

**BUSH TO MEET WITH MIDEAST PARTIES
IN ATTEMPT TO BOOST THE PEACE TALKS****By Cynthia Mann
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Israel has welcomed the White House's announcement that President Bush will meet later this month with the parties to the Middle East peace talks, in an attempt to maintain momentum through the presidential transition.

The announcement, made Monday by White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, came as the bilateral talks began their eighth round here.

It was clearly aimed at injecting confidence into the process at a time when expectations have been scaled back and progress has flagged because of the uncertainty surrounding the transition.

The low level of expectations was dramatically illustrated by the skeletal delegation that the Palestinians sent here to protest the plodding pace of the talks.

Israeli delegation spokesman Yossi Gal condemned the reduction of the Palestinian delegation, calling it a violation of the rules governing the negotiations. He urged the Palestinians and other Arabs to resist the temptation to stall the process until after Bill Clinton is inaugurated.

"Time is of the essence," he said. "Let us not waste" it.

Gal also said Israel refused to be deterred in its pursuit of peace by the terrorist ambush early Monday of three Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip.

"We will do everything in our power to keep the peace process alive," he said. To suspend negotiations "will reward the terrorists," whose objective is to thwart the process.

Gal called on his "Arab counterparts" to work together to combat the rejectionists and "protect these precious negotiations."

U.S. Expert Sent To Territories

While Gal said he was glad about the White House announcement, he also made it clear that Israel objects to the stepped-up U.S. role the Palestinians have called for to invigorate the negotiations for interim Palestinian self-rule in the territories.

As sponsor, the United States is only supposed "to facilitate" the talks, said Gal. "There is no substitute for face-to-face negotiations between the parties."

The Palestinians have lambasted the Israeli proposal for a Palestinian administrative council as entirely inadequate and a continuation of the Israeli "occupation" in a different form.

Israel has urged the Palestinians to have patience with an incremental approach to self-government. Negotiation of the final status of the territories can only begin after three years of interim self-rule, it insists, in accordance with the formulas governing the talks.

Gal also said Israel was aware of a report published in the Israeli press Monday that a U.S. State Department representative is currently in the territories surveying what training would be required by a Palestinian administrative council. He said Israel had "no problems" with that.

A State Department official confirmed there

is a "mid-level technician" conducting the survey in response to recommendations made during the multilateral talks this fall on refugees and on economic development.

The report in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz said that when the survey is complete, a group of Palestinians is expected to be sent to the United States for high-level management training courses. But the State Department official was unable to confirm this Monday.

**THREE ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED
IN AN AMBUSH IN THE GAZA STRIP****By Lisa Clayton**

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Three Israeli army reservists patrolling the Gaza Strip were killed Monday in an ambush by terrorists of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement.

Gunmen in a passing car sprayed the soldiers' jeep with automatic fire before dawn Monday in an attack coinciding with the fifth anniversary of the Palestinian uprising.

The attackers fled shouting "Allahu Akhbar" (God is great), according to accounts given Israel Radio by Gaza Strip workers who witnessed the assault.

The dead were Lt. Haggai Amit, 24, of Kibbutz Revivim; Cpl. Udi Zamir, 23, of Rehovot; and Shalom Zabari of Gedera.

The Israeli army has imposed a military closure of indefinite duration on the Gaza Strip as of Tuesday morning, which will bar residents from entering Israel.

Speaking from Rome, where he is on an official visit, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin laid blame for the attack on both Islamic fundamentalists and Syrian-supported terrorists. He said Israel would take necessary measures against acts of terror.

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, said the army plans special measures to combat terror in the Gaza Strip, which was escalated as peace negotiations resumed Monday in Washington.

Barak said the last two months had seen 20 attempted attacks against Israeli vehicles and military installations, most of which had been foiled.

In the Knesset the opposition Likud blamed the government's defense policy for the attack.

Likud Knesset member Michael Eitan called on Rabin to give up the defense portfolio.

Rafael Eitan, leader of the right-wing Tsomet party and a former army chief of staff, called for a renewal of tough measures employed against terrorists in the Gaza Strip in the 1970s.

He urged the army to seek out the terrorists "in orchards, in abandoned buildings and in other hiding places and kill them one by one."

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Hadash Communists, a mainly Arab party, announced they would hold a torchlight procession in Haifa to mark the fifth anniversary of the intifada and to show solidarity with Palestinians.

"The intifada is an important historical event for Israelis, too, and is, in fact, what brought the Rabin government to power," said Hadash Knesset member Tamar Gozansky.

NEWS ANALYSIS:
IS LIFTING OF BAN ON PLO CONTACTS
FIRST STEP TOWARD TALKS WITH TUNIS?

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Israel's move to lift the legal ban on meetings between its citizens and officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization is being viewed around the world as a major step toward eventual negotiations between the Jewish state and the PLO.

