

ISRAEL WILL NOW ALLOW RED CROSS ACCESS TO PALESTINIAN DEPORTEES**By David Landau**

JERUSALEM, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- Reversing its previous position, Israel agreed Thursday to allow officials of the International Red Cross to fly over Israeli-controlled territory to see 415 Moslem fundamentalist activists expelled to Lebanon.

News reports said Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, who had also refused access through Lebanon, made a similar announcement in Beirut, saying his government would allow Red Cross officials to cross Lebanon's territory on a "one-time-only" basis to visit the deportees.

The Israeli move was announced just before a second U.N. envoy arrived to underline a Dec. 18 Security Council resolution calling on Jerusalem to take back the deportees.

Under the agreement, Red Cross personnel will fly with the help of U.N. peacekeepers from the Israeli-held buffer zone in southern Lebanon for a one-day mission and on a one-time-only basis, the announcement said.

Officials close to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin denied the decision represented a reversal of his previous position on Red Cross visits to the deportees.

They claimed no change had occurred in Rabin's basic policy of refusing to allow aid to transit to the deportees through the buffer zone in the absence of agreement by Lebanon to facilitate regular supplies through its territory thereafter.

Weather permitting, two Red Cross officials were to fly to the deportees' encampment Friday morning, boarding a helicopter at the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon at Nakoura, just north of the Israeli border with Lebanon.

The Israeli decision was announced as Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan, envoy of U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, flew in for weekend talks about the deportees.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who was to meet with the envoy Friday, said he hoped for progress toward an agreed solution on the deportees issue.

Earlier this week, in a televised appearance on the ABC News program "Nightline," Peres said he believed a solution would soon be found.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**ARREST OF HAMAS TERRORISTS A BLOW, BUT MOVEMENT'S POPULARITY GROWING****By Gil Sedan**

JERUSALEM, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- The arrest of 22 members of a Hamas terrorist gang, coming on the heels of Israel's deportation of 415 Moslem fundamentalists, has dealt a severe blow to the Islamic activists.

But politically, Hamas seems to be stronger than ever.

Even before this week's announcement that the 22 were behind bars, detention, death and flight to Egypt had led to erosion in the ranks of Izz a-Din al-Kassam, the military branch of Hamas.

Experts here now estimate that only 50 or

so of the terrorists remain at large and that they, too, are mostly on the run.

But that is only part of the picture. Izz a-Din al-Kassam is a collection of small terrorist squads with only tenuous links among them.

Analysts say that even the relatively small number of members that have evaded arrest can quickly attract new recruits and carry out ad hoc acts of terrorism.

The fact is that despite its recent success in apprehending Hamas gangs, Israel's Shin Bet security service is faced with unsolved killings.

Still at large are the murderers of three Israeli soldiers in Gaza on Dec. 7, reservist Yuval Tutjani in Hebron on Dec. 12, Border Police Sgt. Maj. Nissim Toledano on Dec. 13 and Shin Bet agent Haim Nahmani in Jerusalem on Jan. 3.

Hamas claimed responsibility for all of those attacks.

Hamas' organizational structure has undoubtedly suffered a setback since Israel expelled most of its top officials to Lebanon. In the absence of most of the movement's leadership, Moslem colleges and mosques no longer offer as safe a shelter for terrorists.

But the success of the Israeli offensive has not weakened the position of the Hamas in the Palestinian community.

Three weeks after the expulsions of the Moslem fundamentalist activists, secular and religious Palestinians alike have rallied behind the deportees, exerting pressure on Palestinian negotiators to stay away from the Middle East peace talks.

This popular support will undoubtedly make the remnant leadership's task of replenishing the ranks of Hamas all that much easier.

PRO-ISRAEL CIRCLES ARE PLEASED WITH CONGRESSIONAL ASSIGNMENTS**By Deborah Kalb
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- More committee assignments in the new 103rd Congress were made this week, and advocates for Israel seem pleased overall by the results.

