

**HEAD OF PALESTINIAN TEAM TO STAY ON
DESPITE OPPOSITION TO RESUMING TALKS**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- Haidar Abdel-Shafi will remain, at least for now, as head of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks with Israel.

The decision was made after intensive deliberations at the West Bank home of Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi on Saturday, a day before the delegation left for Washington.

Last week, reports said Faisal Husseini, already chief adviser to the delegation, would be named the new head under an agreement worked out with Israel, which had previously objected to Husseini because he lives in eastern Jerusalem.

It was unclear whether disagreement within the Palestinian camp or continued Israeli objections blocked Husseini's appointment as chief negotiator.

Abdel-Shafi reportedly wanted to resign his post, because he objected to returning to the peace talks before the Islamic extremists deported by Israel last December to Lebanon were allowed to return to the administered territories.

The Gaza leader apparently was angry that the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership overruled the delegation's recommendation that it not resume talks with Israel until this matter could be resolved to the Palestinians' satisfaction.

But Abdel-Shafi was persuaded to continue on as head of the team.

"We are going to go," he said. "We are going to respect the decision of our leadership."

Yet not all the delegation members agreed. Two members of the team from the Communist Party will boycott the Washington talks.

Arafat Predicts State In 18 Months

Meanwhile, PLO leader Yasir Arafat defended the decision to return to the talks. The PLO leadership said in a statement that there had been several achievements that had paved the way for the Palestinians' return, including matters related to Jerusalem, deportations and the role of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Arafat also is presumed to have received assurances that if the Palestinian team returned to the talks, the Persian Gulf states would resume financial aid to the PLO that had been cut off after the PLO backed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

At the same time, Arafat was reported as saying in a BBC radio interview Sunday that resistance in the territories would continue until Israel gives up the territories.

In the interview, Arafat also said he was confident an independent Palestinian state would be created within 18 months.

In Washington, preparations for the peace talks were under way. An Israeli advance team, led by negotiator Elyakim Rubinstein, arrived Friday and began consultations with State Department officials.

In Israel, government officials said a number of gestures, including the return of Palestinians deported several years ago and concessions to ease conditions in the territories, were expected as the talks got under way.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was quoted as

saying that the Palestinians would be able to form their own police force in the territories, even before a final autonomy agreement was signed.

Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip denounced the proposal, saying they would continue to fire upon armed Palestinians.

**ALONI, AGAIN, NEEDLES RABIN,
AS OPPONENTS URGE HER OUSTER**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is expected to face another Orthodox-led assault on his controversial education minister, Shulamit Aloni, when the Knesset returns from its spring recess later this month.

But this time, Rabin and Labor Party leaders will find it harder than ever to rally the coalition's support for the outspoken Aloni, head of the left-wing Meretz bloc.

Aloni, who has a history of stirring outrage in her public speeches and media interviews, has even alienated her own supporters by her latest remark, in which she criticized Rabin for reciting the Shema Yisrael prayer at the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration in Warsaw last week.

The prime minister, in a rare gesture expressing both emotion and religious feeling, had donned a black yarmulka at the end of his Warsaw speech and recited the Shema, noting that it was the last words on the lips of so many of the Holocaust victims.

Aloni, who accompanied Rabin at the head of the Israeli delegation to the events in Poland marking the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, said later she found Rabin's recitation of the Shema in that context an implication of submission or resignation to the fate of the Holocaust victims.

Even commentators usually sympathetic to Aloni have excoriated her for these comments.

The Orthodox United Torah Judaism Front immediately submitted to the Knesset a motion of no confidence in the government, designed both to chasten Aloni and to embarrass Rabin's Orthodox coalition partner, the Sephardic Shas party.

Shas has frequently found itself under attack by its own constituency over Aloni's controversial statements.

United Torah's Menachem Porush said Aloni's latest utterance meant there was nothing in the Jewish national heritage that Aloni was prepared to leave sacred and unswayed.

