

**ARMY LAUNCHES PROBE INTO DEATHS  
OF 4 SOLDIERS BY FRIENDLY FIRE****By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, May 24 (JTA) -- The army has launched a top-level investigation into a fatal clash in which four Israeli soldiers were killed in southern Lebanon after two paratrooper units mistakenly attacked each other.

The tragic "misunderstanding" occurred early Monday morning in the central sector of the security zone when each Israeli unit mistook the other for a terrorist band and opened fire.

Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Ehud Barak has promised that all possible lessons will be drawn from an investigation into the incident to avoid repeating such mistakes in the future.

Both units appear to have been engaged in parallel operations in a search for gunmen in the rocky and brush-strewn hilly region.

Initial reports said the soldiers apparently were not informed of the presence of another Israeli unit in the area.

A later report by the chief paratroop officer, Brig. Gen. Doron Almog, said one unit had split in two, with one group lying in ambush while the second was moving along the hillside, approaching the ambush from below.

Almog said the two groups clashed, but it was not immediately clear which one had opened fire first, using automatic fire and hand grenades. The incident occurred at 4 a.m., when it was still dark.

Hostile gunmen who were in the area at first held their fire, but were reported to have attacked Israeli reinforcements rushing to the scene to evacuate the wounded and the dead.

One officer and three soldiers were killed. They were identified as Lt. Ezra Asher, 22, of Moshav Tekuma; Sgt. Maj. Geva Ya'acov Marchaim, 21, of Jerusalem; Sgt. Ya'acov Gedaliya, 20, of Carmiel; and Sgt. Ehud Halamish, 20, of Tel Aviv.

The two seriously wounded men were Sgt. Assaf Danoun, 21, of Haifa and Staff Sgt. Baruch Nathan, 21, of Haifa.

The commander and two senior members of this same paratrooper unit were killed in the explosion of a roadside bomb in the security zone last month. Two other members of the unit were seriously wounded in that blast.

When news of the accident became known, opposition parties in the Knesset agreed to the government's request to postpone a planned no-confidence vote.

The Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee also postponed a scheduled session with the chief of staff, who flew to the scene of the incident to launch the investigation.

**RABIN TRIGGERS HEATED DEBATE  
BY REMARK OVER GAZA AUTONOMY****By Cynthia Mann**

JERUSALEM, May 24 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has triggered a heated political debate this week following what appeared to be a casual remark about the possibility of implementing a Palestinian autonomy plan in the Gaza Strip before doing so in the West Bank.

Rabin's remark, made at Sunday's Cabinet meeting, made it clear, though, that autonomy would be implemented only in the context of a negotiated settlement reached in the Middle East peace talks.

In that respect, Rabin's "Gaza first" remark differs from the "Gaza first" option supported by some other Israeli leaders, who have called upon Israel to pull out of the Gaza Strip unilaterally and implement autonomy there.

But even Rabin's less radical proposal drew both criticism and support.

Likud Knesset Member Benny Begin strongly opposed the idea and said the majority of his party supported his view. He accused Rabin of allowing Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat, who recently endorsed such a plan, to set the agenda for the peace process.

The idea was also rejected by two members of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi. Ashrawi charged Rabin with trying to drive a wedge between the Palestinians in the territories.

The head of the Palestinian negotiating team, Haidar Abdel-Shafi, however, said he had no objection to such a strategy. Shafi is a physician from the Gaza Strip.

On the other side of the argument, the Likud's Moshe Katsav and Labor's Eli Dayan -- both leaders of their respective party's Knesset factions -- called Rabin's suggestion a good idea.

Dayan said he believed that once the institutions of Palestinian self-rule were set up in Gaza, negotiations could begin immediately on the permanent status of the territories, without waiting for three years to elapse as stipulated under the Camp David agreement.

Rabin provoked the debate over Gaza on Sunday when he said he "saw nothing to prevent" applying an interim autonomy "agreement in principle" reached within the negotiating framework in Washington to the Gaza Strip first.

Rabin has previously expressed his opposition to a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, despite its popularity with many Israelis.

Rabin has said that any territorial concessions must be made within the framework of agreements.

He has also argued that a unilateral withdrawal would set a bad precedent by giving Palestinians the impression that Israel will concede territory under the pressure of violence and terrorism.

**RED CROSS OFFICIAL CRITICIZES ISRAEL  
OVER RIGHTS ABUSES IN TERRITORIES****By Cynthia Mann**

JERUSALEM, May 24 (JTA) -- The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross has told top Israeli officials during a visit here that Israel's closure of the administered territories has led to human rights abuses that violate the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Red Cross President Cornelio Sommaruga made the comments to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and President Ezer Weizman in separate meetings Sunday and Monday.

The 1949 international treaty signed in Geneva outlines the obligations of an occupying

power to return people living under occupation in its control.

