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**JEWISH LEADERS MEET WITH MUBARAK,
RECEIVE SOME ENCOURAGING SIGNALS**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, March 3 (JTA) -- American Jewish organizational leaders returning from an unprecedented two-day visit to Egypt, at the invitation of President Hosni Mubarak, said they received encouraging signals on such issues as the peace process and the plight of Syrian Jews.

Thirty members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations spent 90 minutes "in open discussion" with Mubarak, followed by meetings with other Egyptian officials and business leaders.

The visit to Egypt, which received front-page coverage in the Egyptian press, wrapped up the conference's annual fact-finding mission to the region.

Lester Pollack, chairman of the conference, told reporters back in Jerusalem that the meetings in Egypt on Monday and Tuesday were marked by a "very decided change of language and rhetoric" that reflected a new spirit of cooperation and a desire to work in a regional partnership with Israel.

He said the wide-ranging talk with Mubarak focused on the need to return to the negotiating table in Washington, the likelihood that Syrian President Hafez Assad would honor his pledge to let Jews leave the country, the need to act on the Arab League boycott against Israel and the importance of regional economic development as one antidote to Islamic fundamentalism.

He said the groundwork was laid for possible Egyptian investment in Israel and the promotion in the United States of Egyptian tourism, which has been damaged by recent terrorist attacks on tourists.

Egypt's invitation to the conference signalled its "desire for us to play a role," said Pollack. "We began a process of cooperation and collaboration with Egypt on behalf of American Jews to support the peace process."

Time For A Visit By Mubarak?

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the conference, was careful to delineate the limits of the visit's purpose and the group's mandate.

"We did not go to negotiate for Israel," he said. "We responded to an invitation to raise issues of concern." He said the conference "can help foster the kind of climate that helps move the peace process forward."

He said Mubarak agreed with the conference in principle that the peace process should not be held hostage to a resolution of the fate of the Palestinians whom Israel deported to Lebanon. But Mubarak told the group that some face-saving measures for the Palestinians would be needed for them to return to the talks.

Hoenlein said Mubarak also expressed support for the recent visit to the Middle East by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and optimism about his own upcoming visit to Washington.

He said Mubarak did not appear to be well-informed about the Arab boycott and its impact on Israel when the group pressed him on the issue.

Pollack said he believes the time is ripe for

a Mubarak visit to Jerusalem. But he said the group has no indication that such a trip is in the works, despite recent press speculation to that effect.

Officials in Jerusalem have played down reports from Cairo that such a visit is imminent. But they pointed out that Mubarak did telephone Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin earlier this week to congratulate him on his 71st birthday.

Mubarak's invitation to the conference was seen by the group as a recognition by Egypt of the importance of American Jews as a constituency in U.S. politics, particularly when it comes to the issue of foreign aid.

A Visit To Meggido Prison

Hoenlein said the American Jewish community would continue to support U.S. aid to Egypt along with aid to Israel, because "Egypt's stability is vital to the region."

The trip to Egypt marked the last lap of the conference's annual mission, which included meetings with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Prime Minister Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and other Israeli officials.

There was also an unprecedented meeting with Faisal Husseini, chief adviser to the Palestinian peace delegation.

During an unusual visit to the Meggido prison, which houses Palestinians accused of security offenses, the delegation got a firsthand look at prison conditions and had off-the-record discussions in small groups with prisoners, sources said.

The group also heard from Natan Sharansky on the challenges of the Soviet aliyah; Jacob Frenkel, governor of the Bank of Israel, on the Israeli economy; several experts on Islamic fundamentalism; and Israeli and American journalists on how Israel is portrayed in the news media.

They also visited residents of Ma'aleh Adumim, a Jewish settlement in the West Bank considered by Rabin to be part of Greater Jerusalem. The residents said they are faced with countless "question marks" about their status and their future, in light of the new government and the peace process.

The delegation also had what Hoenlein described as a "very moving" meeting with Moslem refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who have been given temporary haven by Israel.

**GUARD STABBED IN OLD CITY,
IN LATEST TERRORIST INCIDENT**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 3 (JTA) -- A Palestinian woman stabbed and wounded an Israeli guard Wednesday in Jerusalem's Old City, adding to a string of violent attacks that has hit this country in the past week.

The guard, hospitalized with lung wounds described as "light to medium," was escorting a woman from the Jewish Quarter to the Moslem Quarter.

Police apprehended the attacker, a 34-year-old mother of four from a refugee camp near the West Bank city of Ramallah.

The stabbing on Haggai Street, one of the busiest alleys in the Old City, added to the

already high tension in Jerusalem, where police were searching for the Israeli Jew who shot dead an Arab in eastern Jerusalem Tuesday after his car was stoned.