On the Senate side, newcomers Russell Feingold (D-Wisc.) and Harlan Mathews (D-Tenn.) were named to the Foreign Relations Committee.

"Feingold will be an interesting one to watch," said Mark Pelavin, director of the American Jewish Congress Washington office.

Feingold, who is Jewish, defeated Republican incumbent Robert Kasten, who was supported by many pro-Israel political action committees. The Jewish vote was split between the two.

While the new senator's foreign policy positions are not clear to all Jewish leaders, most think his appointment to Foreign Relations is a good one.

"Feingold will be a good, strong, pro-Israel voice on the committee," said Pelavin.

Feingold, who also will be serving on the Agriculture Committee, "took a very strong pro-Israel stance during the election," said Lewis Roth, spokesman for the National Jewish Democratic Council. "People will find him a powerful advocate."

Another new Jewish senator, Dianne Fein-

stein (D-Calif.) was named to the powerful Appropriations Committee, which makes decisions on, among other things, foreign aid to Israel.

"Feinstein will certainly be a pro-Israel voice on Appropriations. She will be an important addition to that committee," said Jess Hordes, Washington representative of the Anti-Defamation League.

Feinstein also was named to the Judiciary Committee, along with Carol Moseley Braun (D-Ill.), a move which places two women on the formerly all-male panel.

"The Feinstein appointment on Judiciary is a terrific one," said Roth of the Democratic council.

He said the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas "showed the need for diversity."

The third new Jewish senator, Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), will be serving on the Environment and Banking committees.

On the House side, pro-Israel forces are pleased by the addition of three Jewish representatives to the Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East.

They are Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), a veteran in the House and longtime Israel supporter, and two newcomers: Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.) and David Levy (R-N.Y.).

Helps Offset Big Losses

Their addition to the overall Foreign Affairs Committee helps offset the departure of such pro-Israel stalwarts as Mel Levine (D-Calif.) and Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), who both lost election bids.

Another loss was Rep. Lawrence Smith (D-Fla.), a staunch supporter of Israel who served on the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations.

"We knew going into this Congress that a lot of the pro-Israel champions -- Levine, Solarz, Smith -- wouldn't be back," said Pelavin of AJCongress. "We will look to others to assume leadership roles."

Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), who is taking the reins as chairman of the overall Foreign Affairs Committee, is also retaining the chairmanship of the Middle East subcommittee.

According to Jonathan Jacoby, president of Americans for Peace Now, this is a "very good sign," because it shows that Hamilton "will give a high priority" to Middle East issues.

While some in the pro-Israel lobby have given only lukewarm praise to Hamilton, Jacoby sees him as "extraordinarily well-versed in Israel-Arab affairs and a strong supporter of Israel and the peace process."

The new ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee is Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), who is Jewish.

"Gilman's ascension as ranking member is an extremely positive development for our community," said Gary Hiller, congressional affairs director of the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group.

"Gilman has consistently been in the forefront of issues of concern," Hiller said. "His importance to our community is in his ability to garner support given his credibility and integrity among his colleagues."

"The new lineup of members on the Republican side" of the Middle East subcommittee "bodes very well for issues of concern for our community," Hiller said.

ISRAELI SECURITY PONDERS HOW STOWAWAY GOT ON PLANE

By Hugh Orgel

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The incident, regarded as a serious breach of both airport security and airline discipline, has caused major consternation at both Ben-Gurion and El Al, which are generally regarded as having among the tightest security in the airline industry.

The stowaway was David Soliman, a 27-year-old man who claims to be a free-lance journalist. He wrote about his experience in an article he sold to the daily Ma'ariv.

Soliman said he had wanted to gather copy for a news story on security breaches at the airport. He claims he had not thought to board a plane and fly off until he was actually aboard the aircraft.

Although he does not say so in his published story, airport personnel claim he had dressed in a dark suit similar to that worn by clerks and security personnel, with a "Security" label pinned to his lapel.

Soliman claims he walked straight through a guarded gate to the airfield at about 9 p.m. on Sunday without challenge from gate guards, and then wandered about the planes parked in front of the terminal.

