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**RABIN EXPRESSES CONFIDENCE IN CLINTON
IN ADDRESS TO ANNUAL AIPAC CONFERENCE****By Deborah Kalb**
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told an upbeat gathering of Jewish activists here that he had "great confidence" in President Clinton and in his efforts to help Israel achieve its goals of peace and security.

Supporters of Israel from across the country gathered at the 34th annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee this week in an optimistic mood, hoping that the warm rapport between Clinton and Rabin will translate into smooth relations among Israel, the United States and the American Jewish community.

In a live-via-satellite address from Israel on Sunday, Rabin recapped the series of meetings he held last week in Washington with Clinton and other administration officials, and with members of Congress.

The prime minister said he was "more than pleased" when Clinton told him that the United States would work to minimize Israel's risk during the peace process by assisting Israel militarily and economically.

Rabin said he told Clinton in their meeting last week that: "We are ready to take risks, calculated risks, for the achievement of peace."

Rabin said he feels, after his meeting with Clinton, that Israel and the United States "have established a solid basis" to bring U.S. assistance to "Israel's efforts to achieve peace, to cope with terror and to bring reform to our economy and society."

Rabin-Clinton Meeting Considered Success

The pro-Israel community considered the Rabin-Clinton meeting a resounding success.

The prime minister was to have addressed the AIPAC conference in person, but he cut his American trip short last week in order to return home to deal with the wave of violence sweeping across Israel.

While Rabin has in the past criticized AIPAC for not playing a constructive role in U.S.-Israel relations, his tone Sunday was complimentary.

Rabin said that although he has had his "differences" with the lobbying group, AIPAC is "the most effective" organization promoting strong ties between the two countries.

He said he was "more than thankful" to AIPAC, and encouraged it to continue its "holy work" for Israel.

In his speech, the prime minister repeated many of the themes he voiced during his recent U.S. trip. He called for compromise on both sides in the peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors, scheduled to resume here April 20, and spoke of Israel's desire for peace and security.

He also praised the Clinton administration for supporting the continuation of Israel's aid level at \$3 billion for fiscal year 1994, and praised the United States for vowing to work to end the Arab economic boycott of Israel.

Rabin termed the boycott "economic warfare" against Israel and said the U.S. approach was "very much appreciated."

In remarks to the crowd of over 2,000 people, Itamar Rabinovich, the Israeli ambassador to Washington who also serves as Israel's chief negotiator with the Syrians, discussed the prospects for the peace negotiations.

He said there was "reason to believe" that "progress" would be made this spring.

The ambassador said that Israel was not "assigning precedence" to either the Syrian or Palestinian negotiating track. "We do not assign a priority," he said.

Both American and Israeli officials recently have expressed optimism about the future of the Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

But it is still unclear whether the Palestinians will resume negotiating on April 20. They have vowed not to come back until all of the 415 Palestinians deported by Israel in December are returned.

Rep. Robert Michel (R-Ill.), the House minority leader, told attendees that the United States must not treat foreign policy as an "afterthought."

He warned against overly deep cuts in military spending, and said the United States must be strong to carry out a realistic foreign policy.

In a briefing with the Jewish press after the session, AIPAC leaders expressed optimism about their organization and the role it can play in maintaining strong U.S.-Israel relations.

AIPAC President Steve Grossman and Executive Director Thomas Dine said they felt the United States would not back off from its commitment to maintaining Israel's foreign aid level, despite calls for increased U.S. aid to the strife-torn former Soviet Union.

Grossman spoke positively of the Clinton-Rabin meeting last week, and said the mood at the conference was "upbeat from that standpoint."

He said AIPAC was seeking to build up its future leadership in a "time of relative calm and stability," rather than "having events overtake you."

He noted a "sea change in grass-roots activism" and said that was "good news" for his organization.

About 1,200 of the conference participants were college students.

**VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO GRIP ISRAEL
AS TWO MORE SOLDIERS ARE KILLED**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) -- A wave of violence that has rocked this country in recent weeks continued to take its toll this past weekend with the killings of two Israeli soldiers and the deaths of at least two Arabs in separate clashes.

In an effort to regain control over the security situation, the government decided Sunday to recruit roughly 2,000 new police officers for the currently 18,000-strong force and to step up efforts to capture Palestinian gunmen in the territories.

The decision was taken at the first weekly Cabinet meeting following Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's return from Washington, where the main topic under discussion was security.

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis gave vent

to their anger over the mounting violence and the government's failure to curb it by demonstrating Saturday night outside Rabin's home. Several were arrested.