In the Gaza Strip, meanwhile, Israeli security forces maintained a curfew on the Rafah refugee camp as searches continued for the Palestinians who killed an Israeli there Tuesday.

Police released the name of the murdered Israeli, Yehoshua Weissbrod, 44, a gas company worker from Tel Aviv, who was shot to death after mistakenly entering the refugee camp on his way to a gas terminal near the Egyptian border.

About 100 local residents were detained for questioning, according to Palestinian sources. Local sources identified the killers as members of the Hawks, an armed gang affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization's mainstream Fatah faction.

In addition, the entire Gaza Strip remained sealed off for a second day, with the army barring the 40,000 or so Palestinian laborers who enter Israel proper daily to work.

The army closed off the territory following the brutal murder Sunday of two Israelis in the heart of Tel Aviv, carried out by a Gaza resident who entered Israel without a valid permit.

In Jerusalem, Arab students clashed with border police, and two rioting students were lightly wounded in the head by rubber bullets.

Jerusalem police were still searching for the killer of Juma Abdul Aziz, 60, who was shot to death Tuesday by a Jewish driver who came under a stoning attack in eastern Jerusalem. The driver fired several shots in return and fled the scene.

Jerusalem police did track down another Israeli driver who fired shots and damaged vehicles in the northern Jerusalem Arab neighborhood of Isawiya on Tuesday night. The man told police he had opened fire in self-defense, after stones had been thrown at his car.

Police confiscated his gun following questioning.

Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur expressed confidence Wednesday that Israel would continue the peace process, despite the recent tension in southern Lebanon, Gaza and Jerusalem.

At the same time, Gur said, Israel would do its utmost to fight Arab terrorism.

CLASHES CONTINUE IN SECURITY ZONE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 3 (JTA) -- Clashes in the border security zone of southern Lebanon continued to mount this week, with one gunman killed during an attack Wednesday on an outpost of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army.

A SLA soldier on guard alone at an outpost near Aramta, on the northern edge of the security zone, opened fire on a gang of armed men approaching his position, killing one of them and causing the rest to flee.

The dead man, found dressed in the uniform of the official Beirut-based Lebanese regular army, was carrying a large quantity of assault weapons and ammunition.

Military sources said it was rare for the gunman to be wearing a Lebanese army uniform.

Clashes in the security zone have flared up during the past few weeks as the militant Shi'ite Hezbollah organization has stepped up activities.

Last weekend, Hezbollah forces launched a barrage of rockets, some of which hit a kibbutz in northern Israel.

SEARCH IS ON FOR MIDEAST LINK TO WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING

By Matthew Fleischer

NEW YORK, March 3 (JTA) -- Officials investigating the blast that shook New York's World Trade Center last Friday are looking into the possibility that a Middle East terrorist group may have been responsible.

The explosion and resulting fires left five dead and more than 1,000 people injured in what is thought to be the worst terrorist incident in the United States since the 1970s.

New York Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly and FBI officials have raised the Middle East as a possible source for the fatal bombing.

But the FBI also insists that it is too early to focus its investigation primarily on Middle East terrorist groups such as the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, both of which have been cited in media reports.

Kelly and James Fox, director of the FBI's New York office, revealed at the investigation's daily 4 p.m. news conference Tuesday that in January, the U.S. Embassy in Algeria received a threat that a New York skyscraper would be targeted for bombing within 48 hours unless Israel allowed the 415 Palestinians it had deported to Lebanon to return to the administered territories.

The warning was repeated two days later, but the deadline passed without action.

But in Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Wednesday, "There are no indications that this threat is related to the World Trade Center bombing."

'Not Tracking Hamas' More Than Others

Sgt. Edelle James of the New York City Police Department said that at this time, investigators cannot reveal how many of the 63 calls claiming responsibility for the bombing came from the Middle East or Middle East terror groups.

While reports have circulated that the FBI investigation has split into several task forces each concentrating on suspected terrorist groups, an FBI spokesman denied this.

"We are not tracking Hamas any more than any other group," Joe Valiquette of the FBI said.

James confirmed that the interagency task force comprising the FBI, the police and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would continue to conduct the investigation as one intact unit.

Initially, media speculation focused on Serbian groups as a possible terrorist link for the bombing, but more recent news stories have given increased attention to Middle East groups.

Valiquette insisted the FBI is not ready to conclude that the bombing was perpetrated by terrorists.

"It's a lead we're looking into, but it's not the only lead," said Sgt. James.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has expressed sympathy with the victims of terrorism in letters of condolence sent to New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and New York City Mayor David Dinkins.