When he noticed passengers boarding an El Al plane, he got on the end of the line.

"As the ground hostesses were checking the boarding cards of the last passengers, I tapped the last man on the shoulder, said 'Excuse me' and climbed the steps, pushing my way into the plane, as though I was on duty."

He sat down in an empty seat, after apparently hiding his "Security" tag, and the plane took off.

He said he had not known the destination of his flight until the pilot made his welcome announcement to Nairobi.

Soliman says he waited about half an hour before giving himself up to an air hostess.

He wanted "to give the pilot time to settle down into the flight, and to afford him sufficient time to recover from the shock before having to land the plane," he said.

The stowaway was questioned by the captain during the flight, and again by El Al security and Kenyan security in Nairobi.

He was escorted back to Israel on the return flight. He was again interrogated when he returned to Ben-Gurion Airport, charged by the police and released on bail pending further investigation.

DUTCH GIVE UP ON EL AL RECORDER

By Henrietta Boas

AMSTERDAM, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- The Dutch Aviation Board has abandoned hope of retrieving the cockpit voice recorder of an El Al 747 plane that crashed in Amsterdam three months ago.

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SOME, BUT NOT ALL, FERRIS MORA EXPECTED TO BE ADMITTED TO ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- Some, but not all, of the Ferris Mora, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, are likely to be admitted to Israel under a compromise plan taking shape in a Cabinet-level committee.

The committee, headed by Immigrant Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban, is expected to create controversy, whatever it decides.

Opinion is sharply divided even within Israel's Ethiopian immigrant community on whether to admit the Ferris Mora, whose numbers are estimated at between 25,000 and 50,000.

"There is no chance the committee will say none may enter Israel," Tsaban told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency this week. "Nor is there any chance it will recommend admittance, under the Law of Return, for everyone claiming to be a Ferris Mora."

Tsaban spoke after 10 rabbinic and academic scholars presented expert opinion to the ministerial body, whose members are due to make their recommendation to the full Cabinet next week.

Members of the committee include Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Interior Minister Arye Deri, Tourism Minister Uzi Baram and Justice Minister David Libai. Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, a major player in the immigration process, is a non-voting member of the committee.

In an interview, Tsaban said a key problem is the definition of a Ferris Mora. If, for example, it means a first-degree family relationship with someone already in Israel, it would open the gates to a broad range of people who do not even claim to be Ferris Mora, but are closely related to someone who does.

About 2,000 Ferris Mora slipped through screening efforts and boarded planes in May 1991 when Operation Solomon airlifted most of Ethiopia's Jews to Israel. Indeed, it emerged that the passengers included several hundred Ethiopians who are clearly Christian and make no claim to be anything else.

Ethiopian Immigrants Divided

About 4,000 Ferris Mora are now waiting in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, hoping to be allowed to proceed to Israel. Some 2,800 are inside or closely attached to the Joint Distribution Committee compound there. Another 1,200 have gathered in the city, in the hope of eventual emigration to Israel.

Sources said American Jewish organizations active on this issue have now ceased encouraging Ferris Mora from outlying areas to sell their holdings and make their way to the capital.

Israeli differences of opinion on the issue are not along traditional Orthodox-secular lines. Indeed, some secular opinion strongly opposes a "liberal" policy toward Ferris Mora, while some Orthodox opinion favors precisely such a policy.

Polarization has also surfaced in the Ethiopian community. Many Ethiopian Israelis testified before the committee that the Ferris Mora were condemned as traitors by the mainstream Jewish community in their native country.

When the aliyah question first surfaced, they said, some Ferris Mora actively tried to thwart efforts by Jewish families to get to Israel, in some cases by reporting on them unfavorably to the authorities.

Sociologists say some Ethiopian Israelis, who are finding it hard enough to acclimate to Israeli society, feel an additional barrier of suspicion and alienation would be created by the advent of a large number of Ethiopians who, at least at present, are not properly Jewish.

Authorities apparently hope the 2,000 who slipped through in Operation Solomon will eventually meld into the broader mass of that aliyah.

