

**ISRAEL AGREES TO RECOGNIZE PLO
IN A HISTORIC REVERSAL OF POLICY**

By Cynthia Mann and David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- In a historic reversal of government policy, Israel has decided to extend official recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres made the announcement Thursday following a series of secret meetings in Paris at which high-level Israeli and PLO officials hammered away at the language of a mutual recognition pact.

In Tunis, PLO leader Yasir Arafat signed a letter Thursday night to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin renouncing violence and stating that the PLO "recognizes the right of Israel to exist in peace and security."

Rabin, in turn, was due to formalize Israel's recognition of the PLO by signing a letter to Arafat on Friday morning saying that the Jewish state now regards the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people."

Rabin had originally been expected to sign the letter to Arafat late Thursday, but the move was delayed pending the arrival here of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst, who helped mediate the Israeli-PLO negotiations and was to deliver the letter from Arafat.

In Washington, the United States appeared to be close to resuming its own dialogue with the PLO, which was suspended in 1990 following an attempted terrorist attack on Israel by one of the organization's factions.

President Clinton had planned to make a major announcement on the Middle East on Thursday, but it was later canceled. Sources said the administration decided to wait until the Israeli-PLO recognition pact had been finalized.

But the administration may not be prepared yet to formally recognize the PLO's legitimacy. State Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters Thursday that resuming the U.S. dialogue with the PLO is "a much different question" than "establishing some formal recognition."

Approved Unanimously In Israel

Here in Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Peres' announcement of Israel's decision to recognize the PLO was made after the pact was approved unanimously Thursday by the 10-member "inner Cabinet" of senior ministers.

The ministers later hailed the historic development and expressed hope about the changes it would spur in the region.

The Knesset, which was expected to approve the pact, was scheduled to vote on the matter after Rosh Hashanah.

In Tunis, the PLO executive committee endorsed the pact Thursday, authorizing Arafat to sign the letter recognizing Israel.

Peres was expected to fly to Washington for an official signing ceremony with the PLO on Monday. The two parties were also expected to sign an agreement that would grant Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho as a preliminary step toward extending Palestinian authority throughout the territories.

It was not clear who would represent the

PLO at the ceremony, which was scheduled for 11 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

The Israel-PLO pact was finalized in secret negotiations that were held this week in Paris.

The negotiations involved the same top officials from Norway, Israel and the PLO who together worked out the preliminary accord on limited Palestinian self-rule in the territories.

Among those present in Paris were Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst; Uri Savir, director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, and his legal adviser, Yoel Zinger; and Ahmed Khoury, better known as Abu Alaa, chief of the PLO's finance department.

The final text of the recognition pact was drafted Thursday morning in the Hotel Bristol, a stone's throw from French President Francois Mitterrand's offices at the Elysee Palace.

Mitterrand appeared live on French television to salute "the extraordinary physical, moral and intellectual courage of those men" who reached the agreement on mutual recognition.

The letters that are being exchanged between Rabin and Arafat meet each leader's conditions for mutual recognition.

'New Era,' Or 'Black Day'?

Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said the PLO letter and the changes in the organization's covenant mark a clear recognition of Israel's right to live in peace and security.

He said the PLO leadership's call to its people to suspend terrorism and violence signifies a new chapter for Israel.

Minister of Culture Shulamit Aloni, who heads the dovish Meretz bloc, called the development the "beginning of a new era" and said she was going to celebrate.

But opposition politicians were enraged and denounced the agreement as treacherous.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu called it a "black day for the State of Israel and a happy day for its enemies."

Tsomet party leader Rafael Eitan said the agreement recognizes an entity bent on the destruction of Israel.

But Peres said the agreement has "great historic meaning." Saying he is "convinced we are doing the right thing," Peres added, "We think it is going to revolutionize relations between the Arab world and the Jewish world, between the Palestinians and the State of Israel."

In Washington, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which had lobbied for years against granting legitimacy to the PLO, issued a statement saying its leaders "warmly welcome the historic decision" of the PLO to renounce terror and recognize Israel.

"We believe that it is appropriate and within the intention of the law for the United States to reopen a dialogue with the PLO under these changed circumstances," the influential lobby said in a noticeable shift of policy.

In New York, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was more cautious. It called the pact "a hopeful augury of reconciliation between two peoples who have lived in tension and hostility for nearly a century."

