

**PALESTINIANS GIVE MIXED SIGNALS
ABOUT SHOWING UP FOR PEACE TALKS**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- With bilateral peace talks scheduled to resume in Washington next Monday, the big question here is whether the Palestinian delegation will attend.

According to Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi, they will not show up on Feb. 24 because Israel has arrested two of the West Bank Palestinians scheduled to go with the delegation.

In Washington, the U.S. State Department announced Tuesday that the Palestinians were "suspending their travel plans" because of the Israeli arrests.

But in the Syrian capital of Damascus, a visiting Palestine Liberation Organization official, Yasir Abed Rabbo, said the Palestinians would show up despite the detentions.

His statement was confirmed in Washington by Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans, who said that despite their "complaint to the world community" over the detentions, the Palestinians would be there for the talks.

According to Jahshan, the Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem simply "wanted it known before the world community that there is this form of harassment. The Israelis have gone out of their way to harass the delegation," he said.

The conflicting statements on the Palestinian intentions appear to reflect the tug-of-war that has emerged in recent months between the indigenous Palestinian leadership in the administered territories and Yasir Arafat's PLO, 2,000 miles away in Tunis, which is officially barred from the peace process but seems to be trying to pull strings nevertheless.

U.S. Urges Palestinians To Attend

Jahshan indicated that in instances of conflicting statements, those from PLO officials were the more authoritative.

Palestinian leaders in the territories on Tuesday received an order from PLO headquarters in Tunis to attend the fourth round of talks in Washington, despite the arrests.

The order from Tunis came just hours after Ashrawi told a news conference in East Jerusalem that the delegation would "suspend" their participation in the peace talks.

The reason, she said, was the detention of Mohammad Horani and Jamal Shobaki, both from Hebron.

Horani was to become a member of the advisory council that accompanies the official delegation, though is not part of it. Shobaki was to join the Palestinian delegation itself.

Its membership is rotated periodically at the insistence of the PLO, in order not to create a permanent body of Palestinians from the territories who could emerge as an alternative to the PLO leadership.

The two detainees are not major figures in the context of Palestinian politics. But the local Palestinian leaders regard their arrests without charges or trial as a provocation by Israel.

In Washington, a State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, urged the Palestinians to

"act in their broader interests by pursuing peace negotiations" with the Israelis next week in the U.S. capital.

He said that all of the delegations had previously informed the United States they would be attending the Feb. 24 talks.

Boucher expressed moral support for the plight of the two Palestinians, saying "the United States has long opposed the practice of administrative detention as it pertains to the treatment of inhabitants of the occupied territories."

Cannot Talk Peace And Practice Terror

On another issue of timing, Boucher said the beginning on March 4 of the Moslem holy month of Ramadan would have no effect on the convening of the peace talks.

Jahshan said that the talks could continue to take place during that month, although the need to pray would restrict the number of negotiating hours each day.

For their part, the local Palestinians are exerting heavy pressure on the United States to intervene for the release of the two detainees.

The Israeli authorities insist they are suspected of terrorist activities against Israel and their arrest therefore was justified.

Deputy Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was spokesman for the Israeli delegation at the last round of bilateral talks, took a tough line. He reiterated Israel's familiar claim that the Palestinians support terrorism while talking peace.

That they cannot do, said Netanyahu. He said the detainees were charged with "organizing terror, criminal actions against Israelis in Israel.

"The Palestinian delegation cannot have it both ways," Netanyahu said. "They cannot talk of peace in the West, in Washington, and condone and, in fact, encourage terror here in the East, in Israel. It cannot be terror and peace, it has to be one or the other."

"We hope they will choose peace," he added.

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

**U.S. JEWISH LEADERS PLANNING
TOUR OF WEST BANK WITH SHARON**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- A plan by an influential group of American Jewish organizational leaders to take a bus tour of Jewish settlements in the West Bank next Monday with Housing Minister Ariel Sharon is already raising eyebrows here, even though it has not been finalized.