In the latest attacks, Sgt. Yossi Shabtai, 21, was killed Saturday morning in the Gaza Strip's Jabalya refugee camp when his army patrol was ambushed by Palestinian gunmen.

Shabtai, from Ashdod, was killed as he tried to charge the Palestinians and return their fire. Security forces were searching for the escaped gunmen.

The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group claimed responsibility for the Gaza attack.

Later the same day, Sgt. Avisar Gitai, 28, was killed and two others wounded in the West Bank when gunmen hiding behind rocks opened fire on their jeep on a road three miles west of the Jewish settlement of Ariel.

The three reservist soldiers were escorting a busload of children.

In clashes between soldiers and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip refugee camp of Khan Yunis, at least two Arabs -- some reports said four -- died in clashes Saturday and Sunday.

The army would confirm only that it was investigating the cause of the Arabs' deaths.

The army also announced it had captured over the weekend four wanted gunmen and seized a large cache of weapons in the Dir-el-Balah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

The four were members of the Fatah Hawks, an armed gang affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization's mainstream faction.

The four had been wanted for multiple attacks against army targets and for the murder of Palestinians they accused of collaborating with the Israeli authorities.

On the political level, ministers of the left-wing Meretz party were working on a plan to develop thousands of public jobs for Palestinians in the administered territories, rather than in Israel proper.

PALESTINIAN AND SHI'ITE KILLED IN CLASHES IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 21 (JTA) -- A Palestinian guerrilla was killed and a Shi'ite gunman captured by the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army in the southern Lebanon security zone over the weekend.

Three SLA soldiers were also slightly wounded during separate clashes.

Friday night, an SLA patrol spotted a squad of guerrillas near Barasheet village in the western sector of the security zone. The SLA patrol opened fire, killing one gunman and capturing a second man.

The SLA's Voice of the South radio reported that the slain man was a member of Nayef Hatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, while the captured gunman was a member of the Amal Shi'ite movement.

The two had apparently been planning to plant roadside bombs along routes used by the SLA and the Israeli army. The men were found to be carrying a large quantity of explosives, along with their guns.

Despite the Democratic Front's apparent involvement in this latest attack, the SLA commander, Gen. Antoine Lehad, described the Iranian-backed Shi'ite Hezbollah militia as the most powerful terrorist organization in Lebanon and the biggest threat to Israel's northern border.

Lehad said that "Palestine operations" were on a "low flame."

In another incident last Friday, SLA troops near Alman village, in the eastern sector of the zone, came under attack, with Amal claiming its men detonated a roadside bomb in the area.

The incident sparked a heavy retaliatory artillery barrage from IDF and SLA gunners against suspected terrorist targets north of the zone.

The attacks against SLA and Israeli positions were said to have been a response to Iran's call to mark Jerusalem Day, which Iran, following its 1979 Islamic Revolution, declared to be the last Friday of the Moslem month of Ramadan.

Lehad's remarks about the dangers of Hezbollah and its Iranian masters were made as he addressed Israeli military correspondents during a parade by SLA officers at the Majediyeh base, in the eastern sector of the zone.

"Iran is the base for the (Hezbollah) organization both in terms of ideology and funding, although the Syrians also help in terms of supplying arms and equipment," Lehad said.

"There is coordination between the Iranians and the Syrians in everything that is connected with Hezbollah.

"Hezbollah is the biggest hostile organization now, with around 2,000 fighters. Hezbollah has support from a part of the (south Lebanon) population, but this support is mainly because Hezbollah fighters have weapons and the force to oblige people to cooperate with them," he added.

UNESCO DIRECTOR VISITS ISRAEL AND SEEKS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) -- UNESCO, the cultural and scientific arm of the United Nations, has dropped its traditional bias against Israel and wants to improve relations with Jerusalem, the agency's director general said on an official visit here.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza, the Spanish head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, told reporters the organization has moved past "its politicization and mismanagement."

He said Israel "benefits from its participation" in UNESCO, and UNESCO "benefits from experts" from Israel.

"I would like to further improve this cooperation," said Mayor, who was scheduled to leave Israel on Thursday.

The UNESCO director praised Israel for remaining with the agency during "difficult times" and for helping to reform the agency from within.

For years UNESCO passed anti-Israel resolutions. The agency also protested archaeological digs in eastern Jerusalem because of Israel's annexation of the formerly Arab half of the city.

Until now, any cooperation that has occurred between Israel and UNESCO has been given a low profile.

But with Mayor's visit, it appears cooperation will increase. UNESCO is now interested in offering scholarships to promote visits here by Arab scientists wishing to study Israel's engineering, environmental and medical research, Mayor said.