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Michel Di Paz in Paris.)

TEXT OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION LETTERS

JERUSALEM, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- Following are the texts of letters in which the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel formally recognize each other.

Yitzhak Rabin
Prime Minister of Israel

Mr. Prime Minister,

The signing of the Declaration of Principles marks a new era in the history of the Middle East. In firm conviction thereof, I would like to confirm the following PLO commitments:

The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security.

The PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations.

The PLO considers that the signing of the Declaration of Principles constitutes a historic event, inaugurating a new epoch of peaceful coexistence, free from violence and all other acts which endanger peace and stability. Accordingly, the PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violence and discipline violators.

In view of the promise of a new era and the signing of the Declaration of Principles and based on Palestinian acceptance of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval and necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant.

Sincerely,
Yasir Arafat
Chairman, the Palestine Liberation Organization

His Excellency Johan Jorgen Holst
Foreign Minister of Norway

Dear Minister Holst,

I would like to confirm to you that, upon the signing of the Declaration of Principles, I will include the following positions in my public statements: In light of the new era marked by the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the PLO encourages and calls upon the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take part in the steps leading to the normalization of life, rejecting violence and terrorism, contributing to peace and stability and participating actively in shaping reconstruction, economic development and cooperation.

Sincerely,
Yasir Arafat
Chairman, the Palestine Liberation Organization

Yasir Arafat
Chairman, the Palestine Liberation Organization

Mr. Chairman,

In response to your letter of September 9, 1993, I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process.

Yitzhak Rabin
Prime Minister of Israel

SHAS PULLS OUT OF COALITION, WEAKENING RABIN'S GOVERNMENT

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- In a move that seriously weakens Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government, the Shas party has decided to withdraw from the Labor-led coalition.

Officials of the fervently Orthodox Sephardic party made the announcement Thursday evening. But they did not say whether the party would also withdraw its support for a historic agreement that would implement Palestinian self-rule first in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

As a result of the Shas secession, the Rabin government is left with a governing plurality of 56 Knesset members -- out of a total of 120 -- from the Labor Party and Meretz bloc.

Unless Labor can persuade additional parties to join the government, it will be forced to rely on the support of the five Knesset members belonging to the two left-wing Arab parties, Hadash and the Arab Democratic Party, in an upcoming crucial vote on the agreement for Palestinian self-rule.

The agreement, which was approved last week by Israel's Cabinet, calls for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho as a preliminary step toward extending Arab authority throughout the territories.

Until now, no Israeli government has relied on the Arab parties to stay in power. This situation would be particularly awkward at a time when Rabin seeks a broad mandate to make a controversial peace with the Palestinians.

The government crisis was prompted by an Israeli Supreme Court ruling Wednesday that two top Shas officials, Interior Minister Aryeh Deri and Deputy Religious Affairs Minister Raphael Pinhasi, should resign in light of charges of financial misconduct that have been brought against them.

Deri submitted his resignation Wednesday to the prime minister; Pinhasi offered his Thursday.

The Shas party has generally favored a settlement with the Palestinians. But the cases against Deri and Pinhasi have generated anger and bitterness within its ranks, and a belief they are being persecuted because they are Sephardic Jews.

On Thursday, the party's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, ordered two other Shas deputy ministers to resign from the government.

Yosef apparently will not make any decision on the party's stance toward the peace plan until after he meets Friday with Rabin and Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, to discuss the security implications of the agreement.

181 OF THE PALESTINIAN DEPORTEES RETURN AFTER NINE MONTHS OF EXILE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- After nine months of exile, 181 of the Palestinian extremists who were deported to Lebanon last December have re-crossed the border and returned to the administered territories.

The deportees, who returned Thursday, left behind 207 other Palestinians, who are scheduled to return to Israel in December.

The deportees, all suspected members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements, had been living in a tent camp at Marj al-Zahour in Lebanon, some two miles north of Israel's buffer security zone.

Israel had agreed to allow 189 of the deportees to return, but eight decided to remain in Lebanon, fearing long prison terms if they accepted the offer, according to a camp spokesperson.

In all, Israel deported 415 Palestinians to Lebanon last December, following a series of murderous attacks by Muslim extremists within Israel.

According to a plan worked out by Israel in mid-August, the group of 189 detainees were to return this week, with the balance to return by the end of the year.

