

**ISRAELI CABINET PUTS OFF DISCUSSION
OF TALKS WITH PLO, AT LEAST FOR NOW**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has inched a step closer toward endorsing the idea of bringing the long-banned Palestine Liberation Organization into the peace process.

But Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin remains strongly opposed to a direct role for the Tunis-based organization and persuaded an unusual midweek Cabinet meeting to back away from raising the possibility for formal discussion.

For their part, the Palestinians indicated there was not much to talk about as long as Israel refused to allow 415 Moslem fundamentalists it expelled to Lebanon last week to return to the administered territories.

Palestinian officials in both Tunis and Jerusalem said the peace process had been dealt a "death blow" by the decision Tuesday of Israel's High Court of Justice to reject appeals against the expulsion of the fundamentalists, who are members of the militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements.

But Israeli leaders expressed confidence that the peace talks would continue after the Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Bill Clinton.

Rabin told the Cabinet on Wednesday that when the bilateral talks resume in Washington, all of the Arab delegations will be there, including the Palestinians.

Peres cited statements by Egypt, Syria and Jordan that the talks should continue and urged the Palestinians not to withdraw. Speaking at a news conference for foreign journalists, he expressed hope that elections in the territories could take place in two to four months.

At the same news conference, Peres rejected the idea of opening direct talks with the PLO, saying Israel already had a Palestinian negotiating partner.

But earlier, in a newspaper interview, the foreign minister said Israel should reconsider its criteria about whom it negotiates with. He said Jerusalem should agree to talk with any Palestinian individual or organization ready to reach a peace settlement.

No 'Organizational Distinctions'

"We should no longer make geographic or organizational distinctions between the Palestinians, as previous governments have done," he told the daily Yediot Achronot.

The foreign minister said he favored recognizing as a legitimate negotiating partner Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini, until now disqualified primarily because he lives in East Jerusalem but also because of his close ties to the PLO.

So long as Husseini does not join Hamas, he is an appropriate negotiating partner, Peres said.

The foreign minister's statements represented a departure from the position traditionally held by Israel toward the PLO, which continues to be strongly maintained by Rabin.

The prime minister agreed, under pressure from his left-wing coalition partner, the Meretz bloc, to hold a special Cabinet discussion Wednesday on whether to go beyond talking to Palestin-

ians who take their instructions from Tunis to sitting down with the PLO itself.

Rabin, who has stated that PLO chief Yasir Arafat is the main obstacle to a peace agreement, adamantly opposes opening the door to direct contacts with the PLO.

But a growing number of officials in his own party think otherwise. The most recent to back talks with the PLO was Tourism Minister Uzi Baram.

Immigrant Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban of Meretz argued Wednesday that Israel should tell the PLO that if it played "a constructive role" at the next round of peace talks, Jerusalem would reconsider its policy toward the group.

Health Minister Haim Ramon of Labor suggested that Rabin issue a renewed invitation to meet with the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks. The Palestinians have in the past declined on the grounds that only Arafat is authorized to represent them at that diplomatic level.

In Washington, meanwhile, the State Department expressed concern Wednesday about the welfare of the Palestinian deportees, who are stranded between Israeli and Lebanese army checkpoints in southern Lebanon, with neither side willing to admit them.

"We remain very disturbed by the situation, and I think our views on deportations are well known," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said at a news briefing.

The United States joined a U.N. Security Council resolution last Friday that strongly condemned the Israeli action.

Boucher said the U.S. government would "remain in touch with both the Israelis and the Lebanese on this matter."

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Deborah Kalb of States News Service in Washington.)

**BILL TO ALLOW CONTACTS WITH PLO
IS HELD UP IN KNESSET COMMITTEE**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- Proposed legislation to decriminalize contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization is making its way through the Knesset at a slower pace than its sponsors had hoped.

Opposition lawmakers succeeded Wednesday in winning a two- to three-week delay in a key committee vote on whether to send the bill to the Knesset floor for its second and third readings. They argued that the Knesset Law Committee should first hear more testimony from security experts on the bill's implications.

The bill passed its first reading early this month by a razor-thin margin of 37-36.

A spokesman for the Likud bloc, which requested the additional witnesses, termed the delay "a major success" for those opposed to lifting the ban on meetings with PLO officials.

Knesset member Avraham Poraz of the left-wing Meretz bloc termed the postponement a transparent attempt by the opposition to slow down the legislative journey of the bill and prevent it from becoming law.

But the committee chairman, Dedi Zucker, himself a member of Meretz, said the law is too

important to be pushed through by a coalition steamroller.

The opposition's request for expert evidence is justified and reasonable, Zucker told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Political observers nevertheless felt the delay would inevitably reduce the momentum of pressure within the Cabinet -- mainly by ministers of Zucker's own party -- for a softening of government opposition to opening direct talks with the PLO.