He said UNESCO also would continue to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace through workshops and conferences.

JEWES WELCOME CLINTON'S OPPORTUNITY TO REPLACE WHITE ON SUPREME COURT

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are welcoming President Clinton's opportunity to appoint a judge more sympathetic to their views to replace Supreme Court Justice Byron White, who announced last week that he would be stepping down from the court this summer.

In his 31 years on the bench, White, a centrist conservative appointed by President John Kennedy, tended to be on the opposite side from much of the Jewish community on issues involving church-state relations and abortion rights.

Based on the president's past statements, the appointee is likely to be more liberal than most of the justices currently serving, and would help balance the court's tilt to the right in recent years.

In a 1990 freedom of religion case, White ruled with the majority that state governments could have greater leeway in outlawing certain religious practices.

That ruling, involving ritual use of the hallucinogen peyote by Native Americans, has caused great concern in the Jewish community. Jews are afraid that the decision could restrict such ritual practices as kosher slaughter.

The ruling spawned a bill now pending in Congress, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which would make it harder for the government to encroach on freedom of religion. A broad range of religious groups support the legislation.

White dissented in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade case legalizing abortion, and has continued to express opposition to abortion rights over the years.

"The Court apparently values the convenience of the pregnant mother more than the continued existence and development of the life or potential life that she carries," he wrote in his Roe vs. Wade dissent.

Marc Stern, legal director of the American Jewish Congress, said Friday following the announcement of White's upcoming retirement: "At first glance, it's hard to think he's had a defining role" on the court.

White's Work 'Not Memorable'

"His work product is fine, it's not second-rate, but it's not memorable," said Stern.

Phil Baum, AJCongress's associate executive director, said in a statement that the organization "salutes" White on "his long years of dedicated service."

Baum added, however, that White's retirement gives Clinton his first opportunity "to help point the court in a direction more sympathetic to the goals of compassion for the poor and concern for individual rights and reproductive freedom that he so effectively articulated during his election campaign."

White became more conservative over the years, said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. "He was out of sync with the Jewish mainstream" on abortion rights and civil rights issues, Saperstein said.

Abba Cohen, Washington representative for Agudath Israel of America, an Orthodox group, said his organization had a "somewhat mixed" reaction to White's retirement.

While he said White's ruling on the 1990 peyote case was "dismaying to us," Cohen added that Agudath Israel will "probably miss" White "on a range of issues."

Much of the Orthodox community agrees with White's stand on abortion. In addition, the Orthodox community tends to support federal aid to religious institutions, another issue on which they and White were in accord.

In announcing his plans to retire, White said that "after 31 years," he and his wife "think someone else should be permitted to have a like experience" on the Court.

Speculation has already begun concerning White's replacement.

Clinton has said in past interviews, Saperstein noted, that he would possibly select someone like New York Gov. Mario Cuomo or Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund. Harvard Professor Laurence Tribe is also a possibility, experts speculated.

The assumption has been that Clinton would select an abortion-rights supporter.

Saperstein said that he expects the new justice to be someone with "an expansive view of individual rights," who cares about women's rights and the free exercise of religion.

"He wants someone with vision on the court," Saperstein said, adding that Clinton will want the court, as he wanted his Cabinet, "to look more like America."

Cohen said that Agudath Israel would like Clinton to select a moderate justice to replace White.

"Curing extremes by appointing extremes is not the answer," Cohen added.

HHS SCRAPS PLAN TO REDUCE FINANCIAL AID TO REFUGEES

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) -- Refugees, including Jews from the former Soviet Union, can breathe a little easier now that the U.S. government has pulled back from plans to reduce their financial and medical assistance.

Because of budget cuts, the government had planned to shorten the time during which refugees who had come to the United States were eligible for assistance. The time period for eligibility would have been reduced from eight months to five.

But after advocates for the refugee population intervened, the Health and Human Services Department decided last week to seek additional funding to continue the program on its eight-month basis.

Among the groups speaking out on the refugees' behalf were the Council of Jewish Federations and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Catholic and Lutheran organizations were also involved.

Mark Talisman, director of CJF's Washington office, said he had "long conversations" with HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, whom he has known since they were teen-agers, seeking a way to fund the program.

"She worked a miracle," Talisman said of Shalala's efforts. He added that it would have been a "financial and moral catastrophe" had the program been cut back.