On the other hand, some Ethiopians here have relatives and friends among the Ferris Mora. Many of them claim their exclusion is cruel and arbitrary, especially in view of the fact that 2,000 did get in.

The Ethiopian government is known to be hostile to any further large-scale emigration.

But if an Israeli government decision in principle creates an opportunity for such a move, it would probably be implemented over a period of years, presumably blunting opposition from the Ethiopian government.

Two rabbis who visited Ethiopia last year on behalf of the government came back with a recommendation that the Ferris Mora, whose number they estimated at no more than 30,000, be "returned to Judaism" while still living in Ethiopia, over a period of seven to 10 years, and then gradually brought to Israel.

GERMANY DENIES ANY KNOWLEDGE OF 1952 REPARATIONS COMMITMENT

By David Kantor

BONN, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- German government officials have denied knowledge of any commitment to pay billions in reparations to Israel as the successor state to former East Germany.

They said financial strains in united Germany would make it very difficult to commit to any major payments beyond Bonn's obligations under the existing reparations agreement with Israel.

But the government is ready to deal with any request that might be put forward by Jerusalem, officials said.

Their comments came in response to reports that a World Jewish Congress official said a newly uncovered document showed negotiators for West Germany agreed in 1952 that Germany as a whole owed Israel 4.5 billion marks in reparations for Jewish victims of the Nazis.

Bonn at the time took responsibility for paying 3 billion and held that the then-Communist government of East Germany was responsible for the remainder.

Reunited Germany now has the obligation to pay the 1.5 billion mark obligation that was never recognized by East Germany, WJC Vice President Kalman Sultanik was quoted as saying.

Interest and inflation factors over four decades would bring the sum to billions of dollars.

NORWEGIAN DECRIES EUROPEAN RACISM

COPENHAGEN, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- Norway is seeking to focus broad European attention on a rising wave of neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism throughout the continent.

"We must get to the root of these problems," Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg said in an address to the Danish Parliament.

He said Oslo will seek to place the issue high on the agenda of an October summit meeting of the Council of Europe, an assembly of 21 European parliamentary democracies.

CONN. UNIVERSITY PUTS OFF PLAN TO OPEN BRANCH IN MIDDLE EAST By Lainie Blum-Cogan

NEW YORK, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- The University of New Haven has announced the postponement of a controversial branch campus that it had planned to open in the West Bank.

The change in plans is due to "heightened political tensions in the region during the past couple of weeks," the university's president, Lawrence DeNardis, said in a statement.

"The safety of our faculty and students in the Middle East must be a primary concern. A delay will afford us more time to assess this issue and explore all possible options," he said.

Security may have been one of DeNardis' concerns, but controversy -- both local and international -- has surrounded the proposed branch in the West Bank town of Elkana from its inception last fall.

Critics of the campus, located 12 miles east of Tel Aviv, included the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Peace Now, the New Jewish Agenda, the National Lawyers Guild, the Middle East Crisis Committee, the Middle East Network of United Methodists, members of the Israeli government and Bir Zeit University, a Palestinian campus in the West Bank that has been closed for nearly three of the last five years by the Israeli military.

Joseph Dimow, the secretary of the New Haven chapter of the progressive New Jewish Agenda, applauded the university's decision to postpone the opening of the Elkana campus.

Dimow has vigorously opposed the university plan on the grounds that it would negatively affect the ongoing Middle East peace talks.

"Those negotiations are delicate enough without another irritation," he said in a recent interview.

Dimow thinks the opposition has had "something to do with this decision" to postpone the opening.

Craig Sumberg of the liberal Americans for Peace Now agreed that the opposition in both countries was a "significant factor in the university's decision" to postpone what he thought would be an "unnecessary disruption to the peace process."

'No Impact' On Peace Talks

Jay Rubin, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven, disagreed.

The branch in Elkana, which was set to open in February, would have "no impact on the peace process whatsoever," Rubin said.

