

**U.S. PLANNING TO INVITE PARTIES  
TO ROUND OF PEACE TALKS IN APRIL****By Deborah Kalb  
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, March 9 (JTA) -- The United States is planning to invite the parties involved in the Middle East peace process back to the negotiating table for a new round of talks starting in mid-April.

News agencies reported this week that the new round was set to begin April 20. Israel Television reported a starting date of April 19 and said invitations to the talks, co-sponsored by the United States and Russia, would be sent out Wednesday.

But at the State Department briefing Tuesday, spokesman Richard Boucher would say only that invitations to the peace talks would be issued "soon." He said nothing about the April 19 or 20 dates.

The Clinton administration has been working to inject new momentum into the peace talks, which have been stalled since December, when Israel deported 415 Palestinians to Lebanon.

The president and Secretary of State Warren Christopher have made the peace process a priority. On his recent visit to the region, his first foreign trip, Christopher sought to move the focus of the parties away from the deportation issue and toward a quick resumption of the peace negotiations.

U.S. officials have said that they are committed to playing the role of a "full partner" in the process, assuming the parties are committed to serious negotiations.

A question still remains over whether the Palestinians will return to the talks before all the deportees are returned. American officials have expressed optimism that the Palestinian delegation would return to the table when talks resumed.

Assistant Secretary of State Edward Djerejian told members of Congress on Monday that after Christopher's talks with Israelis and Palestinians, the United States was "persuaded that there was broad agreement in principle on the steps that were needed to restart the peace negotiations."

Over the next few weeks, Clinton is scheduled to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Rabin arrives in Washington later this week and is scheduled to meet with Clinton next Monday. Mubarak is reportedly planning to meet with Clinton on April 6.

**RABIN SEES A DEAL WITH SYRIA  
COMING WITHIN NEXT 12 MONTHS****By Cynthia Mann**

JERUSALEM, March 9 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told a visiting delegation of American Jewish Committee leaders here this week that he is "guardedly optimistic" about reaching at least a preliminary agreement with Syria within the next 12 months.

Rabin told the group in a closed-door session Monday that while Syrian President Hafez Assad is tough, he is evidently interested in securing an accord with Israel, AJCommittee

President Alfred Moses reported.

He said Rabin also held out hope that an autonomy arrangement could be reached with the Palestinians within that time frame.

Moses said Rabin did not specifically address the escalating terrorism by Palestinians in the administered territories. But he did reiterate his opposition to a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which has been urged by some Knesset members in recent days.

The group met with Rabin to discuss his upcoming visit to Washington, the Middle East peace talks and Israel's standing in the international community.

The group also met with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres just prior to his departure for Germany. AJCommittee officers returned from an official visit to Germany last month to investigate government efforts there to combat rising intolerance against foreigners.

Moses said Peres discussed the impact on Israel of changing global politics, stressing the importance of its increased recognition by the world community.

The AJCommittee has actively lobbied member countries of the United Nations to reassess their relationship with Israel and the anti-Israel resolutions that are routinely adopted.

Both Rabin and Peres stressed their positive reaction to the recent visit by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Moses said, while Rabin said he was "looking forward" to his meeting with President Clinton next week.

**ISRAEL PROTESTS BRITAIN'S DECISION  
TO RESUME HIGH-LEVEL PLO MEETINGS****By Cynthia Mann**

JERUSALEM, March 9 (JTA) -- Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin summoned Britain's ambassador to Israel this week and formally protested his country's decision to resume ministerial-level meetings with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

British Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg met Tuesday with two PLO officials and Faisal Hussein, the unofficial chief of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks.

The meeting marked a reversal of policy for London, which suspended high-level contacts with the PLO during the Persian Gulf War, when the PLO leadership proclaimed its allegiance to Saddam Hussein.

Beilin issued a statement that said the decision came at "a critical juncture" and could hurt the prospects for reconvening the peace talks.

"It constitutes a prize for Palestinians who have yet to announce their willingness to return to the process," Beilin said.

But the British said the purpose of the meeting was precisely to urge the Palestinians to return to the peace talks.

Hogg met with Hael Fahoun, the head of the PLO's European section; Afif Safieh, the PLO's London representative; and Hussein.

Hogg reported after the meeting that he had stressed the importance of restarting the bilateral talks.

The Palestinians said they had expressed to

Hogg their eagerness to return to the talks but emphasized that the deportee crisis had to be resolved first. Following the meeting, Hussein reported he was optimistic that a solution would be found.

The meeting apparently was more of symbolic than substantive value.

Israeli officials speculated on Israel Radio that Britain is looking for a role to play in the peace process and, after defending Israel during the deportation crisis, wanted to make this gesture to the PLO to appear "evenhanded."