Israel has repeatedly rejected the notion that it is an occupying power as defined under the convention. At the same time, though, Israel has said it accepts the human rights principles that are delineated by the provision.

Sommaruga told Weizman he was particularly concerned about denying Palestinians access to eastern Jerusalem. He cited the denial of access to health services, places of worship, schools and commercial activity.

Coincidentally, the Cabinet on Sunday loosened regulations for Palestinians who wish to enter Israel proper for precisely these purposes.

Meanwhile, Weizman reminded Sommaruga that the closure was triggered by a wave of Arab terrorist violence that threatened the safety of Israelis even in the heart of Tel Aviv.

"I explained to my guest the problems we had here prior to the closure and that eventually things will be solved when we talk about the future of the countries in the Middle East," Weizman said.

The president also raised with Sommaruga the issue of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad, captured in 1986 in a raid over Lebanon.

Weizman complained that Syria would not give any information to Israel about Arad's whereabouts or condition, despite its control over territory held in Lebanon by Hezbollah, which Weizman charged has been holding Arad.

For his part, Sommaruga said the Red Cross is doing everything it can to locate Arad and return him to Israel.

On Sunday, Sommaruga told Rabin he was concerned about the excessive violence committed by Israeli soldiers against the Palestinian population for the preservation of "law and order."

The Red Cross president also pressed his concerns about the practice of destroying homes of wanted terrorists, the conditions of administrative detainees and Red Cross access to Lebanese detainees in southern Lebanon and Israel.

Rabin told Sommaruga: "The injury of innocent civilians is a tragedy and we are doing everything to reduce it."

At the same time, he noted that in the last year there had been an increase in the use of live weapons, grenades and explosives used by Palestinians.

Rabin also defended the destruction of the homes of wanted fugitives, saying a home is destroyed only after a complete evacuation.

He added that the occupants of destroyed homes who did not in fact shelter wanted people were entitled to compensation.

He said that as soon as terrorist violence ceased, there would no longer be a need to employ administrative detention.

## PERES SAYS HE'S PLEASED WITH TRIP TO FAR EAST

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 24 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said at the end of his visit to the Far East that he was pleased with the results of his political and economic talks with leaders in China and India.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing last Friday, Peres said Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told him that "China does not intend to sell missiles to the Middle East countries that are at war and that China will be very, very

careful not to sell weapons that would endanger the security of our country."

In his three-hour meeting with Qian on Thursday, Peres received assurances that China "does not sell missiles to Iran and Syria," according to an Israeli diplomat.

The two ministers also discussed a wide range of bilateral issues, including economic cooperation, joint scientific research and cultural exchanges.

Peres also briefed his counterpart on the recently concluded ninth round of Middle East peace talks.

Qian, who recently visited Israel, told Peres he had fond memories of his trip and his reception here. He told Peres that Middle East peace talks are too crucial to be disrupted by fundamentalists and extremists.

Peres complained about China's voting record against Israel in the United Nations, and the Chinese foreign minister agreed to reconsider its traditional pro-Arab and anti-Israel record in foreign affairs.

Other points raised by Peres included the failure of China and its official airline to conclude an agreement with El Al, Israel's national airline.

El Al began operating a weekly charter flight between Ben-Gurion Airport and Beijing last September. But Air China has not yet signed a regular scheduled flight agreement and has not yet begun its own promised flights to Israel.

Reports of the trip by Peres, who is being accompanied by a delegation of Israeli industrialists and businessmen and a small press group, have been sparse, partly because of communications problems.

The heavy schedule has also created problems. An Israel Radio correspondent reported over the weekend that the journalists hardly knew what day it was, because of the pressure of keeping up with the official group.

Upon his arrival in China, Peres paid the traditional visit to the Great Wall and visited Beijing University, where he was granted the title of honorary professor and inaugurated the Ben-Gurion Chair in International and Middle Eastern Relations.

The Israeli foreign minister left Beijing on Saturday night for Shanghai for a short visit before returning to Israel, where he was scheduled to arrive midweek.

In Shanghai, China's largest city and main port, Peres said that Israel would be opening a consulate there. Israel already has established an embassy in Beijing.

Before arriving in Beijing, Peres spent two days in New Delhi, the first visit by an Israeli Cabinet minister to India since the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries last year.

During his stay in New Delhi, Peres met with Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma and Foreign Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao and offered to help India in its fight against terrorism.

Peres also signed a memorandum of understanding on economic cooperation and agreements on interaction in the fields of science and technology and cultural affairs.

Because of the Shavuot holiday, the JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published Wednesday, May 26.