Critics of the plan say that, whether intended or not, the tour will send a signal to Washington that American Jewry backs the Likud government's efforts to expand Jewish settlements in the disputed territory, which the Bush administration views as an obstacle to peace.

But Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which is planning the tour as part of its annual study mission here, was quoted as saying the visit is merely an effort to "see firsthand the facts on the ground" and "implies no endorsement" of Israeli government positions.

News of the planned bus tour surfaced as

another umbrella group of American Jewish organizational leaders, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, convened a special debate on Israeli settlement policy late Tuesday at the group's annual plenum in Portland, Ore.

Sharon, who is Likud's most outspoken advocate of expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank, first offered to give the tour during a New York address to Conference of Presidents members in December.

The tour is tentatively set for Monday, a day after the Jewish organizational leaders arrive, though plans have not yet been finalized, said Malcolm Hoenlein, the umbrella group's executive director, who is already in Israel.

Hoenlein said that a tour of housing sites by one of Israel's most authoritative sources on the subject was an entirely appropriate way of getting firsthand information about an issue of major interest to American Jewry and the U.S. government.

He stressed that the tour would be one part of a mission that also includes planned meetings with representatives of Israel's peace camp and Palestinian leaders, not to mention top members of the government and Knesset opposition, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Labor leader Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Moshe Arens.

Impact On Loans And Peace Talks?

But the planned tour has been criticized by some members of the Conference of Presidents, which represents some 50 leading American Jewish organizations.

They are concerned in part about the timing. If the tour happens on Monday, as planned, it will coincide with a scheduled appearance by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker before a House of Representatives subcommittee holding hearings on Israel's request for U.S. guarantees covering \$10 billion in loans needed for immigrant resettlement.

Baker has made an Israeli freeze on housing construction in the West Bank a condition for receiving the U.S. guarantees -- a proposition Israel has not yet accepted.

Monday is also the day that Israel is scheduled to resume bilateral peace talks in Washington with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians, who have repeatedly threatened to make the settlements issue the focus of the deliberations, in the knowledge that they have U.S. and world support on the matter.

Critics fear that the sight of American Jewish leaders accompanying one of Israel's most hard-line Cabinet ministers on a tour of the West Bank could stiffen the resolve of both Baker and the Palestinians.

The Conference of Presidents leadership reportedly has given instructions that the tour be closed to the news media. But both the Israeli and overseas press are likely to be on hand regardless, photographing the Jewish leaders on their visit.

Informed sources told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that Israel's Foreign Ministry had counseled the Conference of Presidents to call off its Israel study mission altogether at this time, because of the intense involvement of the political leadership here in pre-election politics.

But the umbrella group insisted on sticking to the schedule, according to ministry sources. They said top officials of the ministry were dismayed to learn of the group's plan to tour the settlements with Sharon.

Meanwhile, Israel's Agriculture Ministry has

launched a program of West Bank tours for immigrants from the republics of the former Soviet Union. The program is designed to convince them of Likud's defense and settlement strategy in advance of the June 23 elections.

The U.S. government this week sought an official explanation from Jerusalem about whether this development signaled a change in policy regarding the settlement of immigrants in the territories.

HEZBOLLAH RETALIATES FOR KILLING WITH ROCKET BOMBARDMENT OF ISRAEL By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- The Shi'ite fundamentalist Hezbollah, retaliating for the assassination Sunday of its leader, Sheik Abbas Musawi, has hurled a barrage of Katyusha rocket fire at northern Israel and the Israeli-controlled security zone in southern Lebanon.

The Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army have responded with a hail of artillery shells aimed at the rocket-launching sites.

About 40 rockets fell in Upper Galilee and the security zone Sunday night, and scores more followed Monday night and early Tuesday.

Many residents were forced to spend the night in bomb shelters. But no injuries were reported and property damage was minor.

