

NJCRC VOTES NOT TO TAKE PART IN DRIVE FOR POLLARD'S CLEMENCY

By Larry Yudelson

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- Jonathan Pollard's campaign for clemency has again failed to win the endorsement of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the body responsible for setting policy for much of the organized American Jewish community.

By a vote of 162-147, with 41 abstentions, delegates to NJCRAC's annual plenum here rejected a proposed letter to President Clinton that would have asked for a review of Pollard's life jail sentence, with an eye toward commutation for time already served.

Instead, the delegates opted to continue NJCRAC's longstanding policy of neutrality on the Pollard case, in the belief it does not demand the attention of the organized Jewish community.

The vote Wednesday was a major setback for the former U.S. Navy analyst, who was convicted in 1986 of espionage for Israel.

It was also something of a surprise given Pollard's growing support among community activists and mainstream Jewish organizations.

Several national Jewish agencies and local community relations councils have recently adopted statements calling either for commutation or review of the sentence.

But the Anti-Defamation League voted last week to maintain its position of neutrality on the issue, concluding that there is no evidence of anti-Semitism in Pollard's sentencing or jail treatment.

The biggest factor in the NJCRAC vote appears to have been the Pollard activists themselves. Delegates on all sides of the issue said the tone and positions taken by the activists in the ongoing communal debate were a deciding factor in the decision to reaffirm NJCRAC's neutrality.

'A Lot Of Unfair Criticism'

"The NJCRAC committee on Pollard, and NJCRAC itself, has taken a lot of unfair criticism by the Pollard supporters, and that led many, including some who themselves have questions about the sentence, to rally behind the organization" and not vote for commutation, said Douglas Kahn, who as executive director of San Francisco's Jewish Community Relations Council drafted the proposed letter to Clinton.

The prime target of name-calling by Pollard supporters has been Phil Baum, associate executive director of the American Jewish Congress and head of NJCRAC's ad hoc committee studying the Pollard affair.

During Wednesday's debate, Baum called his experience in that connection "the most unpleasant and painful in all my years working with the Jewish community." He received a resounding show of personal confidence from the NJCRAC delegates.

In fact, though, AJCongress and Baum recently changed their position from neutrality toward one calling for presidential review with an eye toward commutation, akin to that rejected by the plenum.

In making the case in favor of commutation, Kahn of San Francisco argued that Pollard's life

sentence is disproportionately long, that he has already served seven years in prison and that there is reason to believe his plea bargain was violated by the government.

But Kahn strongly disassociated himself from the Pollard activists, whose suggestions that some of the convicted spy's actions could be justified "sometimes border on disinformation," he said.

Some of Kahn's arguments were disputed by Rabbi Eric Yoffie, vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

"There are others who received similar sentences for similar crimes. You can't simply assume what has been assumed about the sentencing," he said.

Yoffie said there is a feeling in the UAHC that when Pollard becomes eligible for parole in 1995, "we would support it."

The question of timing also led to the defeat of the resolution. Many delegates were concerned about raising the sensitive matter of Pollard at the beginning of the new U.S. administration.

"Last night we heard from the vice president of the United States, supporting many of the issues we went to Capitol Hill to argue on behalf: full funding for Head Start, increasing the Earned Income Credit, expansion of the women's and children program," said Lynn Lyss of St. Louis.

The Pollard case "is not the first issue we want to bring to the government," said Lyss, a NJCRAC vice chair and delegate from the National Council of Jewish Women.

'A Cancerous Growth On The Community'

Another delegate explained that raising the issue now would put Clinton in a bind: Either he would reject the request, and needlessly offend the Jewish community, or he would commute Pollard's sentence, and risk being seen as pandering to Jewish voters.

Further hurting the resolution's chances was the fact that the vote on whether to break with NJCRAC's neutrality and send a letter to the White House was held before the specific language of the letter could be debated.

That led at least some, and perhaps a deciding number, of delegates willing to support a softer pro-Pollard resolution to abstain instead.

But there was a clear sense that even among those supporting the resolution, few placed the issue of Pollard high enough on their agendas to be swayed come election time.

While a few cited the human suffering of Pollard, more spoke to issues of perception and pressure. Some spoke of concern that NJCRAC's position of neutrality was being misinterpreted as opposition to commutation.

Others appeared weary of defending the neutrality in the face of what Richard Stone of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America described as "a great sense of unease within a greatly inflamed Jewish community that Pollard has been mistreated."

In a partial explanation of his support for clemency, Stone said, "This is a cancerous growth on the community, and for that reason alone we should want to cut it out."

Instead, NJCRAC is likely to remain the target of vilification from Pollard activists.

But David Luchins, a vice president of the

Orthodox Union, offered some advice to the activists: "If you want people to agree with you, don't bash them."

