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ARAFAT LINES UP AT LEAST SOME SUPPORT FOR PEACE PLAN FROM MOST ARAB LEADERS
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat has succeeded in lining up at least tepid support for a proposed peace agreement with Israel from virtually all the Arab leaders in the Middle East.

What remains for him now is to secure the backing of those within his own ranks.

Arafat left Damascus on Monday with only a qualified statement of support for the proposed agreement from Syrian President Hafez Assad.

After more than six hours of meetings with Arafat, Assad would only say that he would back the agreement with Israel if the Palestinian people gave it their support.

Assad's hedged endorsement, which was accompanied by a protest that the agreement with Israel was "not coordinated with the Arab brethren," was somewhat less than what Arafat had hoped for.

But it nonetheless enabled him to move on to the next challenge -- gaining the support of the PLO Executive Committee, which was scheduled to meet later this week.

The announcement of Assad's lukewarm support followed a more wholehearted endorsement of the plan by King Hussein of Jordan, who praised Israeli and PLO leaders in a statement Saturday.

The Lebanese government, on the other hand, which is heavily influenced by Syria, did not embrace the accord. Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri said Saturday that the Palestinians had weakened their own cause by not consulting with Syria or Lebanon before reaching the accord.

The proposed Israeli-Palestinian agreement, which was endorsed last week by Israel's Cabinet, calls for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho as a first step toward extending Palestinian authority to the administered territories.

Support From Persian Gulf States

Arafat also got needed support Monday when the six Persian Gulf states comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council gave their support to the draft agreement with Israel.

But the council's statement made no mention of any forthcoming financial support that would be crucial to prop up Palestinian self-rule in the territories.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states withdrew their funding of the PLO after Arafat backed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Experts believe that the PLO's dire financial situation since then substantially weakened Arafat and led to his seeking the current proposed accord with Israel.

The agreement now has the backing of six Arab states in addition to those in the Persian Gulf region: Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

The Arab nations were encouraged to support the proposed pact in a letter sent by President Clinton to nine Arab heads of state last Friday. The letters, which sent a clear message that the United States was firmly backing the process, were the first action taken by Clinton since the plan was announced last week.

The proposed peace plan also won the support of the Communist People's Party in the territories, which stated Monday that the plan nonetheless needed to be approved by the PLO's Executive Committee and by an all-Arab summit.

Over the weekend, Arafat won the support of the 16-member council of Fatah, the mainstream and most moderate group within the PLO.

But the task of winning the full backing of the PLO remains daunting. At least four members of the council rejected Arafat's call for support -- and he is certain to encounter even harsher opposition when he seeks the approval of the 18-member PLO Executive Committee.

In an indication of some of the hurdles still facing Arafat, none of the leaders of militant Palestinian groups based in Damascus was willing to meet with Arafat while he was there.

Popular Front Calls For New PLO Leadership

Another PLO constituent group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, called Monday for a new PLO leadership to be elected by a special conference of representatives from all Palestinian factions.

And in Tunis on Monday, a senior member of the Popular Front said the radical group would ignore any order from Arafat banning attacks on Israelis during the period of self-rule.

Despite these protests from extremists within the PLO -- and from Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah -- optimism ran high in Israel that the agreement will soon be signed in Washington.

Israeli officials were also hopeful of signing a mutual recognition pact with the PLO -- another watershed event that would have been unthinkable until a week ago.

Negotiations on that front continued in Paris over the weekend, where Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met with his Norwegian counterpart, Johan Jorgen Holst. The Norwegian diplomat has been instrumental in the secret talks carried out between the Israelis and the Palestinians over the last several months.

The two diplomats focused on securing economic support for the proposed plan.

The previous day, Peres met with French President Francois Mitterrand, who praised Peres for his "great intellectual and political courage." The French president also said he would view "very positively" any request for assistance to meet Palestinian needs for self-rule in Gaza and Jericho.

The Israeli government's optimism was reflected in remarks Friday by Itamar Rabinovich, Israeli ambassador to the U.S., who said in Washington that the historic breakthrough with the Palestinians may lead to similar advances in negotiations with the Syrians.

Rabinovich, who is also chief negotiator for Israel's bilateral talks with the Syrians, said that Israeli and Syrian negotiators have overcome some longstanding differences during the current round of peace talks being held in Washington.

"Several of the sticking points of previous rounds have been resolved this week," Rabinovich said, addressing reporters at the National Press Club on Friday.

But, he added, although progress had oc-

curred, the two sides "were not on the verge of concluding that agreement."

The Israeli-Syrian talks have stalled for months over definitions of withdrawal and peace. Israel is waiting for Syria to define what it means by "full peace," and Syria is waiting for Israel to spell out its plans regarding withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Rabinovich welcomed the progress that had been made on other former problem areas of the draft document.