Schools opened late Tuesday because many youngsters had a sleepless night, but no classes were canceled.

Two major salvos fell at 4:40 and 7:15 a.m. local time Tuesday. Fragments indicated they were 122mm rockets, which have a range of about 12 miles.

Another salvo fired at noon Tuesday fell short of Israel and landed in the security zone. Hezbollah sources in Lebanon claimed 65 Katyushas were fired.

One landed a few feet from a post manned by Norwegian soldiers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. But it did not cause any casualties, according to a report from UNIFIL headquarters in southern Lebanon to the United Nations in New York.

The Katyusha rocket strikes by Hezbollah had been expected following the killing of Musawi on Sunday in a precision attack mounted by Israeli helicopter gunships.

Israel acknowledged publicly that the attack was a carefully planned operation intended to get rid of the Shi'ite fundamentalist leader, whom it held responsible for most anti-Israel guerrilla action in southern Lebanon and attempts to disrupt the Middle East peace process.

Experts in Arab affairs and anti-terrorist specialists have warned that Hezbollah may not confine its response to the dangerous but largely inaccurate Katyushas.

These experts predicted more numerous and violent incursions along Israel's borders and retaliatory strikes against Israeli and Western targets in Europe and elsewhere abroad.

Israel has been bracing for such attacks, stepping up security on the borders and on the so-called Green Line dividing the administered territories from Israel proper.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, warned "those on the other side" Monday that they would pay a heavy price if the Katyusha attacks continued.

Barak said the IDF would not confine itself to defensive measures, but he did not elaborate.

U.N. RIGHTS PANEL ADOPTS 4 ANTI-ISRAEL RESOLUTIONS

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- The U.N. Human Rights Commission adopted four anti-Israel resolutions last Friday and was accused by the Israeli delegate of being caught "in a time warp."

Raphael Walden of Israel, which is not a voting member of the 53-member panel, said the commission acted as if no peace process was under way.

He noted with astonishment that one of the resolutions called for "an effective peace conference" sponsored by the U.N. Security Council and inclusive of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The resolutions "did not reflect the spirit of hope to which the peace process, started at Madrid, has given birth," Walden told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

A resolution branding "illegal" Israeli settlements in the "occupied territories" was adopted by a vote of 45-0 with one abstention. Walden claimed it "amounted to a condemnation of Jewish immigration to Israel."

The other resolutions were adopted by a vote of 31-2 with 17 abstentions. The United States and Uruguay cast negative votes on grounds that the language was "unbalanced."

The abstaining countries included Russia, several Eastern and Central European countries and those members of the European Community eligible to vote.

Also abstaining were Japan, Canada, Australia, Chile and Costa Rica.

Walden pointed out that this bloc of 17 countries either abstained or opposed anti-Israel resolutions, a pattern unchanged from last year but nevertheless welcome.

The Israeli delegate also welcomed their vote against a resolution accusing Israel of atrocities against Palestinians. The same bloc abstained on a resolution affirming the right of Palestinians "to resist Israeli occupation by all means."

EGYPT FORMALLY INFORMS ISRAEL DETAINEES SUSPECTED OF SPYING

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- After more than two weeks of rumor and vague reports, Egypt officially informed Israel on Monday that it had arrested three Israeli Arabs for espionage.

The Egyptians also accused the detainees of "violating the security of the state and possession of forged documents," the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem was told.

But they remained vague about why they detained a fourth person, an Israeli Jew who has business contacts with the Arabs arrested.

The Arab detainees are members of one family. An Israeli diplomat in Cairo said Farres Mussarti, his son Majed and daughter Faya are suspected of having spied for "an alien body."

But the Egyptians did not mention Israel or its intelligence agency, Mossad, in connection with the arrests.

The Egyptians seem to be treading cautiously in this matter, which is reportedly being closely followed by President Hosni Mubarak and other ranking government figures.