"There's so much rancor and name-calling and intensity of feeling," he said. "I think this became a vote of confidence in the NJCRAC ad hoc Pollard committee rather than on the issue at hand."

Luchins said his personal argument on behalf of commutation may have been undercut by the legal threats from Pollard's attorney to sue him for alleged statements against the jailed spy.

He added: "I wish there was this much feeling in the community about Jewish education, intermarriage and continuity, issues which are more pressing for Jewish survival."

ISRAEL EAGERLY AWAITS CHRISTOPHER, BUT DOES NOT EXPECT MAJOR PROGRESS

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- The upcoming visit by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is a clear and welcome signal that solving the region's conflicts is a top priority of the new U.S. administration, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin said Wednesday.

At the same time, Beilin played down expectations that the visit would yield new peace proposals or any other concrete results.

He said it is important, however, that Israel convince the Clinton administration that "the longest conflict since World War II is soluble" and that Israel is committed to a solution.

Christopher was scheduled to leave Washington on Wednesday night for Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, possibly Lebanon and Israel, where he is scheduled to arrive Monday.

The secretary, too, has played down expectations, describing his mission as a "fact-finding trip."

In a special briefing for reporters, Beilin stressed the visit is a much-needed demonstration of U.S. involvement in the peace process.

"It is vital we're talking directly with our neighbors," said Beilin, "but there won't be peace without the involvement of the American administration."

"The mere fact of his coming," said Beilin, "is very, very important to accelerate the peace process."

But Beilin cautioned there are limits to a constructive U.S. role. "It doesn't mean twisting arms, neither the Arabs' nor ours," he said.

He said no pressure need be placed on Israel. "We are committed to peace and ready to pay the price, and we know the price is a territorial one," he said.

Hopes To 'Sign Treaties This Year'

But he conceded it would be very important for Israel to convince the administration it is willing to "solve the conflict after so many years."

Beilin refused to predict whether dates would be set for the resumption of peace talks at the conclusion of Christopher's visit, calling that "technical and secondary."

He also refused to be pinned down in the wake of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's admission Tuesday that he had been overly optimistic when he had estimated the initial phase of the peace process could be concluded within nine months.

Beilin said it would be "a mistake to set a new threshold," but "we will do whatever possi-

ble in the framework of the security needs of Israel" to advance the peace process and "sign treaties this year."

"If we don't, it will only be because the other side didn't respond," he said.

Next week's visit is expected to strengthen the warm relations that have begun to develop between Israel and the new administration.

Its significance is heightened by the uneasiness that had been expressed over the Christopher appointment by some American Jews and by the successful orchestration of a compromise in the crisis over the Palestinians Israel deported to Lebanon in December.

For his part, Beilin seemed to signal ambivalence over the deportations. He said the decision "wasn't a very easy one" and that Israel had "paid the price" in the international community.

Beilin called it "premature to judge" its effect on the fight against extremists. And, while he said it was not carried out "as part of on-going policy," he said Israel could offer no guarantees it would not happen again.

DEMOLITION OF ARAB'S HOME BARRED, BUT RULING UNLIKELY TO CHANGE POLICY

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- Human rights organizations have welcomed a decision by Israel's High Court of Justice to bar the demolition of the West Bank home of a convicted Arab terrorist.

But they say the decision is not likely to result in a major change of military policy.

The High Court this week canceled a military order for the demolition of Mohammed Turkman's home in Jenin, saying it would cause his family "disproportionate" suffering.

Instead, the court allowed the army to seal off two of the home's three rooms, rendering them inaccessible to the nine family members living there.

Israeli and Palestinian human rights activists tepidly welcomed the move, but stressed it did not signal any change in what they describe as the army's policy of "collective punishment."

It is unclear what effect, if any, the court ruling will have on future demolition orders.

"Sealing is less harsh than demolition, which is irreversible," said Tami Bash, a researcher for B'Tselem, an Israeli information center for human rights in the territories.

"But it is still harsh and denies innocent people their homes, people who haven't been charged with anything," she said. "And, as with all collective punishment, we believe it's wrong and forbidden by international treaties."

Turkman was convicted two months ago for the October murder of an Israeli, Motti Biton, and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

A military order to demolish his house was challenged by Turkman's mother, who lives in the house with eight other family members.

Upholding the mother's petition, the justices wrote that "under these circumstances, less drastic" measures should be taken.

Usama Halabi, an Israeli Arab who is a senior attorney with the Quaker Legal Aid Center in East Jerusalem, said the decision was "something positive."

The court intervened and allowed for individual circumstances to play a role, Halabi said, and "decided the case on its merits."

But the substance of the ruling is "nothing new," he added.

