

**ISRAEL FREES LONGEST-HELD PRISONER
IN GOODWILL GESTURE TO PALESTINIANS**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- In an effort to build confidence among Palestinians for the implementation of the self-rule accord signed last month in Washington, Israel has released its longest-held Palestinian prisoner.

Twenty-three years after Salim al-Zeri entered the gates of an Israeli jail, he was set free Tuesday to the cheers of hundreds of Palestinians who had turned out to greet him.

Zeri, 50, had been a commander in Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat's Al Fatah movement. He was jailed in 1970 after he attempted to infiltrate Israel with a terrorist unit from the sea. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The release came as Israel and the PLO were scheduled to resume their negotiations in the Sinai border town of Taba over the implementation of the self-rule accord.

There are an estimated 11,000 Palestinian detainees and prisoners in Israeli jails.

The PLO has demanded that all the prisoners be released as part of the accord, but Israeli officials insist that prisoners convicted of murdering Israelis will not be released.

Yet Israel is preparing a massive release of other prisoners -- including administrative detainees, women and minors as well as the elderly and sick -- to demonstrate some immediate positive results from the self-rule accord.

It is believed that, as a first step, Israel will release some 4,000 prisoners who have been sentenced up to five years in jail.

Criticism From Likud

But Israeli sources stressed Tuesday that the criteria by which Palestinian prisoners would be released -- and consequently their total number -- would be negotiated in Taba.

In the 1960s, Zeri was involved in a number of terrorist attacks against Israel Defense Force targets in the Gaza region, but no Israeli soldiers were hurt as a result of his actions.

Although he had murdered an Arab who had been suspected of collaborating with the Israeli authorities, the act was not considered grounds for his continued imprisonment.

A government spokesman said Tuesday that since no terrorist attacks had been perpetrated by the PLO since the signing of the accord, there was "no reason not to release Zeri after 23 years in prison."

The plan for a massive release of Palestinian prisoners was sharply criticized this week by the Likud Knesset faction.

The Likud claimed that the release of security prisoners was an "irresponsible act which endangers the personal security of Israel's citizens."

But Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab who is an adviser to Arafat, said it was time to forget the horrors of the past and to work together for a better future.

"I understand the sensitivity of the public in Israel," said Tibi, "but a new leaf has been turned."

**NAVAL OFFICER WARNS ISRAEL
TO EXPECT MORE TERROR ATTEMPTS**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- A ranking naval officer is warning that Israel can expect infiltration attempts from the sea similar to an Oct. 9 incident in which a terrorist attempted to reach Israel on a jet ski.

Addressing military correspondents Monday at Navy Day observances, Maj. Gen. Ami Ayalon said he expects that infiltration attempts, launched by fundamentalist groups opposed to Israel's self-rule accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization, could be expected to come mainly from Lebanon.

But he did not rule out the possibility of attacks coming from the Red Sea or from the Mediterranean near the Gaza Strip.

"The terrorists continue to conduct sea maneuvers, especially in the Tripoli area of northern Lebanon," Ayalon said.

Infiltration attempts could be expected "by a range of methods," he said.

Ayalon said terrorist organizations possess many speedboats and other sailing equipment, including fast water scooters, or jet skis, such as that used in the Oct. 9 attempt to reach the coast south of Rosh Hanikra, a town near Israel's border with Lebanon.

Members of the PLO's Al Fatah organization in Lebanon who oppose the self-rule accord were joining opposition groups and taking their weapons with them, he said.

The navy commander said that Israel intends to acquire some \$2 billion in new equipment.

**ISRAELI OFFICIAL MAKES APPEAL
ON BOYCOTT TO ARAB AMERICANS**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- In a break with the tradition in which Israeli officials come to Washington to meet with U.S. government and Jewish leaders, an Israeli official met with Arab Americans.

Israeli Housing Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer met Monday with a joint group of Jewish and Arab American officials.

In what is believed to be the first substantive meeting between an Israeli official and top Arab American leaders, the luncheon was yet another in a series of groundbreaking events between the two communities here since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed their landmark agreement last month.

The meeting was organized by Project Nishma, a group that promotes education about the peace process.

Ben-Eliezer urged the Arab American leaders to speak out against the continuing Arab boycott of Israel.

The boycott has become a hot topic here in recent weeks, with U.S. officials denouncing it as an anachronism now that both the Palestinians and Jordan are entering economic relationships with Israel.

"We expect you, the Arab lobby, to raise your voices" against the boycott, Ben-Eliezer told the officials, who included leaders from the

National Association of Arab Americans and the Arab American Institute, as well as the Egyptian ambassador to Washington.

James Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute who was at Monday's meeting, said in an interview Tuesday that the Arab American community here, like Arab countries, is split on the subject of the Arab boycott.