Some warned it would send a dangerous signal to the PLO that the formula for the talks established at Madrid could be changed. That formula bars representatives from abroad from participating formally in the Palestinian delegation to the bilateral talks. This effectively excludes officials from the PLO, based in Tunis.

#### ISRAELI LEADERS TRY TO CALM SETTLERS RESTIVE AFTER KILLINGS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 9 (JTA) -- Israeli military and political leaders sought this week to calm increasingly restless Jewish settlers, who have clashed violently with Palestinians in the wake of several recent killings of both Arabs and Jews.

Some 300 settlers from the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc and from the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba demonstrated Monday night outside Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's residence.

The demonstration began quietly, but several demonstrators crossed police barricades, sat in the middle of the street and disturbed the traffic. Ten demonstrators were held by police for questioning.

A Gush Katif settler turned himself in to police Tuesday, admitting he had fired the shots that killed a 22-year-old Arab youth during a clash Monday between settlers and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The Gush Katif resident was returning from the funeral of fellow settler Uri Megidish, who was stabbed to death by Arabs earlier in the day.

Megidish was killed by two of his Palestinian workers as he drove them to his settlement's greenhouse.

Although the security forces knew the identity of Megidish's killers, they have been unable so far to find and capture them.

Enraged settlers returning from Megidish's funeral clashed with Palestinians at several spots in the Gaza Strip.

Ahmad al-Madhoun was shot dead near the main entrance to the strip from Israel proper.

The settler who confessed to shooting al-Madhoun was described as a 43-year-old resident of Moshav Ganei Tal, but his name was not released.

Police said they intended to detain more Israeli settlers who allegedly fired indiscriminately at Arab workers on their return from the funeral.

#### Laborites To Discuss Gaza's Future

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, visited the Gaza Strip on Tuesday and urged Jewish settlers to show restraint.

"Citizens of Israel, even those living in the Gaza Strip, know that no one may take the law into his own hands, and whoever does so will be dealt with accordingly," Barak said on army radio.

The string of bloody attacks, including one in Tel Aviv by a Palestinian laborer from Gaza

who fatally stabbed two Israelis, has prompted a debate about whether Israel should unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

Despite objections by Labor Party leaders, the Knesset Labor caucus has decided to discuss the fate of the strip in light of growing demands by the party rank and file to pull out of Gaza.

The demand to discuss Gaza was raised, among others, by party faction whip Avi Yehzekel and Knesset members Shlomo Buhbut and Yosef Vanunu.

Health Minister Haim Ramon is one of the most outspoken supporters of unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, but the demand has been rejected outright by senior ministers such as Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and Yossi Sarid.

The deputy army chief of staff, Gen. Amnon Shahak, appeared before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to explain how the army intended to curb the Gaza terrorism.

Shahak said the army was planning to set up sophisticated metal detectors at the crossing from Gaza into Israel proper that would help soldiers pick out Arab workers carrying knives and explosives.

But Shahak said that security measures at the crossing point could not completely block murderers from entering Israel proper. The terrorists would always find an alternative way, he said.

The army also intended to invest more than \$100,000 to set up road signs that would help prevent Israelis from entering Palestinian population centers by mistake. This was the case last week with Yehoshua Weissbrod, who entered the Rafah refugee camp and was stoned by a mob and shot to death.

Shahak explained that one of the reasons why violence is more severe in Gaza than in the West Bank is the deteriorating economic situation in Gaza and the existence of vast amounts of arms and ammunition in that area.

Referring to reports that Catherine Striker, an American working in Gaza for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, failed to prevent Weissbrod's murder, Shahak said relations between Israel and UNRWA were not good.

The U.N. organization employs mainly local Arab workers and has often obstructed security operations.

#### MCDONALD'S IN FOOD FIGHT WITH ISRAEL

JERUSALEM, March 9 (JTA) -- McDonald's has filed an official complaint against Israel for its efforts to prevent the fast-food company from importing its own potatoes for franchises slated to open here by the end of next year.

The company filed a complaint with the U.S. government, contending that Israel was obstructing free trade and that Israeli potatoes do not meet the standards for its famous french fries.

Israel's Agriculture Ministry has denied the charge, claiming it has been cooperative and will arrange for the chain's brand of potatoes to be grown in Israel.

The ministry has chosen a potato processing firm, Tapud, to produce the french fries for McDonald's.

McDonald's has begun issuing franchises to local businessmen throughout Israel. But it has insisted that it be allowed to import its own fries or have Israeli farmers grow a new strain of potatoes to meet its strict standards.

**CONGRESSMAN INTRODUCES LEGISLATION  
TO CRACK DOWN ON DOMESTIC TERRORISM**

By Deborah Kalb  
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 9 (JTA) -- In yet another demonstration of growing concern here in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing in New York, Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) this week introduced legislation aimed at cracking down on domestic terrorism.