The government itself has always maintained there is no inconsistency between backing a law allowing Israeli citizens to meet with the PLO and opposing negotiations with the organization. But neither the left, which supports both types of contacts, nor the right, which opposes both, accepts that distinction.

Bitter debate over the law continued at a session of the Law Committee on Wednesday, sharpened by the knowledge that the Cabinet was considering whether it should debate, for the first time ever, changing Israel's policy toward the PLO.

Likud members charged that the purpose of the new law was to grant legitimacy to the PLO. Likud Knesset member Ron Nachman, mayor of the West Bank settlement of Ariel, said the law would be seen by the Palestinians as a victory for terrorism.

2 ARABS KILLED IN GAZA CLASHES

JERUSALEM, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- Violent clashes erupted Wednesday in the Gaza Strip, killing two brothers, as Israel lifted a two-week ban on movement into Israel proper.

Palestinian sources claimed Israeli troops wounded more than 40 during demonstrations by rock-throwers in Gaza and Khan Yunis. But the Israeli announcement spoke of only 12 hurt.

Despite the unrest, close to 24,000 Gazans crossed to jobs in Israel.

But tensions remained high in the strip, where six Palestinians were killed in riots last weekend sparked by Israel's expulsion of 415 Moslem fundamentalists.

Residents of Khan Yunis say Ismael Abadin, 27, and his brother Mohammed, 30, were merely sitting at home and not engaged in throwing stones when they were killed in Wednesday's riots. Israeli military sources could not immediately determine the cause of their death.

Israel denies claims by Palestinians that changes have been introduced into standing orders for opening fire. Gazans claim soldiers now apparently shoot with the intention of hitting rock-throwers. They say most of the wounded were hit in the leg.

ISRAEL MAY HELP INDIA DEVELOP TANK

TEL AVIV, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- Israel may assist India in building a new tank.

According to a report in the Times of India, Israel is seeking to provide sensors and fire-control systems for a tank being developed by India.

A senior Indian defense official said the Israelis "are prepared to delete brand names of the items they supply" for the Arjun tank, the report said.

Cooperation on the project would be significant since New Delhi for decades demonstrated solidarity with the Palestinians and kept its

distance from Jerusalem. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel only last January.

Israeli defense officials said cooperation between Israel and India on the project would require a political decision, news reports said.

Final trials of the 50-ton tank are due next month. If successful, production will begin by the middle of next year.

The Arjun, under development for 20 years, is powered by a German engine and has a Dutch-made sighting system. It is designed for a four-member crew.

HUNGARY'S RULING PARTY FORCES ANTI-SEMITIC TO A LESSER POST

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- Hungary's ruling party has moved to soften the impact of a top official known for his anti-Semitic diatribes by maneuvering him into a position with a lower profile.

Istvan Csurka, who has blamed national ills on liberals, Jews, Western financiers and the press, is no longer vice president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, a post which has been abolished.

Instead, he will serve on a newly created party presidium that has 21 members, Hungarian Foreign Minister Geza Jeszensky told World Jewish Congress leaders in New York this week. Csurka had been one of six vice presidents.

The move followed mounting international criticism of Csurka for his anti-Semitic attacks in party publications and in a regularly scheduled Sunday radio program.

Jeszensky, in New York for consultations on the Bosnian crisis, said he hoped the World Jewish Congress would now help counter the negative image projected by Csurka.

The Hungarian foreign minister reported on Csurka's diminished role to WJC's secretary-general, Israel Singer, and its executive director, Elan Steinberg.

Singer said it was too early to tell whether the move would significantly reduce Csurka's influence, according to Leslie Keller, chairman of the WJC's Eastern European Commission.

VANDALS DEFACE DOHANY SYNAGOGUE

BUDAPEST, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- Vandals attacked the outside wall Hungary's largest synagogue here last weekend, ripping off a memorial tablet commemorating the Soviet liberation of a Jewish ghetto in World War II.

A day after the attack on the landmark Dohany Street synagogue, a member of the ruling coalition in the Christian Democratic party condemned the vandals from the floor of Parliament.

The chairman of the Jewish community, Gusztav Zoltai, termed the vandalism a "brutal act."

The plaque was put up 15 years ago to mark the January 1945 liberation of a ghetto where tens of thousands of Jews perished.

Some categorized the assault as anti-Russian rather than anti-Semitic. Many Hungarians question the role of the Soviet army as a "liberator," and monuments commemorating Soviet war heroism have been taken down and moved away, most to a special park.

A new plaque will be put up at the same spot with the help of a Jewish entrepreneur, Zoltai said.