He said his institution believes that the secondary boycott of companies doing business with Israel is "not helpful" and should be ended.

'Everything Is Negotiable'

In 1991, Zogby said, his group proposed trading the boycott for a recognition of Palestinian national rights, and now, "to be consistent," there should be a trade.

But he said there was "no point" to Arab American groups issuing statements opposing the boycott because they have been holding meetings on the issue and are supportive of the peace process.

At a small briefing at the Israeli Embassy for reporters Tuesday that included members of the Egyptian press -- in itself an unusual occurrence -- Ben-Eliezer called Monday's meeting "very promising."

During the briefing, Ben-Eliezer spoke of reaching agreement with Syria by the end of 1994.

"Syria is the lever for the whole thing," he said, adding that once peace is reached with Syria, Israel could look forward to relations with such Arab countries as Qatar.

"Everything is negotiable," Ben-Eliezer said several times. But he drew the line at the issue of Jerusalem, calling it "taboo" and "out of any negotiations."

Ben-Eliezer also met with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros. The two discussed a plan to establish a three-way Israeli, U.S. and Palestinian planning committee to work on future rehabilitation of Gaza, Ben-Eliezer said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

IN A CHANGED MIDDLE EAST LANDSCAPE, PEACE NOW TAKES LOOK AT ITS MISSION

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- As members of the dovish group Americans for Peace Now gathered last week for their 1993 Advocacy Seminar, one of the main questions was where the group would go from here.

After all, one of its major goals, achieving some sort of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, had been more than fulfilled with last month's historic ceremony between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

But APN leaders say the group still has an important mission in educating Americans about the peace process and in working to ensure that the Israeli-PLO agreement is implemented.

APN, which has been controversial among some in the organized Jewish community, is now poised to have a much stronger voice within the community than in the past, for several reasons.

Some positions long espoused by APN, such as mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, have been embraced by the Clinton administration and Israel's Labor government.

Several former APN board members are serving in high positions within the Clinton administration. For example, Sara Ehrman is an

official at the Democratic National Committee, and Peter Edelman is a special assistant at the Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition, the group just hired Gary Rubin, director of national affairs for the centrist American Jewish Committee, to serve as APN's chief executive officer beginning Nov. 1.

And APN -- which is affiliated with the Israeli group Shalom Achshav -- is now ensconced in the mainstream Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"Our prospects are very bright," Rubin said. "The majority of American Jews, and of the Israeli population, is on our side."

At the advocacy seminar in Washington last week, APN leaders discussed the group's future priorities.

Rubin said that Peace Now planned to focus on three major areas: explaining the peace agreement to Americans and Israelis, working to resolve future problems that could hinder the agreement's implementation, and working with Shalom Achshav in Israel to prepare for peace.

Major Groups Oppose Agreement

On the first point, there are still "significant groups in the Jewish community" opposing the agreement, Rubin said. And even among those who support it, there are many who do not have a deep knowledge of its complex details.

In addition, Rubin said, it is important that American Jews demonstrate support for the agreement.

The vast majority of American Jews, according to recent polls, support the accord.

On the second point, Rubin said there will be many issues that could be difficult to resolve, including security arrangements, borders, refugees and the future of the Golan Heights. APN will be promoting ideas combining the concept of compromise with the concept of Israeli security, he said.

And on the third issue, APN and Shalom Achshav will be expanding dialogue programs between Israeli and Palestinian youths. They also will be working on new education programs that would change textbooks that promote hatred between the two groups, for example.

"Our bread and butter issue in this country," said Gail Pressberg, "is to reflect the discussion that goes on in Israel and among Palestinians."

Pressberg said the group would continue along those lines now that Israelis and Palestinians have signed an agreement. She has been directing APN and will head its Washington office when Rubin assumes his post.

"The ice was broken with the handshake," she said. "Now is the time to talk about the details."

The group has planned for Knesset members and for Israeli and Palestinian military and security experts to tour the United States, speaking to Jewish groups and synagogues.

And it is about to unveil a video presentation about the peace process, featuring Israeli and Palestinian officials and young people, and Israeli soldiers.

APN officials have set a broad agenda, and say that priorities will have to be assigned over the next few weeks.

"We recognize that we will have to pick and prioritize. But it's just a few weeks after the landscape in which we work has been totally transformed," said Shifra Bronznick, APN's executive committee chair.

FOCUS ON ISSUES:**JEWISH AGENCIES FALL SHORT ON FAMILY LEAVE PROVISIONS**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- When it comes to supporting family- and woman-friendly legislation, the leaders of Jewish communal organizations wax eloquent.

But a survey of Jewish communal and religious organizations reveals that their pro-family philosophies often do not extend very far when it comes to their own employees.