# **LERMAN AND MANDEL NAMED TO HEAD U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL** By Deborah Kalb States News Service

WASHINGTON, May 24 (JTA) -- Ending over a month of speculation, the White House has announced that New Jersey business executive Miles Lerman would become chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, and Rutgers University Professor Ruth Mandel would become vice chair.

In a statement Friday evening, President Clinton said that Lerman and Mandel were "charged with keeping the flame of memory alive."

"I have faith in their ability to do so," the president said.

Lerman and Mandel replace Baltimore builder Harvey Meyerhoff and San Francisco executive William Lowenberg, respectively.

In a controversial move just weeks before the museum's April 26 opening, the White House asked Meyerhoff and Lowenberg to resign from their posts.

They were asked to stay on for the museum's opening, however.

Both Meyerhoff and Lowenberg were presidential appointees named by previous Republican administrations.

In other personnel matters at the museum, the director, Jeshajahu Weinberg, who had previously said he wished to leave his position, decided recently to stay on for an indefinite period of time.

A search for a new director was suspended when Meyerhoff and Lowenberg were asked to step down.

## **New Chair Is Holocaust Survivor**

The council's new chair and vice chair are already members of the council, a body appointed by the president which served as a development arm of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum before it opened, and now functions as its board of trustees.

Lerman is a Holocaust survivor who was appointed to the council by former President Jimmy Carter.

He runs an import-export business in Vinceland, N.J., and has served as national vice chairman of the State of Israel Bonds.

During his service on the council, Lerman has been a key player in the process of obtaining Holocaust-related artifacts and documents from a variety of European countries.

Mandel is director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers.

She is an expert on women and leadership, focusing on women politicians, and was appointed to the council by former President George Bush.

"Building the museum has been the central focus of my life for thirteen years," Lerman said in an interview Monday. "I am grateful to the president for having the confidence in my ability to lead the effort at this stage."

Lerman acknowledged he is assuming the chairmanship at a "very challenging stage," just as the museum has opened to "world acclaim."

The museum's mandate, Lerman said, was to make the horrors of the Holocaust relevant to people today.

"Our hope is to touch the soul of the visitor," he said, so that each one asks, "What is my responsibility to society today?"

The museum, he said, will serve as a repository of artifacts, and a meeting place for Holocaust scholars "for centuries to come."

"We felt it was extremely important that we tell" the story of the Holocaust "in an undeniable manner," and the artifacts he helped bring to the museum, he said, will contribute to that goal.

"All the exhibits are authentic, and documented," he said. "We are denying the deniers the ability to fiddle around with history."

Lerman said that under his chairmanship, the council would formulate policies but would let the professional museum staff implement them.

He said he hoped to "return stability to the organization," which has been the subject of reports and rumors concerning infighting among various factions about what the museum's mandate was to be.

But he pledged that any major disputes would not be "hidden" from public scrutiny.

Lerman said he was "very pleased" with the selection of Mandel as vice chair, and noted that they "augmented" each other's skills.

He also praised his predecessors, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel and Meyerhoff.

In a separate interview Monday, Mandel, who was born in Vienna, spoke of her family's attempt to flee occupied Europe on the ill-fated ship St. Louis, which was turned back as it approached Cuba with its cargo of refugees.

Mandel, an infant at the time, and her parents, were "very lucky," she said. They ended up in England, and, after the war, moved to the United States.

Her father's family, however, who remained in Poland, were all shot, except for one cousin who managed to flee to Palestine.

"The opportunity to serve as vice chair," she said in a written statement, "is a very great honor and one that has deep, special meaning for me."

## **4 NUNS LEAVE AUSCHWITZ CONVENT; LAST 10 TO LEAVE BY END OF JUNE** By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, May 24 (JTA) -- After years of international diplomatic wrangling, four of the nuns from the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz have moved into a new convent, built across the road and off the grounds of the former death camp.

The four Carmelite nuns moved into their new cloister on Monday and consecrated the new convent, participating in the first mass there.

According to Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy, who conducted the mass at the new convent and oversees the archdiocese which includes Auschwitz, the remaining nuns will leave the old convent by the end of June.

There are believed to be 10 more nuns in the old convent, all of whom plan to go to other convents.

The news of the four nuns' move was made public by Kalman Sultanik, vice president of the World Jewish Congress, who received a letter from Rakoczy on Monday stating that the move to the new convent had taken place.

"This marks a new positive chapter in Catholic-Jewish relations," Sultanik said.

Plans for the move had been discussed since 1986, when negotiations first took place between representatives of the Jewish community and the Catholic Church over the controversial and sensitive issue of the convent.

# BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

## MOROCCAN JEWS STEADILY DEPARTING, LEAVING SMALL COMMUNITY TO CARRY ON [Part 1 Of 2]

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

MARRAKECH, Morocco (JTA) -- Rabbi Avraham Sabagh is leaving Morocco for good this year, bringing to an end his family's five-century presence in the North African kingdom.