But the Israeli government takes exception to that view, even though it initiated a repeal of the ban and pushed it through the Knesset on a first reading last week by a majority of just one vote.

Government officials deny the move means an end to Israel's longtime refusal to recognize the PLO as anything other than a terror group.

As Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin put it last Friday, in remarks to a European Parliament committee in Brussels, revocation of the ban "does not mean the government will meet the PLO tomorrow."

But that, in fact, is how the move is being interpreted by the PLO in Tunis, Palestinian leaders in the territories, other Arab leaders, Western statesmen and Third World diplomats.

Even opposition members of the Knesset vigorously espoused that interpretation during the course of a rowdy, six-hour debate over the new legislation on Dec. 2.

"The message from Israel to the world on this black day," declared Likud Knesset member Michael Eitan, "is that we have given legitimacy to the PLO."

And writing ruefully in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, Binyamin Netanyahu, a top contender for leadership of the Likud, said: "The British don't talk to the IRA; the Germans and Italians don't negotiate with their terrorists. Why should the Israeli government talk to the PLO?"

The Israeli government, for its part, insists it has no intention of negotiating with the PLO.

"The two matters -- the law and the policy -- are entirely unconnected," Justice Minister David Libai of Labor, a former law professor, told the Knesset.

Some Suggesting Policy Review

The Israeli government will not only refuse to deal with the PLO, it will continue to urge the United States to maintain its own diplomatic boycott of the organization, said Libai.

Nevertheless, he said, the existing ban is "a blot on the statute book of a democratic nation," since it makes it a criminal offense for an Israeli citizen to have contact with a PLO official even if no damage to the security or the interests of the state is caused or intended.

As Libai spoke, human rights activist Abie Nathan, twice jailed for meeting with PLO leader Yasir Arafat, watched the Knesset proceedings from the distinguished visitors gallery. Nathan, currently involved in a relief effort for the starving people of Somalia, had tears in his eyes.

"This day was worth every day I sat in prison," he said when the preliminary vote was over. The bill must still pass two more readings before becoming law.

The ban on meetings with the PLO was imposed in 1986 by a Likud-Labor unity government as a counterweight to legislation outlawing the anti-Arab Kach Party of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane. Rectifying the Criminal Code now is no

indication of a change of policy toward the PLO, Libai said.

The present government, like its predecessors, will refuse to negotiate peace with the PLO, which it regards as a terror organization whose goal is not a negotiated peace, he said.

The strength of the argument put forward by Libai was weakened, however, as it emerged during the debate that not only the opposition, but many members of the government coalition, failed to accept its logic.

A prominent Labor dove, Knesset Education Committee Chairman Avraham Burg, urged the government "to hold a courageous, deep and soul-searching discussion" on the need to negotiate with "those representatives of the Palestinian people whom the Palestinians themselves consider their legitimate representatives."

And Naomi Chazan of the left-wing Meretz bloc, a leading political scientist who formerly headed the Hebrew University's Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, warned the government somberly: "If you do not negotiate with the PLO today, you will find yourselves opposite the (Islamic fundamentalist movement) Hamas tomorrow."

Even as central a Labor Party figure as Knesset member Ori Orr, a former army general and now chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, referred in the debate to the "demonization" of the PLO in the minds of the Israeli public.

While Orr stopped short of advocating or even predicting eventual negotiations between Israel and the PLO, his comment appeared to open the way for that prospect.

Rabin Uncomfortable With Bill

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin himself is known to be uncomfortable with the new legislation.

He permitted it to be introduced by the government because several of his own backbenchers, led by Yael Dayan, had threatened to introduce it as a private member's bill. That would be an embarrassment to the Labor Party, which pledged in its election platform to abolish the existing ban.

But Rabin preferred not to be immortalized on film voting "for the PLO," and so he stayed away from the Knesset for the whole day.

If the bill wins final passage, as expected, it will be up to Rabin to decide what, if any, effect it will have on government policy regarding the PLO. But there is little evidence to suggest Rabin will be keen about making any shift from Israel's traditional hostility to Yasir Arafat and his organization.

The prime minister coldly ignored Arafat's call for a face-to-face meeting between them, which the PLO leader issued last week in a deftly timed, first-ever interview in Tunis with an Israeli newspaper.

Moreover, Rabin has continued to blast away at Arafat in his speeches as "the prime obstacle to progress" in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

He says the PLO fears that creation of an autonomous regime in the territories, run by local Palestinian leaders, would effectively neutralize Arafat and his circle.

Some Rabin-watchers say it is this logic and not any simplistic boycott of terrorists that lies beneath his continued refusal to deal with the PLO.