Shas, for its part, has resumed its effort to persuade Rabin to remove Aloni from the education portfolio -- which is also United Torah's price for joining.

Shas issued a statement warmly praising Rabin for reciting the Shema.

Even on the secular side of the political spectrum, there has been scant support for Aloni.

Orit Shohat, a columnist for the daily Ha'aretz newspaper, appeared to voice the widespread view on the political left when she wrote Sunday that "Aloni is causing irreversible damage to the secularist cause and image."

"The left-wing world outlook has never looked more superficial," Shohat said, calling Aloni the "greatest flop" of the 1992 political turnabout in Israel.

MEMORIAL DAY'S SOMBER MOOD TEMPERED BY HOPES FOR PEACE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- In a somber day dedicated to the memory of those who have died fighting in this country's many wars, Israel on Sunday mourned its 17,709 fallen defenders.

The Defense Ministry said in a pre-Memorial Day statement that among the mourners were 24,682 widows, widowers, orphans, parents and children who have lost immediate family members.

The ministry said the number of handicapped people maimed in the line of duty and now cared for by the defense authorities numbers 61,649.

Israel's Memorial Day began at 9 p.m. Saturday, when a long siren blast heralded the start of ceremonies at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, attended by President Chaim Herzog; the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak; and representatives of bereaved families.

Another long blast, at 11 a.m. Sunday, marked the start of memorial services at the main military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem and at 40 other military ceremonies in towns and villages throughout the country.

Flags flew at half-mast and restaurants and movie theaters were closed.

Yom Hazikaron -- literally Day of Remembrance -- honors not only fallen soldiers of the Israel Defense Force but also those belonging to the pre-state underground forces, the police, border police, and intelligence and secret services.

At the ceremony on Mount Herzl, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told bereaved families that Israel would do everything possible to "put an end to the killing and bereavement, and to life by the sword."

But he warned Arab countries that Israel would agree only to real peace with real security.

More Katvushas In The North

Rabin said the government would devote the "coming period" to bringing peace to Israel.

"We seek peace with recognition and mutual compromise," he said. "We must not miss the opportunities," but, he emphasized, "we must not risk the security of the State of Israel."

Other official speakers at the various memorial services, including Cabinet ministers and senior army officers, repeated traditional remarks that the dead had paid with their lives in order that Israel should live and remain alive.

These soldiers, they said, had also hoped their sacrifices would lead to peace with the country's Arab enemies.

This year, for the first time, there appeared to be an equal emphasis not only on the mere hope for peace, but also on the fact that concrete steps toward peace were being taken, with the peace talks resuming Tuesday in Washington.

Security had been stepped up throughout Israel in anticipation of Memorial Day.

Security was especially heavy around the northern border because of the recent Katyusha rocket attacks in the region. Rockets landed again Sunday in the border security zone of southern Lebanon, but none apparently reached Israel.

On Sunday evening, the nation switched gears to celebrate Israel's 45th Independence Day, which always follows Memorial Day.

Torches were lit on Mount Herzl as the official day of mourning ended abruptly at 7:45.

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Cynthia Mann in Jerusalem.)

RADIATION NEAR NUCLEAR CENTER IS HIGHER THAN NORMAL, BUT 'SAFE'

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- Radiation levels at certain spots in a Negev hiking area, not far from Dimona's nuclear research center, are higher than the national average but safe for hikers, Environment Minister Yossi Sarid has announced.

Sarid made the comments over the weekend in the wake of reports two weeks ago that radioactive waste had leaked from Israel's top-secret nuclear facility in Dimona, believed to house the country's nuclear weapons program.

Ministry officials checked radiation levels around the installation on the outskirts of Dimona and in the area of Little Crater, south of Dimona, and compared these levels with spot checks taken around the country.

The results, which were not released for publication, show that Little Crater, an area visited by hikers, is safe from a health and environmental point of view, Sarid said.