IRAN'S GROWING NUCLEAR THREAT IS SUBJECT OF DEBATE BY KNESSET
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- Iran's nuclear program endangers the entire Middle East, not just Israel, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin told the Knesset this week.

Beilin was responding to questions about Iran's nuclear and military buildup, which has been the subject of recent accounts in the news media here.

Speaking on Tuesday, Beilin said that although Israel's deterrent military capability is important, it is not enough to guarantee safety from Iran.

"This is dangerous because Iran is a country which regards terrorism as a legitimate tool, a country which is highly extremist and irrational, which has an interest to penetrate the Moslem republics of the former USSR," said Beilin.

There was no difference of opinion in the Knesset as to the Iranian government's nature, with Knesset members calling Iran a "crazy country" and warning that no one could tell when and who would press the red button in Teheran.

Beilin said Israel is trying to exert pressure on the West not to grant Iran any military aid. Israel also tried to convince China to refrain from aiding Iran, but the Chinese responded that their aid was earmarked for nuclear research geared toward peaceful purposes.

"I believe that our deterrence, the peace efforts and our diplomatic efforts can get us closer to an effective campaign against this phenomenon," the deputy foreign minister said.

Knesset member Rafael Eitan of the right-wing Tsomet party, a former Israel Defense Force chief of staff, said that Israel alone should do its utmost to prevent the Iranians from achieving their goal, which he stated as erecting a world Islamic state, "without Israel and without Jews."

Likud Knesset member Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israeli deterrence is not an adequate response to the danger of the "Islamic Bomb."

He urged the government to convince the United States and other industrialized countries to stop the flow of technological equipment and know-how to Iran.

VIOLENT CLASHES CONTINUE IN LEBANON AS HEZBOLLAH KEEPS UP THE PRESSURE
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- Violent clashes between Hezbollah guerrillas and Israeli and Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army soldiers continued Wednesday for the fourth day running along the northern edge of the south Lebanon security zone.

Two Hezbollah soldiers were killed in the gunfights Wednesday and seven SLA soldiers were wounded, according to initial Israeli reports.

The increase in Hezbollah activities was expected as the Iranian-backed organization this week marked the one-year anniversary of the assassination of their former leader, Sheikh Abbas Musawi, by Israeli forces.

The Shi'ite Hezbollah group has been holding memorial demonstrations and meetings in several southern Lebanon towns to mark the occasion.

Hezbollah is expected to keep up the pressure during U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher's trip to the Middle East, which begins Thursday.

ISRAEL CLAIMS THERE IS NO CHANGE IN POLICY ON IMMIGRANTS WITH AIDS
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- The Israeli government maintains it has not changed its policy on immigrants infected with the virus that causes AIDS and that recent reports to the contrary were the result of "misinformation."

Applicants for immigration to Israel must disclose on the routine health forms they fill out whether they are infected with HIV, a requirement that has been in place for nearly a year, said David Efrati, director of population administration in the Interior Ministry.

Applicants who are HIV-positive are not automatically barred entry to Israel, said Efrati. Instead, their applications are forwarded to the Interior Ministry, which decides whether to permit entry on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Health Ministry.

So far, Efrati said, no cases have surfaced as a result of the policy.

Contrary to earlier reports, the HIV status disclosure requirement does not apply to those wishing to visit Israel as tourists, said Tova Elinson, a spokeswoman for the Interior Ministry.

Media reports that Israel had decided to bar most immigrants infected with HIV had sparked protests from the medical and civil rights communities in Israel. They had also generated concern in segments of the American Jewish community at a time when the Clinton administration has decided to reverse a ban on visitors and immigrants with AIDS.

But officials at the Orthodox-controlled Interior Ministry say those reports were erroneous and that media inaccuracies contributed to confusion about the issue.

Officials at the Health and Absorption ministries refused to comment on the matter and referred all inquiries to Interior.

Policy Implemented Last Year

Elinson said the confusion apparently was caused by a recent decision of the health, absorption and interior ministers to re-examine the policy.

The re-examination was a follow-up to efforts by the former Likud government to tighten the regulations, she said.

In fact, the new ministers concluded that there is no need to alter the regulations, Efrati said. "We continue without a change in policy."

The requirement that potential immigrants disclose their HIV status is merely an extension of health provisions in the Law of Return, which governs immigration to Israel, Efrati explained.

The Law of Return stipulates that Israel can deny entry to those who might endanger public health, said Efrati. He said the decision to add AIDS to the list of diseases in this category was made in 1991 and implemented last April.

As a result of the policy implemented last spring, the Jewish Agency has instructed its emissaries for the past several months to include the question about HIV infection on their medical forms, said agency spokesman Yehuda Weinraub.

As recently as two weeks ago, the uncertainty surrounding Israel's policy warranted a public clarification by the Interior Ministry.