Sabagh lives in Fez, attending to the spiritual needs of the shrinking Jewish community, which once boasted 20,000 but presently numbers fewer than 250 people.

He is the sole member of his family who remains in Morocco. His wife and two children live in Paris, where he goes to visit them every several weeks.

The bearded, stocky rabbi is not happy about leaving the country of his birth. "But there is no future here for my children," he sighs.

It is a mournful observation echoed by Jews throughout the country, as they face the slow but inevitable decline of their community and send almost all of their children overseas to attend college, to find spouses and to start careers.

Solange Ohayon is a pediatrician in her early 40s who lives in Rabat with her husband, Victor, a doctor who is a lieutenant colonel in the Moroccan army and a professor of medicine at the University of Rabat.

The two oldest of their three children have left Morocco.

"To find a Jewish wife my sons must go to Canada. I want them to stay, but I have no girls for them," said Ohayon sadly.

Once they graduate from high school, young Moroccans go to France, to Israel, to Canada or to the United States and rarely return to settle in their native land.

As a result, the Jewish population is disproportionately old and not renewing itself.

"The moment they have finished high school they leave, so you don't have a thriving community," said Albert Weizman, who runs the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's operations in this country.

## Most Young People Are Gone

"Most people 18 to 45 are gone," he told a reporter from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency who accompanied a delegation from the New York Board of Rabbis visiting Morocco.

The delegation was visiting the country at the invitation of King Hassan II of Morocco.

One religious leader of the Casablanca Jewish community, who has eight children residing all over the world, estimated that "within two or three generations there will be no Jewish community here."

Before the Jewish exodus began in the 1950s, some 300,000 Jews called Morocco home.

Until 1967, tens of thousands of Jews populated Fez's mellah, the oldest Jewish ghetto in the country, living in crowded impoverishment.

The ancient walled area, a small city unto itself, is a tangle of passageways made narrow by the apartment buildings built up around them.

There was no indoor plumbing, and what was once the mikveh is today used as a public bathhouse. A faucet in an alley provides water to nearby families as it did once for the Jews.

The mellah was built near what was once the king's royal palace, when Fez was Morocco's capital.

Today the mellah is empty of Jews and full of Moslems.

Remnants of a sukkah still stand on the roof of one of the buildings. Its beams are used by the present owners to hang clotheslines.

As the delegation traveled by minibus through Rabat, Fez, Marrakech and Casablanca, modest neighborhoods both ancient and modern, once occupied almost solely by Jews, were pointed out by guides.

Today Jews live among Moslems, spread out through many neighborhoods in each of the cities.

Morocco was nearly emptied of Jews from the 1950s through the 1970s, when a flood of emigration led to the exodus of 96 percent of the population.

Today, there are many more Jews of Moroccan descent outside of Morocco than there are in the country -- some 900,000 worldwide, according to Serge Berdugo, president of the country's Jewish community.

And there are between 6,500 and 7,000 Jews left inside the country, some 5,000 in Casablanca and populations of up to about 350 in a handful of other cities -- Marrakech, Fez, Meknes, Tangier, Tetouan, Assadir and Safi.

The exit of Jews today is a slow but inexorable trickle, one family at a time.

In just the five years that Weizman has been in Casablanca, the population has shrunk by about 2,000 members -- about 25 percent.

## Schools And Old-Age Homes Have Closed

As a result, the last Jewish schools in Fez, Marrakech and Meknes have closed over the last five years, as have old-age homes in Marrakech, Fez and Rabat.

Funding of communal institutions by the JDC has shrunk accordingly.

The JDC's budget in the country is now \$2 million annually, down from \$2.5 million five years ago, said Weizman.

The Jewish relief organization funds educational, medical and cultural institutions but not religious ones, including synagogues, kashrut supervision or cemeteries.

At first glance, Morocco's Jews are a wealthy bunch. Those who hosted the New York rabbis at lavish, intimate dinners live in roomy villas staffed by four or five servants.

These Jews dress well, travel abroad often and enjoy a comfortable life. But these are not Morocco's only Jews.

There are only 10 truly wealthy Moroccan Jewish families, according to Weizman, and another 200 who would be considered upper middle class by North American standards.

"A lot of families stay here because they cannot have the same standard of living in Paris," said Weizman.

Families also take care of their own, supporting parents and grandparents and uncles and cousins who can no longer support themselves.

It is not simply a matter of familial social culture, but an economic necessity, since Morocco does not provide its citizens with social welfare benefits like Social Security or Medicaid.

This means that after supporting their own family members, paying a staff of servants and providing a home for members of their extended families, most families have little left over to support community institutions, said Weizman.

He estimates that fully one-third of Morocco's Jews receive some sort of direct financial assistance from the community.