Nineteen of the original group were returned to Israel earlier this year because of illness or because Israeli authorities admitted they had been expelled in error.

The 181 returning deportees made their way on foot to the Zumriya crossing point, where tents had been erected for their processing.

After they were given medical examinations by Red Cross doctors and went through an identification process, the deportees were placed aboard waiting buses for a short trip to another holding area inside the security zone.

'Let Us Hope' They've Learned A Lesson

They then boarded two buses for their return to prisons and detention camps inside Israel and the territories.

The windows of the buses were painted over to conceal the identities of the passengers from curious passers-by, particularly those in Kiryat Shmona, many of whom were angered by Israel's decision to free the deportees.

According to Israel Radio, the deportees were bound but not blindfolded, as they had been when they were deported last December. The transfer took from morning until late evening Thursday.

The returnees were scheduled to be questioned by Israeli security officials. Those who were under arrest before their deportation were to return to jail. Those not under suspicion of participating in terrorist acts were to be allowed to return to their homes.

"Let us hope that those who spent the past few months in Lebanon have learned a lesson and now know that the government of Israel will not rest in the face of violence and terrorism carried out against its citizens and soldiers," said a statement issued by Israel's Defense Ministry.

"The government and the security forces will not desist" to struggle "against those who perpetrate acts of terrorism and who seek to undermine the peace process," and Israel "will not hesitate to take extraordinary measures against those who engage in terrorism," it said.

CZECH JEWISH COMMUNITY DISAPPOINTED BY VETO OF A BILL TO RETURN PROPERTY

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- The Jewish community here has expressed disappointment over a recent decision by the governing coalition parties to reject a bill that would restore Jewish properties seized by the Nazis.

"The Jews are the only community in this country waiting in vain for justice," Jiri Danicek, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Czech Republic, said following the decision.

A proposed law for the return of Jewish properties had been prepared and approved in March 1992 by the government of the Czech Republic under the united Czechoslovakia.

According to the bill's provisions, synagogue buildings, cemeteries, rabbis' dwellings and other properties that formerly belonged to Jewish communities and organizations were to be returned to Czech Jewry as an act of justice and reconciliation.

But the proposed law was put aside after the defeat of the previous government in the June 1992 general elections.

The new coalition government led by Vaclav Klaus concentrated on more urgent legislation -- particularly laws connected with the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate states, which took place on Jan. 1.

Current Czech restitution legislation only affects property expropriated after the Communist takeover of the country on Feb. 25, 1948.

But the majority of former Jewish property which is now owned or used by the state or municipalities had been expropriated by the Nazis after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

Only A Few Towns Would Return Buildings

Immediately after the war, it had been possible to reclaim Jewish property from the Czechoslovak authorities.

But as a result of several factors -- including obstruction of the process by government authorities, the lack of formal evidence, as well as the deaths of many claimants at Nazi hands -- a large part of the formerly Jewish property had not been returned before the Communist takeover of 1948.

In subsequent years, the Communists refused to return any state-administered wealth to individuals or religious communities.

More recently, a number of leading politicians, including former President Vaclav Havel, had expressed their support of a bill that would remedy former injustices against the Jewish community.

But in the current ruling coalition -- particularly within the Civic Democratic Party of Prime Minister Klaus -- the prevailing desire is for a new law that would return only those properties that had been used for communal religious activities.

If the new law were enacted, Jewish property taken away from individual members of the Jewish community before Feb. 25, 1948 would not be subject to restitution at all.

Only a few municipalities have shown any willingness to return buildings which once belonged to the Jewish community.

Danicek, the Jewish federation's president, warned that "three of the nine still existing Jewish communities in the Czech Republic" might have to close down for economic reasons.

AFTER PRODDING, RENO DELAYS DECISION ON INVESTIGATING CROWN HEIGHTS RIOTS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- Shortly before U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno was expected to announce that she would not pursue a federal investigation into the handling of the 1991 Crown Heights riots, Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) intervened and convinced her to postpone her decision, according to several knowledgeable sources.

Schumer, who represents sections of Brooklyn and Queens in Congress -- but not the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn -- is chairman of the House subcommittee on crime and criminal justice and is said to carry considerable clout in Reno's office.