Included in the clarification was a new requirement that applicants for work permits in Israel submit the results of an HIV test to their employers before being issued the permits.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**NJCRC PLENUM TACKLES NEW REALITIES FACING JEWS IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17 (JTA) -- New realities are emerging for every ethnic minority in America, and the Jewish community is no exception.

At the annual plenum of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, held here Feb. 13-17, Jewish community relations professionals grappled with the implications of those changes.

The mood was hopeful and energetic, and most of the 400 professionals attending seemed to share the faith that Jewish communal relations work will continue to play a central role in the effort to make America a country comfortable for all minorities.

But the challenges, acknowledged plenum participants, are daunting.

Jewish community relations professionals--those on the front lines of intergroup and ethnic tensions -- struggle to find their niche within the ever-changing dynamic among the ethnic and religious groups to whom they represent Jewish interests.

At the same time, they must continue to define their role within the Jewish community, whose interests are served by the relationships they create with other groups.

The multi-ethnic mosaic of America and its emerging minorities presents a spate of potential new coalition partners, and a more complex community relations picture than the one historically faced by the Jewish community.

But as Jewish communal leaders grapple with the disturbing demographic trends documented in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, the place of community relations work on the Jewish agenda is being fundamentally questioned.

"The community relations function in the Jewish community is being downgraded, to the serious detriment of the Jewish community," said Earl Raab, in remarks which opened the plenum.

Raab is director of the Nathan Perlmutter Institute at Brandeis University in Boston.

The central tension, he said, is between the "integrative" impulse of most American Jews, and the "separatist" nature of strengthening Jewish identity.

Intergroup Work Not Seen As Priority

Intergroup work is viewed by the Jewish community as a defensive measure, so it is not seen as a high priority in a time when the community feels secure.

As a result, the plenum was dominated by talk of curtailed funding and new, sometimes unclear, priorities being generated by federations.

There was much informal discussion of coping with downsized staffs and having to choose carefully what areas of community relations work are going to be addressed, and what will have to be ignored.

Another of the primary tasks these professionals are confronting is recruiting Jews to be part of the community relations effort.

"The Jewish community is interested in PACs (political action committees) and direct access to congressmen," said Alice Abrams of Cincinnati, in a session on "Building and Maintaining Grass-Roots Political Involvement."

Jews "don't seem to realize that contribu-

tions won't buy as much" political capital as personal involvement will, she said.

Steven Windmueller, director of the Los Angeles JCRC, noted that the nature of volunteering has changed for Jews.

"Interest is short-term, project based. Younger Jews especially feel the need to do mitzvot, but want short-term demands."

Just as important to these JCRC professionals as the internal problems are the changing dynamics among ethnic groups which, in many places, have led to a reassessment of existing relationships.

The future, say the professionals, lies not in dialogues and in statements, but in action.

"When are we going to stop writing statements and start taking action?" asked Gary Rubin, director of national affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

"There's no more time to talk," said Nancy Kaufman, executive director of the Boston JCRC, at a session on African American-Jewish relations.

"We're trying to find a continuum for involvement" rather than cope from crisis to crisis, she said. "We have to stop talking to the same old leaders and find a new message."

'Good With Press Releases'

"We're good with press releases, fair with dialogues and very poor in dealing with issues of primary interest to the black community," said Rabbi Lynn Landsberg of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, at the same session.

"Let's get our hands dirty, be there wherever we are needed, with literacy and anti-poverty programs, championing issues in the legislative arena," she said.

In a separate session, one devoted to "Ethnic Relations in Crisis," Eleanor Holmes Norton, the District of Columbia's delegate to Congress and a life-long civil rights activist, spoke of precisely how the Jewish community has been and can be useful on the legislative front.

The Jewish community's relatively strong connections to presidential administrations has been valuable on issues of concern to both blacks and Jews, she said.

She cited Jewish efforts on behalf of the 1991 Civil Rights Bill.

When the president was saying that it was only about "quotas, quotas, quotas, you talked back to President Bush, saying this is not about quotas and we know what they are. And that's when he began to listen," recalled Norton.

"It is time for you to take up that battle for maintaining religious harmony again," she said.

In an effort not just to revitalize existing relationships, but to form new ones, as well, NJCRC conducted sessions with the presidents of a national Moslem group, Mahmoud Abu-Saud of the American Muslim Council, and of a Latino organization, Raoul Yzaguirre of La Raza.

In Detroit, "new partnerships" have included joining with the Arab, Chaldean and Polish communities to encourage respect for diversity through the public schools, according to David Gad-Harf, director of the JCRC there.

The common agenda between Jews and these other groups "is broad," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center, citing the battles against bigotry, poverty, joblessness, hunger and homelessness.

"Make no mistake about it. Our destiny is bound up with each other's," he said.