"I'm delighted that this week, when everybody is in a holding pattern," he said, that both the Syrians and Israelis "found the presence of mind and the courage needed in order to make progress, albeit limited."

Progress is also expected on the Israeli-Jordanian track when talks resume in Washington on Tuesday.

(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents Deborah Kalb in Washington and Lisa Glaser and Michel Di Paz in Paris.)

POLICE MINISTER REVIEWS SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS UNDER PROPOSED PLAN By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- Although the proposed plan for Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jericho contains broad outlines for security arrangements, many of the practical details still need to be worked out, according to Israel's top police official.

In a briefing for the foreign press Monday, Police Minister Moshe Shahal said that if the agreement is to succeed, both parties must stop seeing each other as enemies and begin building confidence and cooperation.

The proposed Israeli-Palestinian agreement, which was endorsed last week by Israel's Cabinet, calls for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho as a first step toward extending Palestinian authority to the administered territories.

Shahal said that the plan calls for Israeli security forces to retain responsibility for the safety of Israeli citizens and settlements in Gaza and the Jericho area. The Israeli forces will also be responsible for ensuring that Israeli citizens in the territories obey the law.

In addition, Israel will retain control over the strategically important bridge crossings to Jordan, he said.

But he noted that no details have yet been spelled out for the size or exact jurisdiction of the Palestinian police force that will begin operating in Gaza and Jericho once the plan goes into effect.

He said there are recommendations to have "cooperation on different levels" between the Israeli and Palestinian police forces, but exact details remain to be worked out by negotiators.

As of now, only 100 Palestinians have been in police training programs in Jordan. But Shahal said Israel is open to allowing Palestinians with military training in Jordan or Egypt to serve in the new police force.

The prospect of an armed Palestinian police force has sparked fear and anxiety among some sectors of the Israeli public. Some settlers' groups have even gone so far as to pledge to take up arms against Palestinian police.

The minister said that public attitudes must be changed on both sides.

"We will have to realize we're talking about trying to live in peace," he said. "If we will

continue to consider ourselves enemies (with the Palestinians), it will be a problem.

"I hope there will be a difference between declarations and reality," he added, referring to the settlers' threats of violence.

"We will certainly deal with any action not inside the frame of the law with all firmness," he said.

Shahal held a three-hour meeting with representatives of the settlers Sunday night to try to address their concerns.

"The Palestinians have an interest in stability and in maintaining security," Shahal told the group. They "will have a challenge to conduct their government in the interim period in such a way as to build confidence, and I believe they will do their utmost" to promote peace, he said.

One option reportedly being considered by Israel to increase security under the proposed autonomy plan involves leaving large border police forces in the areas that will be evacuated by the Israel Defense Forces.

What is still unclear is whether Israeli forces will be able to carry out "hot pursuits" of suspected terrorists into areas covered by the self-rule agreement.

Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur said over the weekend that the IDF would patrol the roads in the vicinity of Jericho, where many Jewish settlements are concentrated.

He said new roads would be constructed to make it easier for the IDF to protect more isolated settlements.

MASSIVE RALLY IN TEL AVIV KICKS OFF CAMPAIGN FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT OF PLO PACT By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- A massive rally held here Saturday night kicked off what promised to be an all-out campaign to mobilize public opinion by both supporters and opponents of the tentative agreement on Palestinian self-rule in the territories.

Tens of thousands of Israelis filled Tel Aviv's Malchei Yisrael Square on Saturday, for what observers are calling one of the largest public rallies ever held in Israel.

Organizers, which included the Labor Party, the Meretz bloc and Peace Now, said the rally had drawn between 150,000-200,000 people. Police estimates, however, put the number at closer to 40,000.

Whatever the figure, participants agreed that the Tel Aviv rally was certainly the happiest and most good-natured of all the many mass meetings that have been held in this central square. Strangers stood packed together with smiles on their faces, nodding to each in acknowledgement of a joint presence at a significant event.

Among those addressing the crowd were Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and writer Amos Oz, both of whom gave their strong support to the proposed agreement, which calls for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho as a first step toward a gradual transfer of authority to the Palestinians in the territories.

"We are not going to sign this agreement out of weakness, but out of strength," said Ben-Eliezer. "Today we are heading into the hardest battle, the battle for peace."

The opposition Likud Party meanwhile scheduled a mass counterdemonstration on Tuesday which the event's sponsors promise will be even larger than Saturday's event.

HUNGARIAN LEADER DURING HOLOCAUST IS REBURIED WITH FANFARE IN HOMETOWN

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- In a move that provoked a wave of stormy criticism from Jewish groups here, the Hungarian leader who handed his country over to the Nazis during World War II has been reburied in his hometown.