Slightly higher than normal radiation levels found at some specific points were believed to be remnants of the Chernobyl fallout in Ukraine in 1986, the minister said.

But Sarid added that it was reasonable to suppose that some insignificant rises in radiation levels measured at other points "come from, among other things, the sewage which came in the past from the oxidation ponds of the Negev Nuclear Research Center.

"To prevent doubts in this area, and also out of general environmental considerations," he said, the Nuclear Research Center "has already taken various steps to stop sewage water from reaching the crater."

ISRAELIS KILL IRAQI INTRUDER

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- Israeli soldiers shot and killed an Arab infiltrator, later reported to have been an Iraqi, who attempted to illegally cross the border from Jordan into Israel.

A border patrol spotted him shortly before midnight Saturday in the Arava region north of Eilat as he was trying to cross the border.

The soldiers shot the man after he failed to halt or respond to their warnings.

The intruder, dressed in civilian clothes and unarmed, was reported to have been a 27-year-old Iraqi. His name was not disclosed.

QUAKE AND HAILSTORM STRIKE ISRAEL

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- An earth tremor measuring a low 3.6 on the Richter scale was felt in parts of Galilee early Saturday morning but caused no damage.

Experts said the epicenter of the tremor was in the Hula Valley region, along the fault line of the Syrian-African rift, which runs from Turkey to East Africa.

But while the tremor had little effect in Galilee, an unusual hailstorm swept over the nearby Golan Heights, causing damage to produce in orchards.

Local farmers said large hailstones woke them during the night and wrecked a significant amount of fruit just beginning to grow.

Eli Malka, a farmer of Moshav Sha'al and chairman of the Golan Settlers Committee, estimated that 80 percent of his nectarine crop had been destroyed by the hailstorm.

JEWISH CONGREGATIONS, INDIVIDUALS OUT IN FORCE FOR GAY RIGHTS MARCH

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, April 25 (JTA) -- Jewish groups, congregations and individuals from around the country joined hundreds of thousands of marchers here this weekend for the largest gay rights march in history.

The 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equal Rights and Liberation, as it was officially known, wound its way across Washington on Sunday from near the Washington Monument to the Capitol. Organizers expected about a million to attend, though the U.S. Park Police estimate was 300,000.

Under warm and sunny skies, marchers carried rainbow-colored gay rights flags and American flags, and posters bearing such slogans as "End Discrimination! Lift the Military Ban," "Lesbian Rights Now" and "Civil Rights Now."

Goals of the march included greater visibility for gay and lesbian issues, including the introduction in Congress of a gay civil rights bill, an increase in funding for AIDS education and research, and end to discrimination against gay men and lesbians in the military.

The fact that the march has "garnered so much attention has proven that it has had an effect and that it has been successful," said Barrett Brick, executive director of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jews.

The World Congress represents gay synagogues and other groups around the world, and it was just one of many Jewish groups at the march.

A contingent from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was there, as well as a group from the Reconstructionist movement, a few graduate students from the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and members of synagogues from around the country.

Evely Laser Shlensky, chair of Reform Judaism's Commission on Social Action, was marching with the UAHC group. The march, she said, is "an expression of our values. It reflects the position we've already taken, of civil rights for everyone."

Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, director of the UAHC's department of interreligious affairs, said he had brought his 6-year-old daughter with him to the march. "It's part of her family values," he said.

Gay Rabbis, Too

Rabbi Eugene Lipman, a former head of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and rabbi emeritus of Temple Sinai in Washington, compared the march to the 1963 civil rights march on Washington, led by the Rev. Martin Luther King.

"The size of the gathering is going to make a difference" in parts of the country "where no one knows gays and lesbians are people," Lipman said. "The lesson has to be learned in the same way" that people learned that "blacks are people, in the 1963 march."

Sammie Moshenberg, Washington representative for the National Council of Jewish Women, said her organization was well-represented at the march. "Our organization is concerned where there is an issue of discrimination," she said.

