

**AS ISRAEL, PLO PREPARE TO MEET,
DISAGREEMENT OVER TALKS' LENGTH**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- While Israelis and Palestinians have agreed to resume their talks, the two sides are offering widely varying estimates of how long it will take to reach an agreement.

Breaking a 10-day deadlock in their talks, Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organization negotiators said five negotiators from each side will meet daily, beginning Monday, at the Sinai border town of Taba until they resolve all the issues facing them.

But how long that will take depends on who is making the estimate.

Israeli ministers, after a briefing by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday, predicted it would take up to two months of intensive talks to resolve the two sides' differences.

"There are literally hundreds of issues to be dealt with," one Cabinet source said.

But Nabil Sha'ath, the chief PLO negotiator in Taba, told reporters that the negotiations could be completed in two to three weeks.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, a member of the Israeli negotiating team in Cairo before the talks reached a standstill, dismissed Sha'ath's estimate as wishful thinking.

"If he turns out to be right, I'll be the first to applaud," Sarid said on Sunday. "But better to be realistic than over-optimistic."

The Two Sides Could Miss April Deadline

Considerably more is at stake than which estimate will turn out to be right.

Six or eight more weeks of negotiations might mean that the two sides could miss their next deadline -- April 13 -- when, according to the self-rule accord the two sides signed last September, Israel is scheduled to complete troop withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

Moreover, protracted Israeli-Palestinian negotiations could upset the carefully laid U.S. plans to reactivate in the coming weeks the Israeli-Syrian negotiations, which have been stalled for months.

President Clinton is scheduled to meet in Geneva on Jan. 16 with Syrian President Hafez Assad, who for many years was regarded in Washington as an inveterate hard-liner and a supporter of regional and international terrorism.

The United States is not yet ready to embrace Assad. But the meeting between the two leaders is regarded by both sides as a potential turning point.

Syria, bereft of a superpower backer after the fall of the Soviet Union, is anxious to win the favor of the American government.

The United States is determined to follow an Israeli-PLO accord with an Israeli-Syrian pact that would hold out the promise of long-term stability in the Middle East.

The big question, Rabin was reported as telling the Cabinet on Sunday, is whether the Syrian leader will speak clearly with Clinton about his concept of peace with Israel.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
TAKING NAME FROM PRE-1967 BORDER,
'WOMEN IN GREEN' PROTEST PLO PACT**
By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- At a time when many groups opposed to the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization accord are struggling to get their views across to the public in Israel and abroad, one women's organization is conveying its message loud and clear.

Known as Women for Israel's Tomorrow, the group has proven adept at attracting media coverage at a time when events and demonstrations linked to the pact between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat constantly vie for air time and headlines.

Inaugurated eight months ago by some 30 Jerusalem women who were opposed to territorial concessions to the Palestinians, the group has sprouted into an organization with 1,000 dues-paying members.

Thousands of sympathizers and supporters have also lined up behind the organization.

According to Ruth Matar, a founder and chairwoman of Women for Israel's Tomorrow, the vast majority of the group's members live within Israel's pre-1967 borders.

'Ordinary Israelis Who Oppose' Agreement

"We're not settlers," she said. "We're ordinary Israelis who oppose the agreement between Rabin and Arafat."

This fact is important, Matar asserted, "because we represent the views of a growing number of Israelis."

Quoting recent opinion polls, which indicate that the majority of Israelis no longer support the accord, she said, "The tide of public opinion in Israel is turning, and our voice needs to be heard."

Matar said she and several like-minded friends, many of them originally from English-speaking countries, launched the organization "partly as an answer to the media's coverage of anti-government demonstrators."

"The media in Israel has traditionally portrayed anyone who demonstrates against concessions to the Arabs as settlers and right-wing fanatics," she said.

"That was especially true after Rabin and Arafat signed the agreement and hundreds of thousands of Israelis came out to demonstrate against it," she said. "There were at least 200,000 people at the largest rally, but Israel Television reported it as tens of thousands."

"The TV and newspapers also said that the vast majority of the demonstrators were settlers or religious people. That simply wasn't true," she said.

Matar, who emigrated from New York in 1977, said: "Israelis are eager to hear what we have to say. We're not anti-peace; we want a real peace that will not threaten the State of Israel."

"As wives, mothers, grandmothers, we have a special interest in attaining a real peace," she said.

The group has dubbed itself the Women in Green. Its members wear Kelly-green hats to demonstrate that they are opposed to returning to

the so-called Green Line, Israel's borders before the Six-Day War.

Their nickname is a play on the name of the left-wing group Women in Black, whose members have been demonstrating every week since the start six years ago of the intifada, or Palestinian uprising, against Israel's occupation of the territories.

Since May 1993, members of Women for Israel's Tomorrow have staged weekly demonstrations, ranging from small vigils to large rallies throughout the country.

With chapters in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem, as well as in smaller communities such as Ra'anana and Petach Tikvah, the organizers are able to mobilize members in a particular region within a matter of hours.