Opposition on those grounds is "a fantasy on the part of Arab-American organizations that are looking for issues," he added.

He called DeNardis a "well-intentioned, good friend of the Jewish community" who has the "best interests of his university and doing good for the peoples of the region at heart."

Robert Fishman, executive director of the Connecticut Jewish Community Relations Council in West Hartford, added, "I can't believe DeNardis would cave in to the opposition."

In a December opinion piece in the New Haven Register, Sameer Hassan, president of the Connecticut chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, criticized the university plan.

A campus in Elkana would have "serious and far-reaching implications for the integrity of

international law, the current Arab-Israeli peace talks, U.S. foreign policy and the future of the Palestinian people," he wrote.

Such a venture, he said, was in violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly forbids the construction of settlements in occupied territory.

Israel's Labor-led Education Ministry also voiced objection to the plan.

According to a report in the New Haven Register, Education Ministry spokesman Ron Melamed said his office is looking into the possibility of overturning the decision of the previous Likud government, which approved the Elkana campus.

DeNardis, who was a one-term Republican congressman, said the university was forced to locate its proposed Israeli campus in the administered territories "due to the refusal of Israeli regulatory authorities to grant approval for new institutions of higher education inside their country."

When he announced the establishment of the school in November, DeNardis called the Elkana area one in which "demand for higher education far outstrips supply."

The campus, therefore, would help meet that demand.

100 Israelis Attend University

DeNardis learned of this need from the many Israelis who attend the University of New Haven. About 100 are currently enrolled, mostly in engineering programs.

DeNardis emphasized that "the university's branch in Elkana will be committed to equal access to educational and employment opportunities for all applicants -- regardless of race, creed, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability."

He continued, "Our hope is that, by studying and learning together at our branch, the people of this region will be ultimately brought closer together in all ways."

This hope, however, was criticized as "naive" by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Amiram Goldblum of Peace Now in Israel agreed with this criticism. He was quoted by the Jerusalem Post as saying, "The only Arabs able to get into the university will be those who come to clean."

Goldblum is credited with raising the issue to national status in Israel, garnering the support of such figures as Education Minister Shulamit Aloni, the outspoken leader of the left-wing Meretz bloc.

Though DeNardis did not say when the branch might open, university spokeswoman Toni Blood said the plans were not being canceled.

"We are planning to do it. It's just a matter of how and when," Blood said.

In his statement, DeNardis said he intends to engage in further talks with Israeli officials and educational representatives, Arab institutions and Palestinian and other interested groups on the question of location "as well as other relevant issues."

Richard Morrison, professor of physics at UNH, who was named rector of the new branch campus, has settled with his wife in Tel Aviv. According to Blood, UNH has no plans to bring him back.

"He's still there and we expect him to remain there," she said.

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Opinion is sharply divided even within Israel's Ethiopian immigrant community on whether to admit the Ferris Mora, whose numbers are estimated at between 25,000 and 50,000.

"There is no chance the committee will say none may enter Israel," Tsaban told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency this week. "Nor is there any chance it will recommend admittance, under the Law of Return, for everyone claiming to be a Ferris Mora."

Tsaban spoke after 10 rabbinic and academic scholars presented expert opinion to the ministerial body, whose members are due to make their recommendation to the full Cabinet next week.

Members of the committee include Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Interior Minister Arye Deri, Tourism Minister Uzi Baram and Justice Minister David Libai. Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, a major player in the immigration process, is a non-voting member of the committee.

In an interview, Tsaban said a key problem is the definition of a Ferris Mora. If, for example, it means a first-degree family relationship with someone already in Israel, it would open the gates to a broad range of people who do not even claim to be Ferris Mora, but are closely related to someone who does.

About 2,000 Ferris Mora slipped through screening efforts and boarded planes in May 1991 when Operation Solomon airlifted most of Ethiopia's Jews to Israel. Indeed, it emerged that the passengers included several hundred Ethiopians who are clearly Christian and make no claim to be anything else.