Leah Garrett, a graduate student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, came to the march with nine people from her school.

"We felt it incumbent as Jews to affirm gay

rights," she said. "We know what a minority" feels like.

The graduate school is separate from the JTS rabbinical school, but one rabbinical student, Sara Paasche, was marching.

"To be here as a Conservative Jew shows that people inside" the movement "are trying to move things," Paasche said.

The Conservative movement, unlike Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, does not allow the ordination of openly gay rabbis.

One Conservative rabbi at the march, Howard Handler, said his congregation in New York did not renew his contract after learning through an anonymous phone call that he was gay.

"I'm a test case for the Conservative movement," he said. "I wouldn't take a job without saying I'm gay."

Handler, who said he now has six weeks to go on his contract at the Conservative Synagogue of Fifth Avenue, stood near signs reading "Queer Rabbis and Friends and Families," and "Hire a Lesbian Rabbi."

Rabbi Leila Gal Berner, a lesbian who is religious leader of a Reconstructionist congregation in Media, Pa., said that it is possible to "have a loving relationship with the Torah and challenge it."

She said she is "out" to her congregation and, although it is "very wonderful to be open, it doesn't mean the issues are solved."

'One In Every Minyan'

David Stein, a member of Beth Ahavah, a gay synagogue in Philadelphia, was carrying a sign with a Star of David, half of which was in the form of a pink triangle, the symbol that the Nazis made homosexuals wear during World War II.

Jews attending the march were especially concerned that the Jewish gay and lesbian community achieve more acceptance within the larger Jewish world.

"We can't afford as a community to ditch people -- our gay sons and daughters, uncles and aunts," said Alan Amberg, who came from Chicago to attend the march.

"I hope this gets visibility; it's terribly important," he added, as he stood with others from the World Congress contingent.

"We are part of this movement" for civil rights "as much as anyone else," said Rabbi Marc Blumenthal of Beth Chayim Chadashim, a gay synagogue in Los Angeles. "Jews have been at the forefront of the civil rights movement."

Blumenthal sported a T-shirt with the slogan "One in every minyan," a reference to the oft-quoted statistic that one in every 10 men is gay.

"By marching as a synagogue," said Lee Walzer, a member of Washington's gay congregation, Bet Mishpachah, "we can show the world that gay people are everywhere, that there are many Jewish gay and lesbian people."

Even small gay synagogues were represented at the march. Charles Adler, who is active in the 50-member Beth El B'nai in Dallas, was there with a few others from his synagogue. His T-shirt showed two large multicolored cowboy boots, with the word "Texas" printed beneath.

Some Jewish participants expressed hope that the Jewish community would become more receptive to the concerns of gay and lesbian Jews.

"There's a hunger for spiritualism within the gay and lesbian Jewish community that is not addressed," said Robin Wagner, a member of Am Tikva, a gay congregation in Boston.

SLOVAK LEADER WEEPS OVER HOLOCAUST DURING MEETING WITH JEWISH OFFICIALS

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, April 25 (JTA) -- In an emotional meeting with Jewish community leaders here, the president of the Slovak Republic broke down in tears when recalling the fate of Jews in his village during the Nazi Holocaust, and pledged to ensure that young Slovaks learn about the tragic events of the World War II era.

The Slovak president, Michal Kovac, was in town last week along with other world leaders for the dedication of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He met Friday with officials from the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith International at the AJCommittee office here.

In response to a question from Hyman Bookbinder, AJCommittee's former longtime Washington representative, about whether the Slovak people have an adequate understanding of the Holocaust, Kovac began to describe, through an interpreter, what he said his generation had experienced.

Kovac said that when he was 11 or 12 years old, Jewish families were "taken away" from his village. "I know about our attitude," he said. "We were crying."

He then covered his face and wept.

"We were powerless," he said.

He added that the Slovak minister of culture, in cooperation with the Jewish community, should educate Slovak youth about the Holocaust.

