel would emerge victorious in the battle for "Eretz Yisrael," code words for a Greater Israel encompassing the territories taken in 1967.

Rahelim was named in memory of Rachel Druck, a settler from Shiloh killed in a West Bank bus ambush on Oct. 28, two days before the opening of the U.S.-Soviet sponsored Middle East peace conference in Madrid.

The government's approval of the new settlement at the ambush site may have been a response to the earlier incident, but not to the death of Klein, who was gunned down four days after the Inner Cabinet decision.

WHITE SUPREMACIST TOM METZGER GETS 6 MONTHS FOR CROSS-BURNING

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- Jewish groups here have hailed the conviction of white supremacist Tom Metzger, who was sentenced Monday to six months in jail for participating in a cross-burning ceremony in a Los Angeles suburb eight years ago.

Organizational leaders say the sentence shows a toughening attitude toward racist hate crimes, although at least one official criticized the lightness of the sentence.

It is the first jail sentence in recent years for Metzger, the founder and leader of the White Aryan Resistance, or WAR, who has been engaged in extensive racist and anti-Semitic activities for decades.

But a judgment of $9 million was rendered last year against Metzger, his son John and WAR for inciting the 1988 killing of an Ethiopian man in Portland, Ore.

As part of the California sentence, Metzger, who is also a former grand dragon of the California Ku Klux Klan, was fined $200 and ordered to perform 200 hours of community service with organizations that work with minorities or in a hospital.

David Lehrer, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, described the sentence as "a victory for the Los Angeles community, as well as other communities across the country, which have been victimized by white supremacist hate-mongers."

And Michael Hirschfeld, assistant director of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, said, "The California legislature-- which recently passed a hate-crimes bill -- and other legislative bodies are sending a clear signal that such offenses will no longer be tolerated."

But Rabbi Gary Greenebaum, regional director of the American Jewish Committee, felt that the six-month sentence for Metzger "was somewhat light, considering what is going on, and could have been more severe."

But at least, he said, it "is a clear warning to people of Metzger's ilk."

At the Simon Wiesenthal Center, senior research associate Aaron Breitbart said, "I doubt whether hard-core haters like Metzger will ever change in their hearts, but at least they can be prevented from inflicting their poison on society."

Two Others Sentenced To Jail

Metzger was sentenced following an 11-week trial, in which a jury convicted him on one misdemeanor count of unlawful assembly, but deadlocked on a more serious felony charge.

The trial stemmed from a ceremony held exactly eight years ago, on Dec. 3, 1983, in which 15 men joined in shouting racist slogans, giving Nazi salutes and burning three huge crosses in a canyon overlooking the Los Angeles suburb of Lake View Terrace.

Prosecutors charged that the ceremony was intended to provoke violent clashes, unite white racist groups, and intimidate black and other residents of the racially mixed community.

The cross-burning was videotaped by a free-lance journalist who had infiltrated the group, and the tape was introduced at the trial.

One segment on the tape showed a racist "prayer" delivered by Richard Butler, head of the Idaho-based Aryan Nations and its associated Church of Jesus Christ Christian, a white supremacist, "Christian Identity" church.

In his benediction, Butler said, "So long as the alien occupies your land, hate is your law and revenge is your first duty. We light these crosses in the name of God, over the Luciferian scum of the earth."

Metzger was unrepentant after the sentencing. He told reporters, "We realize that the white separation movement and people who stand up for white working people" who "don't apologize for their beliefs are going to be hammered all the way down the line. But nothing is going to change."

"Each time they knock one of us down, there are a thousand more who will rise up," he said.

Two co-defendants in the trial, who were convicted on a more serious felony count, also received six-month jail sentences and were ordered to perform 300 hours of community work in Watts, a poor, largely black section of Los Angeles.

They are Stanley Witek, reputed leader of the neo-Nazi National Socialist American Workers Party, and Brad Kelly, who has no known organization affiliation.

As part of their three-year probation, the three defendants were ordered by Superior Court Judge J.D. Smith not to associate with white supremacist organizations.

Asked later by reporters whether he would obey the terms of probation, Metzger hesitated and then inquired, "You mean I can't support David Duke?"

He was referring to the Louisiana state legislator who, although recently defeated in his bid to become governor of Louisiana, is now poised to run, again, for president.

Metzger's group, WAR, spreads its racist messages through a cable television program, "Race and Reason," an international fax and telephone network, leaflets and speeches.

JUSTICE DEPT. SEEKING DEPORTATION OF ALLEGED EX-GUARD AT DEATH CAMP

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- The Justice Department has asked a Chicago immigration judge to deport Michael Schmidt, an Illinois resident accused of having been a Nazi concentration camp guard.

Schmidt was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in January 1990 by the U.S. District Court in Chicago, a decision upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. The decision was based on evidence that Schmidt had lied about his wartime activities to secure U.S. citizenship.

He denied charges by the Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations, that he served as an armed guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. OSI has also accused him of serving as a member of the SS Death's Head Battalion.

Neal Sher, director of OSI, said Sachsenhausen was the site of "grotesque" medical experiments on Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, U.S. prisoners of war and political prisoners.

Sher said Tuesday that a date for the court hearing has yet to be set, but that he expects the whole process to be "fairly quick."

Schmidt is one of 15 alleged Nazi war criminals against whom OSI is currently engaged in deportation proceedings, Sher said.