Schumer, who serves as chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on crime and criminal justice, introduced his bill Tuesday at a subcommittee hearing examining whether recent events possibly tied to terrorism were isolated incidents or part of a growing trend.

The proposed legislation, the Terrorism Prevention and Protection Act of 1993, would "establish a new federal offense for domestic terrorism and another for providing material support to terrorists," Schumer said.

Currently, there is no separate federal offense for engaging in domestic terrorism. Schumer's bill would make such crimes punishable by death when they result in death.

The bill would also require "taggants," or easily identifiable chemicals, to be used in all explosives manufactured and sold in the United States. This would aid in tracing explosives like dynamite, in the event of a terrorist bombing.

And the legislation would establish "pre-inspection stations" in international airports to help keep illegal aliens out of the country.

Schumer said in the statement that his concern was sparked by the World Trade Center late last month, the recent killings of CIA employees outside CIA headquarters in Virginia and reports of Middle Eastern terrorist groups operating in the United States.

**A 'Coming Wave Of Terrorism'?**

At the hearing, witnesses disagreed on whether the events were part of a larger trend toward increased domestic terrorism. FBI Director William Sessions played down the events as isolated incidents, while James Fox, head of the FBI's New York office, suggested more of an ongoing trend.

The attack at the trade center, Sessions said, is not "the opening act in a coming wave of terrorism."

But Fox said that the incident was "organized by a large, well-known terrorist group." He added, without naming the group, that "it's a group that knows what they're doing. This was not a group of ad-hoc terrorists."

Mohammed Salameh, the first suspect charged in the trade center bombing, is a Jordanian citizen of Palestinian origin who is suspected of having fundamentalist ties. He has been linked to a New Jersey mosque headed by an Egyptian cleric who openly supports violence in the name of Islam.

Schumer called in January for the immediate deportation of the cleric, Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. State Department officials concede Abdel Rahman was admitted to this country by mistake.

In his statement Tuesday, Schumer said he was "still waiting for a response" from the Immigration and Naturalization Service about Abdel Rahman's status.

Last week, legislation was introduced in Congress that would bar members of the Hamas movement from entering the country.

**PLO OFFICIAL CONVICTED IN N.Y.  
IN A 20-YEAR-OLD BOMBING CASE**

By Matthew Fleischner

NEW YORK, March 9 (JTA) -- The bombs sat quietly in rented vehicles, poised to wreak early afternoon destruction on some of the busiest buildings in New York City.

This happened not in recent weeks but on March 4, 1973 -- during a visit to New York by then-Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.

But the bombs planted at the El Al terminal at Kennedy International Airport, at the Israeli Discount Bank and at the First Israeli Bank and Trust Co. (now Bank Leumi) failed to detonate.

Subsequently, the police and prosecutors failed to convict anyone of attempting the terrorist act.

Until last week, that is, when acknowledged Palestine Liberation Organization official Khalid Mohammed el-Jassem went on trial and was swiftly convicted by a federal district court jury of attempted bombing.

Charles Rose, executive assistant U.S. attorney in Brooklyn, presented evidence that Jassem's fingerprints matched prints found on the bombs, and relied on hotel records to link him with planning the bombing.

No witnesses identified Jassem as the suspected 1973 bomber, and Jassem's attorneys, William Kunstler and Ronald Kuby, claimed that the fingerprints taken from the bomb were "fabricated."

After three days of argument, the jury took just over three hours of deliberation to convict Jassem of the 20-year-old bombing.

The defense lawyers argued that Jassem, a 45-year-old Palestinian living in Cyprus seized by Italian police in January 1991, was being "framed" to "appease" Israel.

**A Tip From The Mossad?**

They also complained that their client could not get a fair trial in the hostile climate created by coverage of the recent explosion at the World Trade Center. The prime suspects in the Feb. 26 explosion, which killed five people, are Moslem fundamentalists.

"There was no way this man could get a fair trial during daily press briefings and inflammatory coverage of the World Trade Center explosion," Kuby said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

While Judge Jack Weinstein sequestered the jury during the trial, Kuby pointed out that jurors are usually told in advance they will be sequestered for a case's duration, but they were not for this case.

"The judge sprung it on jurors the first day of the trial to protect them from the media," said Kuby.

Jassem, who the FBI said was traveling in 1973 under the name of Khalid Duhhan al-Jawary, will be sentenced on March 17. Rose said that at the sentencing he intends to present evidence "from European police agencies" indicating that Jassem was involved in other terrorist acts after the attempted bombing.

Kuby pointed to "factual evidence that the FBI didn't have a clue until 18 years later, when a tip came that they should arrest this man."

The New York Times cited an anonymous source saying the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, supplied the tip leading to Jassem's arrest. The Israeli Consulate had no reaction.