Adm. Miklos Horthy, who led Hungary from 1920 until late 1944, died in exile in 1957 in Portugal and was buried in Gibraltar.

He had asked that his ashes be returned to Hungary when, as he put it, the country was "free from Bolshevik occupation."

On Saturday, 35 years after his death, Horthy was reburied in his hometown of Kenderes, in the eastern part of Hungary.

Horthy came to power in 1920 during a wave of anti-Communist violence. During his regime nearly 600,000 Hungarian Jews, mostly from the Hungarian countryside, were deported and killed by the Nazis.

He was finally pushed aside by Hitler in 1944 and sent to Bavaria.

Approximately 50,000 people attended the reburial ceremony, among them four members of the Hungarian Cabinet, all of whom denied that they were attending the event in any official capacity.

Jewish groups opposed the reburial, saying it represented an official rehabilitation of Horthy.

A day before the reburial, Hungary's Jewish community held a silent vigil at the Holocaust memorial in Budapest to protest the government's implicit rehabilitation of the controversial figure.

In New York, Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the Park East Synagogue deplored the reburial, calling it "most mind-boggling" and "a symbolic accommodation to rising nationalism."

Schneier, who is spiritual leader of the World Federation of Hungarian Jews, spent the early years of World War II in Budapest.

He pointed out that Horthy "in the early 1930s was responsible for the passage of legislation that restricted Jewish participation in many of the professions.

"He was still in office after the Germans moved in in March 1944, and he did not protest the ethnic cleansing of 600,000 Jews from the entire Hungarian countryside, including my family," he said.

Schneier added that he was writing a letter protesting the reburial to Hungarian President Jozsef Antall, whose father was a righteous Christian who rescued Jews.

Antall, in a series of interviews in Hungary last week, praised Horthy, calling him a "Hungarian patriot" who "should be placed into the community of the nation and the awareness of the people."

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York.)

RABBI OF BRATISLAVA ATTACKED, RAISING CONCERN AMONG JEWS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- Amid growing nationalist tensions in the new nation of Slovakia, the country's chief and only rabbi was attacked in broad daylight by two people yelling "Juden raus!" -- an epithet meaning "Jews out!" used widely by the Nazis.

Rabbi Baruch Mayers, a 29-year-old U.S.

citizen, was assaulted at noon Sunday in the Slovak capital of Bratislava.

He was reported to be in good physical condition but mentally agitated.

Mayers, a native of New Jersey, took up the new post in the Slovak capital of Bratislava in April, setting up a synagogue, kosher kitchen and study groups.

Leslie Keller, president of the East European Section of the World Jewish Congress currently in Budapest, sent a letter to the Slovak charge d'affaires in the Hungarian capital expressing shock at the attack on the rabbi.

He asked the official, William Roth, "to call on members of your government concerned in such affairs to take the necessary measures in order to avoid similar incidents and to ensure in the future the personal safety of the chief rabbi."

Meanwhile, Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, in Vienna, accused Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar of pro-Nazi sentiments after Meciar made belittling comments about Gypsies.

His remarks were publicized by the Czech news agency, CTK, but not by the Slovak media.

Slovakia split from Czechoslovakia in January to form its own nation.

Anti-Gypsy and anti-Semitic sentiments, suppressed under communist rule, have resurfaced in the Slovak republic since the 1989 "velvet revolution" that led to the establishment of democracy in Czechoslovakia.

SYDNEY SUBURB GRANTS RELIGIOUS LEAVE

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- A Sydney suburb has become the first municipality in Australia to give non-Christian workers unpaid leave to celebrate religious holidays and fulfill religious obligations.

The Waverley Council, covering an estimated 10,000 Jews as well as growing Buddhist and Muslim populations, introduced the plan because "many people who belong to religious minorities are constrained by a workplace environment that is incompatible with their spiritual needs."

Norman Lee, the only Jewish elected official of the council, said the plan worked well in Canada and should be applied widely in Australia.

"In the past, people just said they were ill to get off days to fulfill their religious obligations," he said.

Waverley Mayor Barbara Armitage said the council is following the precedent set by the national telephone company, Telecom, and the Commonwealth Public Service, in allowing Aborigines, or native Australians, 10 days of unpaid leave every two years to attend ceremonial occasions in the Northern Territory.

ISRAEL REVERTS TO WINTER TIME

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- Israel reverted to winter time on Saturday night, turning its clocks back one hour as midnight struck.

The move, which sets Israeli time two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, follows demands by Orthodox Jews to facilitate Slichot prayers, which are recited in the early morning in the weeks preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Israel is now six hours ahead of the East Coast of the United States, which is currently following Daylight Savings Time.