JEWS HAIL INDEPENDENT UKRAINE BUT ARE WARY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

NEW YORK, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- Advocacy groups for Soviet Jewry have generally welcomed the Ukrainian republic's overwhelming vote Sunday for independence from the Soviet Union.

But many of the congratulatory statements issued this week indicated that Jews remain wary over the long history of anti-Semitism in the huge republic and are seriously disturbed by its most recent manifestations.

Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, urged the newly independent Ukraine, which has been part of the Russian empire for more than 300 years, to continue to allow Jews to emigrate freely and to guarantee that those who stay will be permitted to pursue their "religious and cultural identity."

"We trust that the popularly elected new government will bear in mind the basic human rights of all of its citizens, including its sizable Jewish community," Cardin said in a statement.

Like several other Jewish leaders, Cardin praised the Ukrainian government's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Nazi massacre of Jews at Babi Yar, near Kiev, in September and October.

Pamela Cohen, president of the Washington-based Union of Council for Soviet Jews, sent the group's "profound best wishes" to the newly elected Ukrainian president, Leonid Kravchuk.

Cohen stressed that her group's advocacy for Soviet Jews and human rights "has always encompassed the plight of all peoples and has compelled our understanding of your struggle."

In Ottawa, the leaders of B'nai Brith Canada sent a letter of congratulations to Kravchuk.

Signed by President-elect Gabe Nachman and Frank Dimant, its executive director, the letter acknowledged that "relations between the Ukrainian and Jewish peoples have often been characterized by mistrust and pain over the centuries."

'Mixutre Of Hope And Fear'

But it "welcomed the new openness which has been demonstrated in coming to terms with the good and the bad in our past," specifically the Babi Yar commemoration.

The letter expressed hope that from now on relations between Ukrainians and Jews in the Ukrainian republic and throughout the world will be "based on a common commitment to justice and democracy."

The New York-based Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry said Ukrainian independence "brought a mixture of hope and fear to that new nation's Jews."

"The leadership of Rukh, the Ukrainian nationalist movement, has repeatedly expressed its friendship with Jews," the Student Struggle noted. It maintained that Kravchuk "understands that his manipulation of traditional grassroots anti-Semitism would greatly harm the chances for Ukrainian acceptance in the community of democratic nations."

The Student Struggle added, nevertheless, that "too many Ukrainian Jews remember the long centuries of bloody anti-Jewish pogroms, collaboration with the Nazis, virulent official anti-Semitism under the Soviet regime and anti-Jewish acts today," including graffiti at Jewish cemeteries.

It recalled that only this past August, a monument was erected to officers and soldiers of the Nazi SS in the Ukrainian town of Yaseniv.

HOLOCAUST EXHIBIT OPENS IN CHINA, MATCHED BY CHINESE PEACE DISPLAY

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 3 (JTA) -- The first exhibition on the Holocaust to be shown in China was inaugurated Tuesday in Shanghai, with the ceremonial opening attended by some 300 Chinese dignitaries, American diplomats and a delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which assembled the display.

Yang Fu Chang, the Chinese vice minister for foreign affairs responsible for Middle East relations, headed his country's representation and was the guest of honor at a dinner Tuesday.

The exhibit, called "The Courage to Remember," is a 60-panel photographic display designed by the Los Angeles-based Wiesenthal Center. Since its inaugural opening in Vienna in 1988, it has toured Western and Eastern Europe, including several exhibits in the Soviet Union; South Korea; New Zealand; South Africa; and the United States.

The display in Shanghai, which has descriptions in English and Chinese, is now on permanent loan to China, and there are plans to display the exhibit in Beijing, Nanjing and other Chinese cities, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center, said in a telephone interview from Shanghai.

Also opened was a companion exhibit by the Chinese Institute for Peace and Development Studies. Titled "To Cherish Their Memory Forever," the 20-panel display recalls the presence of some 25,000 European Jews who found refuge in Shanghai between 1938 and 1945.

Fifty international scholars, currently participating in a conference in Shanghai on Israel and Judaic studies, also participated in the opening.

Menorah Lit In Beijing

The Wiesenthal Center delegation, led by the center's dean, Rabbi Marvin Hier, started its visit on Nov. 27 in Beijing and has held a series of meetings with government, academic and business leaders. The group is in China on a two-week mission.

The emphasis of the visit, said Cooper, has been on "reacquainting two ancient (Chinese and Jewish) civilizations and to make sure that Israel gets a fair shake. Because until now, the Chinese haven't heard too many good things about Israel."

Specifically, Hier has urged Chinese officials to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel and to declare that Beijing no longer endorses the 1975 U.N. General Assembly resolution that branded Zionism as a form of racism.

Hier suggested that an appropriate date for such a declaration would be Jan. 20, 1992, the 50th anniversary of the convening of the Wannsee Conference, which set in motion the Nazis' "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem." There was no Chinese response to the suggestion.

At the same time, the group has made it clear to its hosts that the American Jewish community fully supports U.S. demands for human rights reforms in China, as enunciated by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker during his recent visit to Beijing.

At a state dinner in Beijing on Sunday, a Chanukah menorah was lit by Yuki Novick, who heads an Israeli computer company.

The Wiesenthal Center's 30-member delegation includes a high proportion of businessmen who are exploring the possibilities of establishing commercial ties with China.