JEWS RALLY IN D.C. AND NEW YORK FOR STRONGER U.S. ACTION ON BOSNIA

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- With the still-incomplete U.S. Holocaust Museum as a backdrop, hundreds of Jews staged an outdoor rally here Tuesday evening to urge the U.S. government to take stronger action to help the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In New York, Jewish women's groups simultaneously held a candlelight vigil across from the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations, to protest the mass rape and sexual abuse of thousands of women in the former Yugoslav republic.

And at the United Nations, Jewish groups joined other religious leaders and U.N. officials Wednesday in an "International Day of Prayer and Solidarity With the People of Bosnia."

Speakers at the Washington rally, which was sponsored by a broad coalition of 24 Jewish groups, drew parallels between the Nazi Holocaust and the Serbian persecution of Bosnian Moslems.

"Non-binding resolutions couldn't stop the last holocaust," read a sign in the crowd, referring to U.N. Security Council action on the Bosnian crisis that has been widely criticized as inadequate.

Organizers estimate that between 400 and 500 people attended the rally, which took place in late afternoon as dusk descended on Washington.

Nineteen of the 24 sponsoring groups endorsed a 12-point statement asking the U.S. government to "formulate and announce an American policy adequate to the crisis in Bosnia."

The statement, titled "Bosnia: A Plea to the United States," called for military intervention, if necessary, to protect the Bosnian people, and the prosecution of those involved in war crimes.

Representatives delivered copies of the statement to the White House, the State Department and the Clinton transition headquarters.

Leonard Fein, senior scholar at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, recalled in his keynote address that as a child in 1944, he put together a scrapbook about the plight of Jewish children in Europe. He did not know at the time, he said, that "by 1944 there weren't very many Jewish children left in Europe."

Jewish Unity On This Issue

Fein cautioned that such "sweet projects" could be "for naught" once again with the people of Bosnia. The point of the rally, he said, was "to help alter the course of our nation's behavior" before it is too late.

"How tragic, how ironic that this building across the street seeks to memorialize events so ugly, so unspeakable, because we feared future generations won't believe they ever happened; yet they are happening today day in, day out in the former Yugoslavia before our eyes," said Henry Siegman, a Holocaust survivor who is executive vice president of the American Jewish Congress.

Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center, which coordinated the rally, noted the unity in the Jewish community on the Bosnian issue.

"Few issues in recent memory, save for Israel's safety and the fate of Jews in distant lands, have elicited so general and so sharp a reaction from every corner of the Jewish community," he told the crowd.

In New York, about 100 women and men

marched seven blocks from Manhattan's Grand Army Plaza to the Yugoslav Mission, where they held candles and chanted in protest of the mass rape and sexual abuse of women in the former Yugoslavia.

As the Jewish women and men huddled together behind police barricades and held candles in hands that were shaking from the late-December cold, they chanted "Shame, Shame," and "We Will Not Wait: No More Murder, No More Rape."

At least 60,000 women and girls -- half of them teen-agers -- are thought to be pregnant as a result of the rapes, according to preliminary findings reported by the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

While most of the reported rapes have been perpetrated by Serbian and Croatian men against Moslem women in Bosnia, Croatian women have also been raped, said Gloria Steinem, a founder of the feminist movement and a member of the American Jewish Congress Commission on Women's Equality, which organized the vigil.

This rape on a massive scale has "been a way for men to establish their hegemony, a way of 'planting their flag in the soil' and to use women as turf," said feminist author Letty Cottin Pogrebin, who also took part in the vigil.

The event was co-sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women and endorsed by Hadasah, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and Women's American ORT.

'Important To Have A Voice'

Rabbi Rachel Cowan, director of the Jewish Life Program at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, said she took part in the vigil because "there were many times during the Holocaust when people heard what was going on and sat by, doing nothing."

No one from the Yugoslav Mission came out to acknowledge the protesters. From time to time, the outline of a figure was visible at a window, looking out.

But according to Harold Shapiro, one of the few men who participated, "it is still important to have a voice," even if the Yugoslav officials do not listen.

"Even a small voice of protest is important," he said. "The real voice has to come from Washington, because if we allow it to continue, we foster the same thing happening all over the world."

The Washington gathering also included a candle-lighting ceremony for the fourth night of Chanukah.

Lighting candles were Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.); Flora Singer, vice president of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Friends of Greater Washington; William Snowden Keyes, who served in an African American unit of the U.S. Army that helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp; Medzib Sacirbey, personal representative of the president of Bosnia; and children from the Geshur Jewish Day School of Northern Virginia.

"I'm here because I'm tired of seeing the whole world be completely inactive, letting this go on," said Israel Soiberman of Washington.

"We're coming together for reasons that are more than symbolic," said Eli Eisenstein, also from Washington. "We hope to encourage the government to intervene and save lives."

He added, "I think Jews have a special sensitivity to this issue."

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen in New York.)