In fact, there is a dramatic disparity between the rhetoric of Jewish groups and the reality within their own four walls.

Most national Jewish organizations do not have any paid parental leave, and some have no policies in place regarding leave.

The Family and Medical Leave Act, which was signed into law as one of President Clinton's first official acts and went into effect in August, mandates that businesses with 50 or more employees allow workers to take up to 12 unpaid weeks out of the office after having or adopting a child, or in case an immediate family member is ill.

The act, which also had been adopted the previous year by Congress but vetoed by President Bush, had the singular distinction of being backed by every mainstream Jewish group, said Diana Aviv, associate executive director of National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

NJCRCAC is the umbrella group representing 13 national and 117 community Jewish agencies on matters of domestic and international concern.

Many of the family leave act's Jewish organizational advocates termed the mandated unpaid leave a "modest" pro-family step.

Yet not one of the national Jewish agencies surveyed by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency offers employees any paid time off. This forces staffers to hoard vacation and sick time if they plan to have children, and to try to support a family without an income once the baby is born and the accrued time runs out.

Two of the Jewish community's staunchest advocates for pro-family policies have no clear family leave policy.

The 'Cornerstone' Of Jewish Life

NJCRCAC, which has long advocated the family leave law, allows its employees a single paid week off, which is deducted from sick time, upon the birth of a child.

Beyond that it allows no parental leave, paid or unpaid. And vacation cannot be accrued from year to year, prohibiting someone anticipating a child from accumulating time to be used later.

"Most of the women hired here have been past childbearing age," said Sanford Gutkin, NJCRCAC's director of administration and finance.

NJCRCAC is not alone in its lack of a clear parental leave policy.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, wrote to Bush in September 1992, strongly urging him to sign the act into law.

"The Reform movement fervently believes that no one should ever be forced to neglect familial obligations because one fears losing one's job," he wrote.

"The family is the cornerstone of Jewish tradition and Jewish life. We must cherish our families, our children and our parents. We must celebrate the dedication that family members show

by working to support one another and caring for each other when they are ill or hurt," he wrote.

Yet there is no mention of leave for maternity or paternity in the UAHC's personnel policies, said Bob Koppel, UAHC's business manager. No one gets any paid time, if they are able to negotiate with their boss for any time off at all.

There is "a somewhat unclear, non-specified leave policy for senior staff, as executives, that says if you have a need for leave you can request it and it is not unreasonably held back," he said.

Any unpaid time taken by clerical or technical staffers is not included when their total length of service is computed.

The lack of a clearly delineated policy, protecting employees' jobs for a reasonable amount of time, may have something to do with the fact that, according to Koppel, no female employee of the UAHC has ever taken more than several weeks off after giving birth.

Crying 'Gevalt' Over Birthrate

Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress, also wrote to Bush urging him to sign the family leave act.

"More and more Americans are finding themselves forced to choose between caring for their loved ones and keeping a job to meet the family's financial needs," he wrote.

The AJCongress provides no paid leave. But it does allow employees to apply accrued vacation and sick time to their leave and will allow someone to take up to a year off in the case of a birth or a family member's illness, and return to the same job, according to Marvin Besner, director of administration.

Similarly, the American Jewish Committee praised the enactment of the act in February.

Mimi Alperin, chair of AJCommittee's national affairs commission, applauded "Washington's new willingness to forge pro-family policies, not simply talk about them."

The AJCommittee provides no paid time off to employees who have just had children.

It does allow employees to use accrued vacation time during their unpaid leave, said Carol Buglio, director of AJCommittee's New Jersey area office and president of the organization's in-house union.

AJCommittee also allows employees to use sick days to care for a sick child. Up to 60 sick days can be accrued for later use, said Buglio, and after 15 years of employment, up to 80 sick days can be accrued.

"If the Jewish community is as concerned with issues of continuity and identity as it says it is, then we have to look at our own organizations," said Ann Lewis, chair of the American Jewish Congress Commission for Women's Equality.

"We make it difficult for Jewish women professionals to be pregnant and have babies in a community where we're crying 'gevalt' over the lack of Jewish babies," she said.

ISRAELI HAS LUCKY DAY AT DISNEY

PARIS (JTA) -- Oct. 5 was a lucky day at EuroDisney for Ya'akov Perlmutter.

The Israeli tourist was visiting the theme park near the French capital when he took part in an "Aladdin's Magic Lamp Drawing."

The genie of Aladdin's-lamp fame liked the Tel Aviv area resident enough to name him "Aladdin for a Day." Along with the title came the grand prize: a new Renault car.

MAGIC JOHNSON TRIP HIGHLIGHTS THE INCIDENCE OF AIDS IN ISRAEL

By Michele Chabira

JERUSALEM, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- Israelis engaged in the fight against AIDS were ecstatic upon hearing that Magic Johnson would be visiting Israel in October.