The image of the group as being composed of mothers and grandmothers has often worked in the organization's favor, said Ruth Gregor, a 34-year-old member.

"Israelis are interested to see that women from all walks of life, especially those in their 60s and 70s, have come out to demonstrate," she said during a recent demonstration in front of the Foreign Ministry.

"Let's face it," she said with a laugh, "this is not your typical population of demonstrators."

David Bedein, a Jerusalem media analyst, attributed the organization's success to a carefully planned marketing strategy by the group's organizers.

'Determined To Make Friends'

"Unlike most groups that are right-of-center, which have isolated themselves from public opinion, these people have determined to make friends and influence people who make decisions," he said.

"They have successfully demonstrated that a well-dressed, well-mannered group of thinking people are upset by the accord," said Bedein, who has advised advocates of "Greater Israel."

But Anat Hoffman, a Jerusalem City councilwoman and a founding member of the Women in Black, believes that Women for Israel's Tomorrow has often been maligned by the media because it is perceived solely as "a women's group."

"I've seen several newspaper articles with derogatory references to the members' anatomies, and to the fact that a lot of the women are older and Anglo-Saxon (immigrants from English-speaking countries).

"Sure, they've gotten some media coverage, but much of it has belittled their age, their accents and their gender," she said.

Futhermore, said Hoffman, "Women, whether they're right- or left-wing, still get very little attention from the Israeli media. Look at Mabat (Israel Television's nightly news program). A recent survey showed that women and women's issues received only about 5 percent of the show's news time."

Knesset member Naomi Chazan, of the left-wing Meretz bloc, said, "I am a very strong supporter of the peace process with the PLO and of the Women in Black.

"But I cannot say that protest is harmful, as long as it is legal. Opposition is welcome; resistance and rebellion are not," said Chazan.

While conceding that Women for Israel's Tomorrow and Women in Black stand on opposite ends of the political spectrum, Hoffman said, "We have more in common than not. We are both striving for peace."

SOME IN CONGRESS ARE ASKING CLINTON TO KEEP SYRIA ON TERROR SPONSORS LIST **By Deborah Kalb**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- As President Clinton prepares for his controversial meeting next Sunday with Syrian President Hafez Assad, several members of Congress are urging Clinton not to remove Syria from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism or otherwise change U.S. policy toward Syria.

Administration officials have said recently that there are no plans to remove Syria from the terrorism list, but some here remain concerned about the possibility.

The State Department's most recently released annual report on international terrorism described Syria as providing support and safe haven to a number of terrorist groups.

At least four letters to Clinton, written by about 25 members of Congress, circulated on Capitol Hill last week, all stressing the importance of keeping Syria on the list.

One letter to Clinton encouraged him to tell Assad that "the United States will not remove Syria from the list of nations that sponsor international terrorism until there is clear evidence that Syria's support for terrorist groups has ceased."

Another letter, organized by Reps. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), said Syria's recent decision to return to the bilateral talks with Israel was a good sign.

But they said the administration's recent decision to allow Kuwait to transfer three Boeing 727s to Syria "raised concerns that the administration may be considering the removal of Syria from the list of nations which sponsor terrorism."

Another letter was sent on the same day, Jan. 6, by Sens. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.), Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Bob Graham (D-Fla.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) as well as Rep. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.), urging the president to "hold fast" on the issue of Syria's remaining on the list.

Senators also wrote to the president as a group. Another letter sent last week was signed by Sens. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and Connie Mack (R-Fla.).

"If in the name of the 'peace process' some in the United States foreign policy establishment are willing to ratchet up the level of intimacy with a terrorist state, can the day be far behind when someone will suggest" further steps including Syria's removal from the terrorism list?, the senators asked.

The president's decision to meet with Assad in Geneva has received mixed reviews from the organized Jewish community, with some seeing it as a step forward in the peace process and others criticizing it as unnecessarily rewarding the Syrian leader.

PALESTINIANS SUE AFTER CHILDREN KILLED

TEL AVIV, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- The parents of five Palestinian children between the ages of 3 and 12 who were killed by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip in recent years have filed a suit against Israel seeking \$360,000 in damages.

The parents maintained that, under international law, Israel's role in Gaza is that of an "occupying power," and that the government is responsible for the welfare of Gaza's inhabitants, especially for their personal security.

INTERFAITH COALITION PLANS NEXT MOVES IN CONGRESSIONAL ARENA

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- After backing landmark religious freedom legislation in Congress, American groups representing different faiths have discovered that working together can be an effective exercise of political clout.

And in light of the groups' legislative success last year, members say there's more to come.

Three years ago, several major Jewish organizations joined a coalition of more than 65 religious groups that advocated the legislation, called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which President Clinton signed into law in November.

As a result of this collaborative effort, American religious groups found that, despite their many theological differences, they can display some fierce political prowess when working together.

"The coalition is an example of the powerful role that the religious community can play when it is willing to put its energy and resources together," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

The group, called the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, plans to become involved in the debates on several congressional bills that address the right to free exercise of religion.