Ethiopian Immigrants Divided

About 4,000 Ferris Mora are now waiting in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, hoping to be allowed to proceed to Israel. Some 2,800 are inside or closely attached to the Joint Distribution Committee compound there. Another 1,200 have gathered in the city, in the hope of eventual emigration to Israel.

Sources said American Jewish organizations active on this issue have now ceased encouraging Ferris Mora from outlying areas to sell their holdings and make their way to the capital.

Israeli differences of opinion on the issue are not along traditional Orthodox-secular lines. Indeed, some secular opinion strongly opposes a "liberal" policy toward Ferris Mora, while some Orthodox opinion favors precisely such a policy.

Polarization has also surfaced in the Ethiopian community. Many Ethiopian Israelis testified before the committee that the Ferris Mora were condemned as traitors by the mainstream Jewish community in their native country.

When the aliyah question first surfaced, they said, some Ferris Mora actively tried to thwart efforts by Jewish families to get to Israel, in some cases by reporting on them unfavorably to the authorities.

Sociologists say some Ethiopian Israelis, who are finding it hard enough to acclimate to Israeli society, feel an additional barrier of suspicion and alienation would be created by the advent of a large number of Ethiopians who, at least at present, are not properly Jewish.

Authorities apparently hope the 2,000 who slipped through in Operation Solomon will eventually meld into the broader mass of that aliyah.

On the other hand, some Ethiopians here have relatives and friends among the Ferris Mora. Many of them claim their exclusion is cruel and arbitrary, especially in view of the fact that 2,000 did get in.

The Ethiopian government is known to be hostile to any further large-scale emigration.

But if an Israeli government decision in principle creates an opportunity for such a move, it would probably be implemented over a period of years, presumably blunting opposition from the Ethiopian government.

Two rabbis who visited Ethiopia last year on behalf of the government came back with a recommendation that the Ferris Mora, whose number they estimated at no more than 30,000, be "returned to Judaism" while still living in Ethiopia, over a period of seven to 10 years, and then gradually brought to Israel.

GERMANY DENIES ANY KNOWLEDGE OF 1952 REPARATIONS COMMITMENT

By David Kantor

BONN, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- German government officials have denied knowledge of any commitment to pay billions in reparations to Israel as the successor state to former East Germany.

They said financial strains in united Germany would make it very difficult to commit to any major payments beyond Bonn's obligations under the existing reparations agreement with Israel.

But the government is ready to deal with any request that might be put forward by Jerusalem, officials said.

Their comments came in response to reports that a World Jewish Congress official said a newly uncovered document showed negotiators for West Germany agreed in 1952 that Germany as a whole owed Israel 4.5 billion marks in reparations for Jewish victims of the Nazis.

Bonn at the time took responsibility for paying 3 billion and held that the then-Communist government of East Germany was responsible for the remainder.

Reunited Germany now has the obligation to pay the 1.5 billion mark obligation that was never recognized by East Germany, WJC Vice President Kalman Sultanik was quoted as saying.

Interest and inflation factors over four decades would bring the sum to billions of dollars.

NORWEGIAN DECRIES EUROPEAN RACISM

COPENHAGEN, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- Norway is seeking to focus broad European attention on a rising wave of neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism throughout the continent.

"We must get to the root of these problems," Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg said in an address to the Danish Parliament.

He said Oslo will seek to place the issue high on the agenda of an October summit meeting of the Council of Europe, an assembly of 21 European parliamentary democracies.

CONN. UNIVERSITY PUTS OFF PLAN TO OPEN BRANCH IN MIDDLE EAST By Lainie Blum-Cogan

NEW YORK, Jan. 7 (JTA) -- The University of New Haven has announced the postponement of a controversial branch campus that it had planned to open in the West Bank.

The change in plans is due to "heightened political tensions in the region during the past couple of weeks," the university's president, Lawrence DeNardis, said in a statement.

"The safety of our faculty and students in the Middle East must be a primary concern. A delay will afford us more time to assess this issue and explore all possible options," he said.