Reno was expected to announce her decision regarding Crown Heights on Thursday. But news leaked out Wednesday that she was going to deny requests by both Jewish and black groups for an investigation to determine whether residents' civil rights were violated during the rioting.

Early Thursday morning, Schumer asked the attorney general to postpone her decision until she had a chance to examine more evidence from Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes.

She agreed to do so, and is expected to announce her decision within several weeks. Hynes would not confirm any involvement in Reno's postponed decision but sources in Schumer's office confirmed his and Hynes' involvement.

According to Schumer aide Jules Polonetsky, the Justice Department had not recently spoken with Hynes, who felt he had since come across substantial information bolstering the case for a federal investigation.

While Reno herself has given no indication of why she planned not to pursue federal prosecutions, one source close to the Justice Department said that Reno's office "has been saying that the kind and amount of evidence they have isn't enough to provide sufficient grounds for a federal civil rights investigation."

Lack Of Deadlines Prompts New Approach

At her news conference Thursday, Reno indicated that she changed her mind after receiving some information early that morning.

"I didn't hear about it until this morning, and when people suggest that they have legal arguments and that there are no time deadlines and that there are no issues that would require that I make a decision today rather than wait to hear those legal arguments, and there may be some basis for those legal arguments, I hear them," she said.

While she was planning not to pursue federal prosecution, Reno was going to be "very critical of the handling of the Lemrick Nelson case," according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

Nelson was one of the crowd of black teenagers who surrounded Lubavitch scholar Yankel Rosenbaum on the evening of Aug. 19, 1991, some of whom were yelling "Kill the Jew." The rioting in which Rosenbaum was engulfed broke out after a 7-year-old black boy, Gavin Cato, was killed by a car driven by a Hasidic driver.

Jews were stunned when Nelson was acquitted, in October 1992, of being one of those who fatally stabbed Rosenbaum. He had been the only person charged in the murder. Shortly after the acquittal, the Crown Heights Jewish com-

munity began calling for a federal investigation of the crime.

Hynes' handling of the prosecution was thrashed in a comprehensive report prepared by Richard Girgenti, New York state's director of criminal justice and made public in July.

"We're going to utilize the next few weeks to continue in our efforts to secure a full federal investigation that will follow the evidence wherever it leads," said Michael Miller, executive director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) blasted the Justice Department for delaying a decision about federal prosecution, and said Reno was "playing politics" with the injustices that remain two years after riots tore through Crown Heights.

WARSAW JEWISH COMMUNITY HOLDS FIRST BRIT MILAH IN OVER 30 YEARS

By Jed Sunden

KIEV, Ukraine, Sept. 9 (JTA) -- Members of the small but revitalized Jewish community of Warsaw recently had an opportunity to attend the first brit milah to be performed in Poland in over 30 years.

And it wasn't just one brit. It was 11.

The ritual circumcisions, which were performed Aug. 31, took place without fanfare or notice by the community at large -- which put the event in striking contrast to the last circumcision performed in Poland.

On that occasion, in 1962, the mohel was arrested and interned for several days by the Polish government for performing the ceremony.

Rabbi Yitzchok Fischer, executive director of the International Bris Milah Association, was flown in from Monsey, N.Y., to perform the procedure last week. Eleven men, ranging in ages from 15 to 40, took part in the ritual.

The International Bris Milah Association has performed circumcisions on more than 2,500 male infants in the former Soviet Union during the past several years, when restrictions were eased.

The organization has also performed thousands of circumcisions on older emigres to the United States and Canada, and is expanding its program throughout the world.

During the past several years, following the collapse of Communist rule in Poland, Warsaw's Jewish community has expanded its activities.

After more than two decades during which Poland did not have a single rabbi, there are now two working in Warsaw full time.

Circumcisions, like many other Jewish religious rituals, were forbidden or severely limited under the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

In the 1920s, shortly after the Bolshevik revolution, when anti-religious persecution was near its highest point, circumcisions were attacked as "barbaric" rites and restricted.

When persecution was at its most extreme, several mohalim and parents were put on public trial for "maiming and deforming" children.

After World War II, nearly all circumcisions in the Soviet bloc were performed without the knowledge of the Communist authorities.

In 1962, one rabbi, Tzvi Bronstein, traveled to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to perform clandestine circumcisions. Though he performed the ceremony many times in the Soviet Union without being discovered by the authorities, he was caught by the Polish police and deported from the country.