WIESEL RETURNS FROM BOSNIA WITH CALL FOR WORLD SUMMIT

By Cynthia Mann
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel has returned from a recent trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina with a report of "devastation" and "incomparable hatred" and a call for a world summit to end the killing.

In an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last week and in a speech here Sunday at the annual Israel Bonds Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award Dinner, he also called for the worldwide Jewish community to pay attention to the suffering in the war-torn region.

Wiesel, who returned last week, went to investigate the ravages of the former Yugoslavia, where more than 100,000 people, nearly all unarmed civilians, have been killed and more than 2 million have been driven from their homes since the conflict began in June 1991.

While the violence has largely been spurred by the Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign, heavy casualties have been sustained by all sides.

Part witness and part diplomat, Wiesel said he also went to give comfort and consolation to the Bosnian people.

The man who embodies the voice of survivors was unwilling to liken what he saw to the Nazi Holocaust, saying he was "suspicious" of any attempts at such comparisons and suggesting each situation was unique.

"I have seen hate in my life, but the hate that exists there today is incomparable," he said. "I don't think it has an analogy anywhere.

"People are killing one another without knowing why because hate is irrational," he said. He described the citizens of Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, as overwhelmed by a "feeling of futility and meaninglessness."

Wiesel said the situation is "insoluble" unless there is pressure to end the violence from the outside. While he offered no solutions, he said he has "grandiose ideas" of a visit to Sarajevo by either President Bush or President-elect Bill Clinton, and a summit of international leaders.

"I am convinced in every fiber of my being the death will stop, at least for a little while."

Jews Must Raise Their Voices

In the absence of such a summit, he suggested a meeting of the U.N. Security Council in Sarajevo.

Wiesel said it is incumbent upon Jews to raise their voices against the tragedy and give humanitarian aid.

"I have criticized and accused and blamed so many leaders in the free world" for remaining apathetic in the face of the Holocaust, he said.

"I don't think we should be accused" now of the same apathy, he added.

At the Israel Bonds dinner, Wiesel painted a bleak picture of the world, saying these are "dangerous times."

He pointed to the rise of neo-Nazi violence in Germany, saying that country "has abdicated its right to claim innocence by saying it all happened in the past.

"No one can tell me all those Nazis all of a sudden came out," he said. "Where were they?"

He said Germany's recent downward slide began with the insistence by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl that former U.S. President Ronald

Reagan visit the Bitburg cemetery, where Nazis are buried.

"That was Kohl's way to whitewash" German history, said Wiesel.

Wiesel said last week on ABC's "Nightline" program that he was compelled to make the journey to Bosnia because "of the principle guiding my life, not to stand idly by."

On the program, he said it might require force to break the siege of six cities, but it would have to be force combined with diplomacy.

"I'm convinced that a spectacular gesture on the level of summitry will stop the war there," he said. "And nothing else will do it because if not, there will be many, many more deaths."

Wiesel said he would attempt to make contact with Bush, Clinton and French President Francois Mitterrand.

In the former Yugoslavia, he met with Yugoslav President Dobrica Cosic, Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panic, Serbian Prime Minister Slobodan Milosevic and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic.

He also visited refugees and detention camp prisoners, to whom he pledged his aid, and attended Sabbath services at the main synagogue in Belgrade, an experience he called "melancholy."

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff intern Lainie Blum-Cogan in New York.)

OFFICIAL WARNS ABOUT TRAVEL TO EGYPT

By Lisa Clayton

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- In the wake of recent terrorist attacks aimed at tourists visiting northern Egypt, Israel's tour operators have been advised by the government to warn clients of the dangers of traveling to the area.

The prime minister's adviser on terrorism, Yigal Carmon, this week warned tour companies that Israeli as well as foreign tourists are potential targets of attacks by Islamic fundamentalists. His warning precedes the expected increase in Israeli tourism to Egypt during Chanukah.

"With the increase in terrorist incidents in upper Egypt and in the wake of violent acts by Islamic organizations, I would like to bring to your attention the recent intensification of such acts," wrote Carmon.

"Although they are not specifically aimed at Israelis, tourists are the target," he said.

Carmon told the operators that the U.S. government had issued a similar warning to tourists intending to visit sites in southern Egypt.

DUTCH CHURCH CLOSING ISRAEL OFFICE

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- The Dutch Reformed Church synod has decided to close down its representation in Israel, which has been headed for 11 years by the Rev. Geert Cohen Stuart.

For many years, the Dutch Reformed Church had a representative in Jerusalem for contacts with the Jews.

In recent years, there was friction between the synod and Cohen Stuart because he was thought to be too one-sidedly pro-Israel and to have too little eye for the Palestinians.

Instead of a permanent representative, the Dutch Reformed synod will maintain a visiting representative, who will make periodic trips to both Israel and Jewish communities elsewhere, including the United States.