"Together with all freedom-loving people throughout the world, we mourn with you and the citizens of New York the tragic loss of life, extensive injuries and damage to property caused by the dastardly act of what appears to have been a terrorist strike that rocked the World Trade Center," Rabin wrote.

GERMAN PANEL PROPOSES CONVERTING SACHSENHAUSEN BARRACKS FOR POLICE

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, March 3 (JTA) -- A local commission in Oranienburg has proposed converting SS barracks on the grounds of the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp into headquarters for the local police.

In addition, the commission proposed building 6,000 housing units on the site, which lies across from a contemporary memorial to the Holocaust, part of which was set on fire last September.

A plan by the Polish-born American Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind, who lives in Berlin, to build a complex including a memorial, educational and cultural facilities, was rejected, although Libeskind was given a special prize of recognition by the commission.

The commission said that Libeskind's plan, by its references to the Holocaust, would "mean a new trauma for the city."

Libeskind, who designed the recently opened Jewish museum in Berlin, rejected that view, saying, "The trauma has already happened."

"One cannot overcome it by hiding it," he said.

The Israeli consul general, Mordechai Levy, supported Libeskind's viewpoint: "Apartments have no place in such a traumatic place."

"Sachsenhausen is part of Oranienburg's history," Levy said.

About 100,000 people, among them 10,000 Jews, were killed in Sachsenhausen between 1938 and 1945.

The commission's proposals must still be approved by local authorities.

The Union of Jewish Communities in Germany has protested not having been consulted on the proposals.

The union's representative for memorials, Andreas Nachama, complained that organizations representing victims of the Holocaust were also not consulted.

The chairman of the German Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, is due to visit the site next week and meet with local authorities.

The union's secretary, Peter Fischer, predicted that the authorities would heed Bubis' opinion on the matter.

JEWISH GROUPS SAY THEY ARE PLEASED CLINTON HAS FILLED HUMAN RIGHTS POST

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 3 (JTA) -- Jewish organizational leaders say they know little about John Shattuck, the Harvard University vice president nominated by President Clinton this week to be assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

But they are pleased the important post has finally been filled.

Over the years, the human rights post has been the focal point for Jewish groups seeking to encourage the U.S. government to assist Jews in lands of distress, such as the former Soviet Union.

And despite the mass emigration wave of recent years, conditions for Jews and other minorities in the Soviet successor states remain an important concern of the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

The last person to head the bureau, which

the Clinton administration hopes to reorganize and combine with offices dealing with other global concerns, was Richard Schifter, a friend of the Jewish community who held the post in both the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Shattuck's appointment was announced Tuesday, following a lengthy battle within the administration over who would get the post. Shattuck reportedly was favored by those who wanted a liberal in the job.

Among others reportedly under consideration was Joshua Muravchik, a neoconservative resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

At Harvard, Shattuck serves as vice president for government, community and public affairs, and as a lecturer at Harvard Law School. Before coming to the university in 1984, he ran the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union for eight years and served as the ACLU's national counsel in the 1970s.

He also has held positions with the human rights group Amnesty International.

One Jewish official who has worked with Shattuck previously and thinks highly of him is Mark Talisman, director of the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations.

"He's a wonderful fellow," Talisman said.

Micah Naftalin, executive director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, said he looked forward to briefing Shattuck on "the situation in the former Soviet Union once he gets on board."

"We're very enthusiastic that this important job has been filled," Naftalin said.

ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT ASKS ISRAEL TO LOWER ATTENTION ON FALASH MORA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 3 (JTA) -- Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban has suspended a planned trip to Ethiopia, after the African government requested that a low profile be given to efforts to bring the Falash Mora to Israel.

The Israeli government recently approved a plan to allow limited numbers of the Falash Mora, Ethiopians whose ancestors converted to Christianity from Judaism, to immigrate to Israel.

Many Jewish Ethiopian immigrants in Israel have relatives among the Falash Mora, and Israel has decided to allow immigration of the Falash Mora based primarily on family reunification.

A ministerial committee set up to study the issue urged this week that the government take prompt action on reunification cases deserving immediate attention.

The Jewish Agency has been charged with the responsibility of flying these Falash Mora to Israel. The number of people involved has not been disclosed.

The Ethiopian government has often been sensitive about condoning the emigration of its citizens. Ethiopia's prime minister is due to visit Israel later this month, and the issue of the Falash Mora is expected to be a topic of discussion.

The number of Falash Mora has been variously estimated at being between 20,000 and 40,000.

Israel's Foreign Ministry has also sent an emissary to Eritrea, Ethiopia's rebellious northern province.

Israel intends to establish diplomatic relations with Eritrea once the country gains independence from Ethiopia, expected to happen after an April 23 referendum on the issue.