"Unfortunately," he said, "during the years of communism, nobody discussed this."

Kovac's remarks came as a welcome surprise to the Jewish leaders at the meeting, who were visibly moved by his recollections.

Pavel Traubner, head of the Jewish community in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, who was present at the meeting, told the group he was pleased by Kovac's remarks.

"What the president said is very important for the Slovak Jewish community," Traubner said through an interpreter.

"It may be the first time" that such sentiments were expressed by a public official "so openly, frankly and sincerely."

'An Honor And A Duty To Be Here'

Traubner said that he wanted to "thank Mr. President for his reaction right now to his memories." He also pointed out that new textbooks in the Slovak Republic include information on the Holocaust.

During the World War II era, Slovakia was a Nazi protectorate and most of its Jewish community was deported to concentration camps.

The estimated number of Jews now living in the Slovak Republic is only 3,000 to 4,000, Jewish leaders said.

At the meeting Friday, Kovac said he considered it "an honor and a duty to be here at the opening of the museum," and he apologized for the "transgressions" of his "ancestors" against Jews in World War II.

Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJCommittee's director of European affairs, said after the meeting that he was "very taken" by the president's "genuineness and sincerity."

"There was no way it was contrived," he said.

Warren Eisenberg, director of B'nai B'rith's International Council, said after the meeting that

the week of Holocaust-related events probably "triggered horrible" memories for Kovac.

Each person experiences the museum in his or her own way, Eisenberg said, and Kovac had "had the experience of seeing Jews taken away."

Kovac also said he was interested in visiting Israel in the near future.

Although the Slovak prime minister is the actual head of government, Kovac, as president, could have "a role to play" in such issues as encouraging the Ministry of Culture to become active in promoting education about the Holocaust, Jewish leaders said.

MITTERRAND DENOUNCES VICHY REGIME IN STATEMENT LONG AWAITED BY JEWS
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, April 25 (JTA) -- In a statement long called for by French Jews and World War II Resistance fighters, French President Francois Mitterrand has denounced the "extermination of the Jews of France during the Vichy regime," saying that "justice starts with remembrance against the forces of forgetfulness."

Mitterrand, who had been sharply chided for refusing to say modern-day France should apologize for the evils of the wartime Vichy regime, made his remarks in a statement. It was read at a ceremony commemorating the deportation to Auschwitz of 44 Jewish children and seven adults from the village of Izieu.

"The children of Izieu are the very symbol of innocence assassinated, the very symbol of all the Jews of France who were exterminated under the Vichy regime," Mitterrand said. "The pain of the Jewish community is shared by the republic."

Some 250 people, mainly Jewish activists led by French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld, gathered Sunday in the southeastern French village to commemorate the deportations, which actually took place April 6, 1944.

Klarsfeld, whose father died in Auschwitz, wrote a book, "The Children of Izieu: A Jewish Tragedy," published in 1984, which tells the story of the children and how they had come there. The book contains photographs, letters and accounts of everyday life in the home.

The children were deported first to the French internment camp at Drancy and from there to Auschwitz.

The book was used as testimony in the war crimes trial of Klaus Barbie.

In his statement, Mitterrand said that Sunday's commemoration "bears witness" and "recalls where is crime and where virtue."

The president then committed himself to seeing to it that the house in Izieu would be turned into a museum, to be opened next year.

Jewish officials here expressed satisfaction with the president's remarks.

But some voiced criticism that the highest French authority did not state that the first duty of justice is to judge those responsible for the deportation of the Jews.

Rene Bousquet and Maurice Papon, two high-ranking French officials of the Vichy regime, remain indicted but not tried for crimes against humanity. There are no signs that the two men, both 80, will be tried in the near future.

Information leaked to the media a year ago indicated that close advisers of Mitterrand -- some say Mitterrand himself -- are opposed to those trials because they could prove "harmful to the peace."