## ATTORNEY GENERAL NOMINEE BACKS PROPOSED RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BILL

By Deborah Kalb  
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 9 (JTA) -- Attorney General-designate Janet Reno said during confirmation hearings this week that the Clinton administration would back legislation that would make it harder for the government to encroach on free exercise of religion.

The legislation, known as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, has broad support in Jewish and other religious communities. It was designed to circumvent a 1990 Supreme Court ruling that gave state governments greater leeway in outlawing certain religious practices.

While the 1990 case dealt with ritual use of the hallucinogen peyote, Jewish groups consider the ruling a dangerous precedent for laws that could restrict such practices as kosher slaughter.

During hearings Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Reno said President Clinton is "very anxious to sign that bill as soon as Congress can get it to his desk."

She was responding to a question posed by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), whom she said she looked forward to working with in an effort to pass the bill.

Clinton has said in the past that he supports the legislation, which has raised hopes among Jewish groups that the bill will be adopted quickly after unsuccessful efforts last year.

Recent reports that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, an important group that previously opposed the legislation, has now signed on to support it, have also fueled optimism about the bill's quick passage.

The bill was expected to be introduced Thursday.

Reno, who is currently state's attorney in Dade County, Fla., has been hailed by local Jewish groups for her commitment to civil rights.

At the hearing Tuesday, Reno said she wants "to make civil rights enforcement one of the high priorities of the office and do everything I can to see that Americans have equal opportunities."

Clinton's previous nominee for attorney general, Zoe Baird, also backed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Her nomination was derailed by reports that she had hired illegal aliens to care for her son.

## JEWS COMMEMORATE RESCUE IN BULGARIA OF 50,000 JEWS

By Deborah Kalb  
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 9 (JTA) -- The Jewish community this week commemorated the 50th anniversary of the rescue of 50,000 Bulgarian Jews from Nazi death camps, an event that represented at least one bright spot in the dark days of the Holocaust.

While the heroism of the Danish community in trying to save its Jewish citizens during World War II is well-known, few remember this Bulgarian act of resistance.

In March 1943, the Bulgarians canceled deportation orders against their Jewish community, orders that would have resulted in the Jews being sent to concentration camps.

The rescue, carried out by members of the Bulgarian government, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and private Bulgarian citizens, was espe-

cially noteworthy because Bulgaria was officially a German ally in the war.

Speakers at Tuesday's daylong event, organized by B'nai B'rith, linked events during the Holocaust to the present-day crisis in Bulgaria's Balkan neighbor, Yugoslavia, and its breakaway republics.

The Israeli ambassador to Washington, Itamar Rabinovich, who was among the participants, urged the Jewish community to learn the "lessons of the 1940s," and not just passively hope that the violence in Yugoslavia will not spread to the rest of the Balkans.

"Let us be active and assertive in trying to end the crisis," Rabinovich said.

Jewish groups have, in recent months, played a leading role in calling for a more active U.S. policy to stop the "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bulgarian Ambassador Ognian Pischev said his is a country with a tradition of "ethnic tolerance" that, among other qualities, helped it to step "back from the brink of nationalism," unlike Yugoslavia.

"I don't think people in 1943 thought we were making history," Pischev said, but, he added, the rescue of the Jews was "one of the most courageous" acts in Bulgarian history.

## A Story That Needs To Be Told

Pischev read a letter from Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev that noted the "courage" of the Bulgarians in saving the Jewish community, but also commented on the 11,000 Jews from Bulgarian-occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia, "who, despite the protests of the democrats, crossed Bulgaria on the way to the Nazi concentration camps."

A historian, Professor Frederick Chary of Indiana University Northwest, said that the Bulgarian Jewish population was actually larger in 1945 than in 1939, an unusual statistic for a European country in the World War II era.

In his remarks, Chary summarized hundreds of years of relatively tolerant conditions for Bulgarian Jews, a community that, he said, dates back to the second century.

Several participants noted the good relations developed between Israel and Bulgaria in recent years, following Bulgaria's overthrow of its Communist government and its shift toward a democratic society.

Participants also commented on the successful adaptation of the Bulgarian Jewish community to life in Israel. The vast majority of Bulgaria's Jews left Bulgaria after the founding of the State of Israel and the rise of Bulgaria's Soviet-dominated Communist regime.

In addition to B'nai B'rith, the co-sponsors of the commemoration were the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a German political foundation.

Dieter Dettke, the foundation's executive director, said in his remarks that the rescue of Bulgaria's Jews is "a story that needs to be remembered and told," especially today when Germany faces a resurgence of violence against foreigners and support for neo-Nazis.

The commemoration also included a showing of a new film about the Bulgarian rescue, "The Optimists," by Israeli filmmaker Jacky Comfory, and a tour of B'nai B'rith's new exhibit on Bulgarian Jewry.