They were vague about why they had arrested David Ovitz of Givatayim, a Jewish businessman who imports furniture from Egypt. He

appears not to be suspected of any serious offense but was questioned about his contacts with the Mussartis and remained in jail.

Ovitz reportedly employed Farres Mussarti as an interpreter on his furniture-buying expeditions to Egypt.

Israeli observers expect the Egyptians to press charges shortly against the Mussartis, who are from Ramla. If convicted, they would probably face long prison sentences, it is believed here.

The Israeli consul in Cairo, Ronni Porat, was allowed to visit Farres and Majed Mussarti and Ovitz, separately, for the first time Monday in their prison south of Cairo. He was due to talk to Faya Mussarti on Tuesday at a women's prison.

All that the media could learn was that Ovitz complained of the poor quality of the food and lack of blankets.

JEWS FROM USSR WHO MADE ALIYAH LOSE GROUP BID FOR DUTCH ASYLUM

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- A group of Jews from the former Soviet Union who came here after immigrating to Israel lost a collective appeal for asylum in the Netherlands.

But their lawyer thinks they may do better if they appeal individually.

The group, which is calling itself Exodus, was turned down by the president of The Hague District Court last week. He rejected their petition to be allowed to stay in Holland until they found another country willing to accept them.

The court also rejected the plea of 52 other former Soviet Jews who were flown back to Israel from Holland.

They appealed for readmission until they could find another country to accept them.

Despite the setbacks, the lawyer for Exodus, Arnold van Driel, said the decision was encouraging. He said it opened the way for each of the Jews here and those temporarily back in Israel to start legal proceedings on an individual basis.

Van Driel explained that the requests for political asylum were rejected on technical grounds because, according to Dutch law, it can be granted only on an individual basis.

The lawyer said these Jews refuse to return to Israel or stay there because they were constantly humiliated and discriminated against.

He claimed the son of one family had been thrown out of an Israeli hospital when it was discovered he was not circumcised.

GALILEE NOW MORE JEWISH THAN ARAB

TEL AVIV, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- The massive waves of immigration from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia have corrected a problem that has been of serious concern to Israel since the founding of the state.

For the first time since 1948, the Jewish population of Galilee exceeds the Arab population in the northern third of the country.

The latest figures were made public by Ophir Paz, deputy director general of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, in ceremonies last week in the Galilee township of Ma'aleh Tarshicha.

According to the Jewish Agency, the Jewish population in Galilee as of December 1991 was 412,000, compared to an Arab population in the region of 408,000. That represents a Jewish majority of just over 50 percent.

POLAND ASSURES JEWS THAT WARSAW WILL NOT DESTROY GHETTO REMNANT

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- The government of Poland has assured representatives of Canadian Jewry that the city of Warsaw has no plans to demolish the last remnant of the Warsaw Ghetto, namely the "Gate of Zelazna No. 63."

The Polish Foreign Ministry, in a message to the Canadian Jewish Congress, stated that "neither the authorities of the City of Warsaw nor those of the district of Wola have ever passed a decision authorizing the pulling down of Zelazna 63 in Warsaw.

"On the contrary, the Office on the Preservation of Monuments has launched the procedure in order to recognize the above-mentioned building as a historical monument," the message said. It said the building was put on a "special list" of historical monuments in Warsaw.

This sharply contrasts with previous reports reaching the CJC that the last remnant of the ghetto would be razed. Those reports caused deep concern, because the ghetto, which played a major role in the Jewish resistance movement during the Holocaust, is revered by Jews as a symbol of courage.

The CJC had communicated with Polish President Lech Walesa and Stanislaw Wyganowski, the Warsaw city president, protesting the planned move after media reports to that effect were received.

In a Feb. 9 meeting with Poland's ambassador to Canada, Alojzy Bartoszek, the CJC was informed that such a decision had not been made.