Security may have been one of DeNardis' concerns, but controversy -- both local and international -- has surrounded the proposed branch in the West Bank town of Elkana from its inception last fall.

Critics of the campus, located 12 miles east of Tel Aviv, included the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Peace Now, the New Jewish Agenda, the National Lawyers Guild, the Middle East Crisis Committee, the Middle East Network of United Methodists, members of the Israeli government and Bir Zeit University, a Palestinian campus in the West Bank that has been closed for nearly three of the last five years by the Israeli military.

Joseph Dimow, the secretary of the New Haven chapter of the progressive New Jewish Agenda, applauded the university's decision to postpone the opening of the Elkana campus.

Dimow has vigorously opposed the university plan on the grounds that it would negatively affect the ongoing Middle East peace talks.

"Those negotiations are delicate enough without another irritation," he said in a recent interview.

Dimow thinks the opposition has had "something to do with this decision" to postpone the opening.

Craig Sumberg of the liberal Americans for Peace Now agreed that the opposition in both countries was a "significant factor in the university's decision" to postpone what he thought would be an "unnecessary disruption to the peace process."

'No Impact' On Peace Talks

Jay Rubin, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven, disagreed.

The branch in Elkana, which was set to open in February, would have "no impact on the peace process whatsoever," Rubin said.

Opposition on those grounds is "a fantasy on the part of Arab-American organizations that are looking for issues," he added.

He called DeNardis a "well-intentioned, good friend of the Jewish community" who has the "best interests of his university and doing good for the peoples of the region at heart."

Robert Fishman, executive director of the Connecticut Jewish Community Relations Council in West Hartford, added, "I can't believe DeNardis would cave in to the opposition."

In a December opinion piece in the New Haven Register, Sameer Hassan, president of the Connecticut chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, criticized the university plan.

A campus in Elkana would have "serious and far-reaching implications for the integrity of

international law, the current Arab-Israeli peace talks, U.S. foreign policy and the future of the Palestinian people," he wrote.

Such a venture, he said, was in violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly forbids the construction of settlements in occupied territory.

Israel's Labor-led Education Ministry also voiced objection to the plan.

According to a report in the New Haven Register, Education Ministry spokesman Ron Melamed said his office is looking into the possibility of overturning the decision of the previous Likud government, which approved the Elkana campus.

DeNardis, who was a one-term Republican congressman, said the university was forced to locate its proposed Israeli campus in the administered territories "due to the refusal of Israeli regulatory authorities to grant approval for new institutions of higher education inside their country."

When he announced the establishment of the school in November, DeNardis called the Elkana area one in which "demand for higher education far outstrips supply."

The campus, therefore, would help meet that demand.

100 Israelis Attend University

DeNardis learned of this need from the many Israelis who attend the University of New Haven. About 100 are currently enrolled, mostly in engineering programs.

DeNardis emphasized that "the university's branch in Elkana will be committed to equal access to educational and employment opportunities for all applicants -- regardless of race, creed, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability."

He continued, "Our hope is that, by studying and learning together at our branch, the people of this region will be ultimately brought closer together in all ways."

This hope, however, was criticized as "naive" by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Amiram Goldblum of Peace Now in Israel agreed with this criticism. He was quoted by the Jerusalem Post as saying, "The only Arabs able to get into the university will be those who come to clean."

Goldblum is credited with raising the issue to national status in Israel, garnering the support of such figures as Education Minister Shulamit Aloni, the outspoken leader of the left-wing Meretz bloc.

Though DeNardis did not say when the branch might open, university spokeswoman Toni Blood said the plans were not being canceled.

"We are planning to do it. It's just a matter of how and when," Blood said.

In his statement, DeNardis said he intends to engage in further talks with Israeli officials and educational representatives, Arab institutions and Palestinian and other interested groups on the question of location "as well as other relevant issues."

Richard Morrison, professor of physics at UNH, who was named rector of the new branch campus, has settled with his wife in Tel Aviv. According to Blood, UNH has no plans to bring him back.

"He's still there and we expect him to remain there," she said.