Arnold Leibowitz, Washington counsel for HIAS, estimated that the decision will affect 80,000 to 90,000 refugees.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: PEACE NOW BATTLING FOR A PLACE IN AMERICAN JEWISH MAINSTREAM

By Lisa Hostein
Jewish Exponent

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) -- When President Clinton's transition team sought an audience with key American Jewish leaders late last year, it called on two standard-bearers of organized American Jewry: the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

But the transition team also invited to this high-level gathering a group for whom being in the loop is a rather new experience: Americans for Peace Now.

Earlier this month, APN was seated once again alongside AIPAC, this time before the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations. Both groups were advocating for the continuation of current levels of U.S. aid to Israel.

With several of its board members and supporters closely tied to or actually part of the Clinton administration, APN, it appears, has entered the mainstream of American political life.

But the question remains: Is the group, which began just over a decade ago as a support group for Israel's Peace Now movement, ready to enter the mainstream of American Jewish life?

For the leaders of the 10,000-member fundraising and advocacy group, the answer is an unequivocal yes.

"It has become plausible to imagine us playing a constructive role inside the organized Jewish community," said Mark Rosenblum, a founder of the American organization and currently its vice president and political director.

As evidence of its desire to move from the margins, APN has applied for membership in the Conference of Presidents, an umbrella group representing some 50 U.S. Jewish organizations.

The conference is scheduled to vote on the group's application later this month. Its membership committee has recommended APN's acceptance, though not unanimously.

The umbrella group is often seen by U.S. and foreign governments as a central address for American Jewish opinion.

President's Record Questioned

Letters and calls from both supporters and critics of APN have been streaming into the New York headquarters of the conference. No prior application has prompted debate "quite to the degree" that APN's has, said Malcolm Hoenlein, the umbrella group's executive vice chairman.

Philadelphia activists Morton Klein and Michael Goldblatt, both affiliated with the right-wing Zionist Organization of America, have been in the forefront of a national campaign to prevent Peace Now's inclusion in the umbrella group.

Charging that APN lies outside the bounds of mainstream Jewish opinion, opponents focus on the group's dovish policies and on its newly elected president, Gail Pressberg, in particular.

Pressberg's past, which includes nine years as director of Middle East Programs at the American Friends Service Committee, followed by a two-year stint at the Washington-based Foundation for Middle East Peace, is a source of concern to other more mainstream members of the American Jewish community as well.

While at the Philadelphia-based AFSC until 1987, Pressberg was actively engaged in advocat-

ing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and urging the U.S. government to open a dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization long before the PLO's 1988 renunciation of terrorism and recognition of Israel.

As a promoter of policies then seen to be hostile to Israel, Pressberg was perceived by some in the Jewish establishment as "a real problem," according to one Jewish communal leader who had contacts with her at the time.

In an extensive telephone interview from her Washington office, Pressberg lamented the charges against her and defended her record.

"I've been a Zionist all my life, but I was not working for a Zionist organization before," she said of her years at AFSC and the Foundation for Middle East Peace. "I am now," she stressed.

Pressberg's supporters think she is getting a bum rap.

Rosenblum, her APN colleague, credits Pressberg with working on Israeli-Palestinian dialogue "long before it was fashionable."

"The ones sitting at the negotiating table today are the ones she got together," he said. "She will be credited as one who helped get us to this unprecedented opportunity" where Israelis and Palestinians are talking peace.

Many Groups Still Undecided

Asked whether her views have changed since her days at organizations perceived as less-than-friendly to Israel, Pressberg responded:

"Am I a completely different person? No, I'm not a completely different person. But have my views evolved? Yes, my views have evolved, like almost everyone else I know in the American Jewish community.

"I ask people to look at my affiliation with Shalom Achshav and judge my record over the past three years," she said, using the Hebrew name for Peace Now, APN's sister group in Israel.

How much a role Pressberg's record will play in the decision about whether to admit APN to the Conference of Presidents remains to be seen.

According to an official of a national Jewish organization, who requested anonymity, "There is a clear distinction between the way people are responding to Peace Now and the way they are responding to Pressberg.

"Except for those on the fringe, most people in the Jewish community see the right of Peace Now to step up to the table and participate in discussions," the official said.

But with many organizations still undecided about APN's application to the conference, it is not clear how the vote will turn out.

The Zionist Organization of America and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America are among those who have registered their opposition.

On the other side, American Jewish Congress and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations are among those on record supporting APN's bid.

"It's hard to imagine that their application would ultimately be denied, since they meet all the criteria for membership," said the head of one influential group, who asked not to be named.

Lawrence Rubin, executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said his group is undecided, but he is personally "inclined to support the application." He pointed out that APN "has a relationship and an entree both in Jerusalem and Washington that would be very useful" to the Jewish community.