Moshe Ronen, the CJC national executive chairman, and Nathan Leipziger, a Holocaust survivor and chairman of Canada's National Holocaust Remembrance Committee, expressed their appreciation for the ambassador's prompt response.

Leipziger also cited the fact that April 1993 marks the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, when the Jews there bravely attempted the ghetto's defense against overwhelming odds.

He asked that a special commemorative program be instituted by the Polish government. He told the ambassador that signs at the site of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp complex were in need of repair and suggested that the English language be more uniformly used there.

Complaint About Auschwitz Memorial

Leipziger is a member of an international advisory committee planning a revision of memorials at the site.

He brought up several other points at the meeting with the Polish envoy, among them a complaint that visitors often visit only Auschwitz and not Birkenau, because of the distance between them, thus reducing the impact of the camp where some 1.6 million Jews were murdered.

Leipziger informed the ambassador that a generous donation, from former Holocaust Remembrance Committee Chairman Gerda Frieberg of Toronto, was used to purchase a bus to transport visitors to Birkenau from Auschwitz. He asked for assurances the bus be used for this purpose alone.

He also asked that an abandoned 30-room house in the area be refurbished and used as a hostel, kosher restaurant and prayer facility for Jewish visitors, noting that there are already Protestant and Catholic hostels in the vicinity.

"At this time, we must encourage the future

generation to visit this site," said Leipziger. "This is the biggest Jewish cemetery in the world. To not have a place to say a prayer is a real shame," he said.

He also expressed indignation over the recent visit to Auschwitz by Canadian Holocaust revisionist and publisher Ernst Zundel, who publicly refutes that the number of Jews murdered there was so high and denies that anyone was killed by gas.

The CJC has requested that the Polish government refuse entry to Zundel in the future.

AT LEAST 20 ARE IN AUSTRIAN JAILS AWAITING TRIAL ON NEO-NAZI CHARGE

By Marta Halpert

VIENNA, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- At least 20 people are in Austrian jails awaiting trial for illegal neo-Nazi activity while the Parliament prepares to enact legislation that would reduce the penalties for such offenses.

The reasoning behind the proposed new laws and amendments to existing ones is that the conviction of neo-Nazis by juries would be more likely if the penalties mandated by law were eased.

That may be tested in the case, among others, of Gunther Reinthaler, arrested in Salzburg a week ago.

Reinthaler, a 32-year-old student, was named by the neo-Nazis to be "gau-beauftragter" -- the old-time Nazis called it gauleiter, meaning provincial boss -- for the provinces of Salzburg and Oberosterreich, or Upper Austria.

Reinthaler was reputedly one of the most important neo-Nazi organizers in the former East Germany. The police nabbed him in his Salzburg apartment with a large collection of incriminating neo-Nazi material.

A close associate was arrested shortly afterward with neo-Nazi propaganda material and a list of militant extremists and their specific functions.

One of Reinthaler's closest cronies is the self-styled "Nazi fuhrer," Gottfried Kussel, arrested earlier. Police said they had been "after him for years." He was nabbed after boasting of his Nazism and making statements denying the Holocaust on American television.

Two days ago, another 15 men were detained on suspicion of neo-Nazi activities.

Austrian legislators are expected to act in about 10 days on the proposed legislation. But Jewish leaders have already voiced strong reservations about some contemplated changes in the law.

Paul Grosz, president of the Jewish community, said, "We are very restrained in our approval of this new amendment, because we feel it contains quite a few loopholes."

Grosz was referring to draft legislation that forbids denial of the Holocaust or the existence of gas chambers "in public."

The term "in public" is much too broad, he said. It could be open to all manner of interpretation -- for example, that one might minimize, deny or justify Nazi crimes in front of a classroom or a small group, if not at larger forums.

Those objections were dismissed by the chairman of the Parliamentary Judiciary Committee, Michael Graff, who said other laws exist that could be applied in specific cases.

But Grosz noted that his position is shared by Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, head of the Vienna-based Nazi War Crimes Documentation Center.