SKINHEAD ARRESTED IN ITALY FOR ANTI-SEMITIC LEAFLETS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- For the first time in Italy, a person has been arrested for fostering racism, on the basis of a law dating back to 1975 but never before enforced.

Giorgio Cola, 19, a skinhead and member of the ultraright-wing group Political Movement, was arrested Saturday as he handed out leaflets that were both anti-Semitic and anti-abortion.

He was arrested on the basis of a law that makes it an offense to "disseminate in any way ideas founded on racial superiority or hatred" or to "incite discrimination in any way or commit acts of violence or provoke violence against people because they belong to a national, ethnic or racial group."

The law also prohibits the formation of organizations aimed at inciting racial hatred or discrimination.

In recent weeks, in the wake of skinhead demonstrations and anti-Semitic incidents, Jewish leaders in particular have called on Italian authorities to implement the laws already on the books in order to stop this type of activity.

RABIN TELLS EUROPE TO REMEMBER THE PAST AND SAY 'NEVER AGAIN'

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin this week called on Europe to remember the past and cry "never again" to mounting racism and anti-Semitism.

Allowed to go unchecked, attitudes of hatred do "not just threaten the Jewish people alone," he said.

Rabin urged European nations to combat hatred as he addressed ceremonies commemorating Holocaust victims and honoring Italians who fought the Nazis and helped Jews during and after World War II.

On Monday, he honored 335 Romans, including 73 Jews, executed by the Nazis in March 1944 in reprisal for a partisan attack.

He laid a wreath at the monument to them at the Fosse Ardeatine, the Ardeatine Pits, where the Nazi massacre took place, before launching into a series of meetings with Italian leaders.

On Sunday evening, after his arrival, he also stressed the necessity of combating anti-Semitism and racism, during an award ceremony for four Italians who helped Jews immigrate clandestinely to the land of Israel after World War II.

At a ceremony hosted by Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo, Rabin said that it was impossible to look toward the future without remembering the past.

The current wave of hatred, he said, is "a cancer in the heart of European society.

"When I see what is happening in some parts of Europe, I think that people tend to forget history that took place less than 50 years ago," he said.

"Together, we must cry, 'Never again.' Together, we must not permit that all this happens again," he said.

Colombo, too, condemned the current wave of xenophobia.

"It is not enough to condemn it," he said. "We must be present with laws" and strict interpretation of them, he said.

At the ceremony, four Italians were honored

for helping Jews in 1945 to flee to what later became Israel.

In what was known as Aliyah Bet, as many as 20,000 Jews, most of them survivors of Nazi camps, passed through Italy en route to British-mandated Palestine immediately after the war.

They sailed secretly from Italian ports in converted fishing boats and other vessels, or flew in rickety planes.

The four Italians honored Sunday night were anti-Nazi partisans who helped in this operation.

Alberto Li Gobbi, now 72 and an army general, organized groups of former partisans to transport fleeing Jews to embarkation points.

Gualtiero Morpurgo and Mario Pavia converted cargo ships to passenger carriers. Marcello Cantoni, a doctor, offered medical care to hundreds of clandestine refugees.

MORE GERMANS NOW DISDAIN FAR RIGHT

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- German disapproval of right-wing violence has risen dramatically following an arson attack last month that killed three Turkish nationals.

Sixty-nine percent of Germans categorically reject the slogan "Foreigners out," according to an opinion poll published Monday in the weekly Der Spiegel.

That is sharply up from 43 percent who opposed the slogan prior to the Nov. 23 firebombing, which killed a woman and two girls in the northern town of Moelln.

Two right-wing radicals have been charged with murder and arson after confessing to the attack, according to German authorities.

The number of Germans say they understand neo-Nazi sympathies has dipped from 33 to 12 percent.

By the same token, 61 percent support the right of foreigners to asylum in Germany, as compared to only 39 percent before the Moelln killings.

Only 3 percent of Germans believe the extremist right-wing Republican Party is competent to solve the problem of granting asylum to foreigners, as compared with 16 percent earlier.

CZECH WEEKLY UNDER INVESTIGATION

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- A public prosecutor here has overruled a decision by a police official to squelch an investigation of the Prague weekly Politika for publishing anti-Semitic stories.

The police were ordered to reopen their inquiry into the magazine, which has been the focus of mounting criticism over the past year for a crude anti-Semitic bias. It is sold openly on newsstands and has even gained in circulation since the publicity given it by the police investigation.

The decision of the district public prosecutor came after it was found that police had accepted the pro-Politika views of an archivist at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, while turning down opposing views by five academy experts who found Politika pursued an anti-Semitic view in contravention of the law.

Filip Sedivy, vice chairman of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly, said last week that legislation might be needed to bolster legal action against those publications like Politika which violated individual civil rights.