They viewed Johnson's visit -- during which he was scheduled to participate in an exhibition game against the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team -- as a means for raising tens of thousands of dollars for AIDS research and education, and for boosting AIDS awareness in Israel.

According to Israel's Ministry of Health, there have been 249 reported cases of AIDS in Israel. Another 1,064 people are reportedly infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, but have not developed the full-blown disease.

But other health professionals say the number of infected people in Israel is much higher. The World Health Organization places the number of HIV-infected Israelis at about 10,000.

Given these statistics, it was no surprise that AIDS activists here eagerly anticipated Johnson's arrival.

But when it came time for Johnson, who is infected with HIV, to help raise awareness about the disease, for many activists reality did not live up to expectations.

During his three-day stay in Israel, Johnson participated in only one charity event and made just a few references to the disease that cut short his brilliant career in the National Basketball Association.

Instead, Johnson spent most of his time practicing for the scheduled match-up between members of Maccabi Tel Aviv and Johnson's All-Stars, a professional team composed of former NBA players and some college standouts.

Johnson, a former NBA superstar, retired in 1992 after testing positive for HIV. Since then, he has toured extensively, lecturing about AIDS prevention and raising money for research.

Many AIDS professionals, from political activists to physicians, privately expressed disappointment with Johnson's visit, given his stature in the AIDS community.

Though no one faulted Johnson -- all agreed that he has contributed more to the AIDS cause than any other single person -- some blamed the Israeli government's lack of initiative, while others said Johnson's business managers had been uncooperative.

"Magic Johnson's visit had great potential, but the government did almost nothing to take advantage of it," said Mikie Goldstein, a board member of the Israel AIDS Task Force.

AIDS Awareness In Israel 'Is Pretty Low'

"The level of AIDS awareness in Israel is pretty low, and the visit could have gone a long way toward correcting misconceptions," said Goldstein, who added that many Israelis still believe that AIDS is a disease confined to gay men and drug users.

"They think it's an imported disease, something that Israelis get from foreigners, not something we give to one another. The fact is, AIDS is already in this country, and it is spreading," he said.

"The government had a golden opportunity here to raise awareness and education, and it blew it," Goldstein said.

The Health Ministry defended its actions,

noting that at its request Johnson and his All-Stars played a spirited charity game with Knesset members that was attended by hundreds of sick and disadvantaged children.

"I think the trip did a great deal to promote AIDS awareness," said Dr. Zvi Ben-Yishai, chairman of the government's Israel AIDS Committee.

The game Johnson played "raised several thousand shekels, which will be donated to the AIDS Task Force, and the media attention highlighted the AIDS threat," Ben-Yishai said. "Magic Johnson has done a tremendous amount to fight AIDS, but not everything he does has to be AIDS-related."

Business promoter Yehuda Talit, who coordinated Johnson's visit to Israel, was more blunt: "Johnson came here for one reason -- to play Maccabi Tel Aviv. His primary considerations were financial."

Inon Schenker, executive director of the Jerusalem AIDS Project, a group specializing in education and outreach, said he and other AIDS activists contacted Johnson's business office months ago, when the visit was first announced.

"We approached the office and requested some sort of assistance that would make his visit here more visible from an AIDS perspective. The answer was, 'Sorry, you should have contacted us sooner.'"

Schenker nonetheless believes that Johnson's visit was far from a failure.

From a legal standpoint, he said, "Johnson's visit was a precedent. In January, the government decided that foreign workers who are HIV-positive can be denied a visa to enter the country. But Johnson was allowed into the country on business grounds. If Magic Johnson, who has HIV, received a visa and played basketball, no one can deny entry to a Portuguese worker who wants to come and work."

EUROPEAN RABBIS MEET IN UKRAINE

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) -- The European Board of Rabbis held a meeting here last week that marked the first time it had convened in any of the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, a Brooklyn native who is now chief rabbi of Ukraine, welcomed Jewish leaders from 47 countries to the conference.

The parley was headed by Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, formerly the chief rabbi of Britain.

In his opening remarks, Bleich noted the historical significance of the event.

"After 70 years of communism in Ukraine, that such an event, the meeting of rabbis, would happen in Kiev seems unbelievable," he said.

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Communist government confiscated hundreds of synagogues and community buildings in Ukraine.

Last year, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk signed a decree establishing a system of restitution for property confiscated from religious communities.

The religious gathering, held at the Choral Synagogue, was a combined event.

The gathering of European rabbis was paired with the opening meeting of the Second All-Ukrainian Conference of the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, the leading religious group here. Numerous Ukrainian government officials attended the opening ceremony and addressed the two rabbinical groups.