JEWISH GROUPS, TO PROTEST FARRAKHAN, WITHDRAW FROM RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENT

By Elizabeth Bernstein
JUF News

CHICAGO, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- Jewish groups withdrew their sponsorship of the Parliament of the World's Religions last week to protest an appearance by Louis Farrakhan, a militant black leader widely considered anti-Semitic.

The local chapters of the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League, as well as the Chicago Jewish Community Relations Council, pulled out Thursday, shortly before he was scheduled to speak.

In a letter to the Rev. David Ramage Jr., parliament chairman, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman cited the fact that Farrakhan "continues to espouse and promote classic anti-Semitic notions of Jewish domination and control."

Despite the Jewish groups' support for the overall goals of the parliament, "Our participation is incompatible with a presentation by one who has so relentlessly attacked one religious group and so consistently promoted divisiveness along racial lines," Foxman wrote.

When the Jewish organizations had agreed to co-sponsor the parliament, they had some trepidation that "its structures and platforms might be used by individuals with beliefs and goals detrimental to the well-being of the Jewish community," said Michael Kotzin, director of the JCRC.

"Though we were reassured that this would not be the case, the participation of a person like Farrakhan, who in fact has become symbolic of values precisely contrary to those which the parliament was meant to foster, would give him a credibility and legitimacy which we can in no way be part of," said Kotzin.

Jews Expressed Concern Early On

The four Jewish organizations expressed their concerns over Farrakhan's scheduled speech in a letter to Ramage early during the conference, which ran from Aug. 28 through Sept. 4. They did not receive a reply until Thursday morning, the day Farrakhan was scheduled to make his presentation.

At that time, Ramage explained that Farrakhan was invited to speak by the African American host committee and that "the representatives of all faith communities deserve mutual respect."

The Jewish organizations did not believe that Ramage's letter adequately addressed their concerns and felt they had no choice but to withdraw in protest.

The ADL made its withdrawal public on Thursday afternoon, several hours before Farrakhan was scheduled to give his 7 p.m. speech.

Farrakhan responded to the ADL's withdrawal by calling a news conference at 5:00 p.m., in which he charged that Jewish objections had led organizers of an Aug. 28 civil rights march on Washington to cancel an invitation for him to speak. March officials have denied that he was ever invited.

"Unfortunately, the same forces have not allowed us to be here at the 1993 Parliament of World's Religions," Farrakhan said at the press conference. "I think that they need to be told 'Shame on you.'"

Farrakhan added, implicitly addressing the Jewish community, that "we are going to demand

that you stay out of our business and mind your own business. Since you are not going to help us deliver our people out of the condition that some of your fathers placed us in, then we are going to demand that you leave us alone."

The AJCommittee, AJCongress and JCRC withdrew from the parliament privately in a letter delivered to the parliament's chairman early in the evening before Farrakhan's presentation.

Farrakhan was scheduled to speak for 45 minutes on "Faith: The African American Family." He claimed this was a topic he was forced to choose, yet he touched on it for no more than five minutes, and his presentation ran twice as long as planned.

His talk included a mix of many that he has given over the past years, in which he claimed he was working for peace while at the same time espousing anti-white, anti-Christian and anti-Jewish views.

More than 500 people attended his speech, many of them his followers, and his remarks were warmly received with a standing ovation.

In their letters to the parliament chairman, the Jewish organizations expressed their continued support for interfaith work in the future.

The AJCommittee, AJCongress and JCRC wrote that they welcomed the opportunity to join with others "in building fruitful interfaith relations in the years ahead."

FROZEN EMBRYO TO GO TO MOM, NOT POP, ISRAELI COURT RULES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 6 (JTA) -- An Israeli court has awarded custody of a frozen embryo produced by a now-divorced couple to the mother, in the first case of its kind to confront the Israeli legal system.

The Haifa District Court on Thursday rejected the request of the woman's ex-husband to prevent the embryo's implantation in a surrogate mother.

The case began several years ago, when Haifa resident Ruthi Nahmani had to undergo an operation of which a side effect was her inability to have any children in the future.

Since she and her husband, Danny, were at the time married and wanted to have a child, they decided that she should become pregnant and that the fertilized egg would be gestated in a surrogate mother.

But after the fertilization took place, the couple separated and divorced. The husband left home, married and started a new family.

He subsequently made a legal demand that the implantation process be stopped, arguing that he was not willing to be forced to become the father of a child he would not raise.

But the mother responded that since this was her only chance to have a child, the fertilized eggs should be regarded as a pregnancy-in-progress.

In a precedent-setting ruling, Judge Hanoch Ariel ruled that there was no further need for consent from the former husband, since he had previously agreed to the procedure.

According to the judge, the father had no right to retract his original consent.

Nahmani's ex-husband said he would appeal. A similar case in the United States, involving a divorced Tennessee couple, went the other way, when a court affirmed the father's right to have the embryos destroyed.