WIESENTHAL CENTER RAISES OBJECTIONS TO BEATIFICATION OF HOLOCAUST POPE

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, March 3 (JTA) -- A Jewish organization dedicated to commemorating the Holocaust has raised strong objections to an ongoing process by which Pope Pius XII, pontiff during World War II and the Holocaust, might be elevated to sainthood by the Roman Catholic Church.

Prompted by what he perceived as recent indications that the Vatican may be close to completing the first step in the canonization of Pius XII, Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sent a letter to a top Vatican official questioning the worthiness of the prelate he describes as the "pope of silence."

Other sources, however, both Jewish and Catholic, maintain that there are no significant new developments in the decades-long effort to beatify Pius.

They emphasize that the real issue now is the Vatican's continued refusal to unseal its archives from the Holocaust era. Jews and Catholics involved in interfaith relations are redoubling their efforts to get the records opened to scholars. Only then, they say, will the controversy over Pius and the Vatican's role in the Holocaust be resolved.

The controversy has simmered ever since 1965, when Pope Paul VI proposed that his two immediate predecessors, Popes Pius and John XXIII, be considered for sainthood.

The beginning of such a process is an exhaustive canonical investigation as a first step toward beatification. If that step is achieved, church authorities must then determine that God has worked an authentic miracle through the candidate's intercession, following his beatification. Only then can the candidate be considered for canonization.

The Vatican's investigation prior to beatification is so thorough that it has taken 27 years to gather material pertaining to the life and sanctity of Pius XII, who was pope from 1939 until his death in 1958.

2 Recent Developments In Case

The Wiesenthal Center decided to intervene, first through correspondence with the Vatican and now publicly, because of two recent developments, Hier said.

The first was a May 1992 letter from Father Paolo Molinari in response to a question raised by a graduate student working in the Wiesenthal Center library.

Molinari, the Vatican-designated advocate on behalf of Pius, wrote that "the canonical investigations concerning the life, activity and renown of holiness of Pope Pius XII, which had to be completed on the diocesan level, have been completed."

He went on to say that the vast material collected in Rome and in seven other dioceses had been edited, and that two in-depth studies were near completion. "With a view to the beatification, we have an excellent case," he wrote.

The other indication of Pius' imminent beatification, said Hier, is a paper titled "Church, Shoah and Anti-Semitism: The Holy See Facing the Tragedy of the Jewish People (1939-1945)," which was presented by a Vatican representative to a meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in Baltimore last May.

Pius was described in the paper as "not 'silent' during World War II. He was not even 'neutral.' His public statements, from the first encyclical, were clearly directed against the National Socialist regime, and were so understood on both sides."

Hier takes issue with the evidence and conclusions presented in the paper. "This is a serious case of historical revisionism," he said. "Not once did Pope Pius mention the Jews publicly during the war or in his dealings with Hitler."

"It is true that in late 1943 and early 1944, he undertook private initiatives to aid Jews, but by that time 4.5 million Jews had been murdered and Germany was clearly on the road to defeat."

Last June, Hier initiated his inquiry by writing to Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. "While it is normally not the practice of non-Catholics to comment on the worthiness of the church's candidate for sainthood, Pope Pius XII must surely qualify as an exception to that rule," Hier wrote.

Beatification Not Imminent

Eugene Fisher, director of Catholic-Jewish relations for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he was puzzled as to why the Wiesenthal Center chose to intervene at this time.

"The first level of paperwork (on Pius' application for beatification) is completed, but it doesn't seem that beatification is imminent," said Fisher.

"I have no idea why they decided to make a big thing about it now. It's not an issue which can be well addressed through headlines in the press," said Fisher.

Hier, when asked why he was making his view public eight months after the speech was presented and the letter was sent, said that he waited because until recently because he hoped to schedule a meeting with Vatican officials on the matter.

Hier said his request for a meeting with Cardinal Cassidy was turned down.

But Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of inter-religious affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, will be meeting with Cassidy and a representative of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on these matters when he goes to Rome later this month.

For him, the critical issue is that Pius' record remains unclear, and that the archives must be completely opened in order for the Vatican's role in this period to be fully understood.

"At this moment in history it is the obligation of the Vatican to open all the files between 1933 and 1945 concerning Europe and the rest of the world, to see what each of the (papal) nuncios in each country occupied by Nazis did in favor of the Jews," said Klenicki.

"What were the secret orders of the pope? This matter is of great, great importance to us," said Klenicki.

Of Pius he said, "We know he opened churches and monasteries in Rome to hide Jews. But for the most part, 'his record is unclear.'"

Added Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, "The record of Pius XII is a constant flashpoint. We need much more documentation than the Vatican has opened up."

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