FILM ON BLACK LIBERATORS OF CAMPS BRINGS BLACKS AND JEWS TOGETHER

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) -- It was an unlikely picture: the Rev. Jesse Jackson and New York Mayor David Dinkins clasping hands tightly with Satmar Rabbis Leib Glanz and Hertz Frankel, their heads bowed in prayer on the stage of the Apollo Theater in Harlem.

After praying, they sang the civil rights movement anthem, "We Shall Overcome."

It was the culmination of an often emotional evening for them and for 1,200 invited guests attending a special screening of "The Liberators," the story of the all-black Army divisions that liberated the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps during World War II.

The audience at the Apollo last Thursday night included survivors of the camps and veterans of the 761st Tank Battalion and the 183rd Combat Engineers, men who were victims themselves of racism in their own army and country, and were the first Americans to witness the horrors that the Nazis' anti-Semitism had wrought.

A small group of Jews attended from the embattled Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, which in recent months has become the focal point of black-Jewish tensions in the city.

The group from Crown Heights included 15 Jewish teen-agers who came with David Lazerson, the Lubavitcher who founded Project C.U.R.E. and the black-Jewish basketball games that have become well-known outside Brooklyn.

The unusual evening was pregnant with hope as speaker after speaker, before and after the screening, spoke of the need for reconciliation between blacks and Jews, of the need for healing the deep wounds that have riven the two ethnic groups apart.

Jackson, who first conceived of the idea for the Apollo screening, described the event as one of "healing and redemption" and spoke of plans to hold similar events in 25 cities around the country.

'When We Stand Together, We Win'

"We must unify, coalesce in mass action. We must make right popular. In our common quest for change and social justice, when we stand together, we win," he said, even as he acknowledged "our mutual vulnerabilities."

"The wall that came down in Buchenwald must not be resurrected, in any place."

Dinkins said that he is exploring the possibility of showing the film in every high school in the city, and exhorted the African Americans and Jews present to "close ranks against intolerance and hate."

Dinkins then proceeded to quote the Jewish sage Rabbi Hillel by asking, "If not now, when?"

Jackson told the African Americans and Jews present that his own father had served in the army and "was part of this."

But when he told the story of the Nazi death camps and how they were liberated first by black soldiers, "no one believed," said Jackson. "He was still very much 'a nigger.'"

In more than 100 homes, synagogues and churches around the city, groups of blacks and Jews gathered to watch the screening and a discussion that followed, moderated by talk-show host Charlie Rose. The screening and discussion were broadcast over public television.

The audience at the Apollo was studded with individuals who were instrumental in forging the close relations between blacks and Jews during the heyday of the American civil rights movement.

Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's widow, and Carolyn Goodman, the mother of Andrew Goodman, one of three young Jewish civil rights workers murdered in the summer of 1964, attended the screening.

Others present included the Rev. Al Sharpton, Democratic Rep. Charles Rangel of Harlem and Peggy Tishman of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

Collard Greens And Kasha

After the screening itself, guests were invited to a reception in an enormous tent erected adjacent to the famous black theater. Traditional African American and Jewish foods were served as audience members gathered around tables to talk about the evening.

On the menu were collard greens, fried catfish and corn bread; kishke, kasha and kugel.

Kim Fisher, 32, works with a youth group in Staten Island and was one of the area activists who was invited to attend.

Clutching a copy of "The Liberators," the film's companion book which was given to each audience member, Fisher promised to teach her kids about what she had learned through the documentary.

"To tell you the truth, I didn't really learn about the Holocaust growing up. I will let my young brothers and sisters read the book so that they can see that we must love one another, and that we helped the Jews," she said.

Kathleen Taylor, a black Brooklyn therapist who works with the deaf and who counts several Holocaust survivors among her clients, came away from the evening hopeful but realistic.

"We have to get past the pigmentation and get to the pain that's still there," she said. "I hope this is just the first step."

KNESSET APPROVES COMPENSATION FOR TRANSFUSION VICTIMS OF HIV

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- The Israeli government will compensate people who contracted the virus that causes AIDS after undergoing blood transfusions at Israeli hospitals.

Under a law passed by the Knesset on Wednesday, the government will pay a lump sum of about \$95,000 to patients infected with HIV as a result of transfusions received in recognized hospitals.

The measure was adopted unanimously.

Israel has been checking blood for contamination with the virus since 1986. But a number of hemophiliacs are known to have been infected before that time.

The law provides that payment can be made to a spouse or child of an infected person. Moreover, if the infected person dies before receiving the award, his or her dependents are to receive a pension for the rest of their lives.

The legislation creates a committee comprising a judge and two doctors to determine, in each case, whether HIV infection was attributable to a blood transfusion received in Israel.

REMINDER: The JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published Friday, Dec. 25.