One such bill would provide greater protection in the workplace for employees making religious claims.

This so-called "religious accommodation" legislation, due to be introduced by the end of this month, is regarded as important for observant Jews and members of other religious minorities whose religious practices vary from the norms in the workplace.

The coalition will also advocate that religious groups be exempt from regulations requiring that organizations make public disclosures of their lobbying activities.

Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Committee on Public Affairs, said the coalition will be unable to reach a consensus on some issues, but will consider breaking into smaller groups on difficult matters.

While the religious freedom legislation involved a beneficial change in the law for everyone, new issues are not so uniformly accepted, Walker said.

"We're talking now about principles that not every group can live with," he said. But, he added, "just because we all can't hang together on a particular issue is not a sign of failure."

Dr. Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, president of the Islamic-American Zakat Foundation, said that for the coalition to maintain its unifying influence, "we will have to be selective about the issues we pursue."

A Three-Year Lobbying Effort

In a panel discussion last week sponsored by the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists and the American Muslim Council, representatives from Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups talked about the coalition's recent success.

"The coalition had an enormous impact" on the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, said Saperstein.

"It would have been impossible" to pass the act without the coalition's help, he said.

The coalition lobbied for more than three years for the law, which makes it harder for

state governments to infringe upon a person's right to practice one's religion.

"Our group really impressed members of Congress," Saperstein said, adding that several members of Congress knew little about the bill before they were approached by the coalition.

Among the Jewish groups that joined the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion are Agudath Israel of America, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith, the Council of Jewish Federations, the National Council of Jewish Women and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

PRIEST GIVES ANTI-SEMITIC SERMON IN SERVICE FOR NEO-FASCIST YOUTHS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- During a service held here last week to commemorate three neo-fascist youths killed 16 years ago, a Roman Catholic priest delivered a sermon with a strong anti-Semitic message.

"Our enemies are the Communists," the priest, Don Curzio Nitoglia, was quoted as saying last Friday by the Rome daily newspaper *Il Messaggero*.

"And Pope Pius XII, you recall, strongly condemned Communism. Communism in fact is the child of historical materialism, which was invented by Karl Marx," he said. "And Karl Marx was the son of a Jew."

"Thus Communism is the child of Judaism," he was quoted as saying. "For this we must be against Communism and against Judaism. Without turning the other cheek."

Nitoglia made his comments within days of the signing of a historic accord by Israel and the Vatican that, for the first time, established formal diplomatic relations between the two governments.

The commemorative service was held at the local office of the neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) in a working-class neighborhood in the southeast of Rome.

The service was held to commemorate the deaths of three 19-year-old members of the MSI who were killed Jan. 7, 1978, during a period when right-wing and left-wing terrorism was rampant in Italy.

"We are here to remember three dead youths, killed by Communism," Nitoglia said.

"According to our enemies, we should turn the other cheek. But this is a mistaken interpretation of the Gospel."

"Communism is absolutely not dead, as they say, but is ready for a resurgence sooner than we think. And we must be ready to defeat it. But not by turning the other cheek."

"Even the Catholicism of the (Second Vatican) Council is the fruit of an accord between Communists, Masons and Jews," Nitoglia said.

The Second Vatican Council, convened in the mid-1960s, called for an improved relationship between the church and the Jewish people, lifted the church's charge of deicide against the Jews and decried anti-Semitism as contrary to the spirit of the Gospels.

"The Jewish force in the world is great," the priest reportedly said during the commemoration.

"We fight to defend ourselves and defend the true Catholic Church, against Communism, the Masonic lobby and Judaism. And we will be invincible, in the name of the Lord," he said.

FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL SEEKING REASSESSMENT OF ISRAEL-DIASPORA TIES

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 9 (JTA) -- The time is ripe to reassess the old, stereotypical formulas that have characterized the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, asserts the new head of the world Jewry division of the Foreign Ministry.

Haim Divon, who was Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia from 1991 to 1993, was tapped last September to take the Foreign Ministry job. He replaced Yehudi Kinar, who is now serving as the consul general in San Francisco.

Divon, who has served in diplomatic posts in Sri Lanka, India and Canada, said the division has been restructured and charged with a more "tightly defined agenda."

And that, he said, signals that the matter of world Jewry will be taken more seriously by the Foreign Ministry.

He spoke of a "new chapter" in the division and of the "fresh outlook" of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Deputy Minister Yossi Beilin and Director General Uri Savir.

"Each of them realizes it's high time to give proper attention to the Diaspora," he said.

Divon, who reports directly to Savir, said he has had "more meetings in the last four months" on the Diaspora with Savir, Peres and Beilin "than there were (in the ministry) in the last four years."

American Jewish leaders, both inside and outside Israel, have praise for Divon's predecessor, Kinar. But they say Divon's access and high diplomatic status lend new weight and prestige to the issue.

They also say that despite little background in Diaspora Jewish affairs, he is a quick study and serious about his new post.

Divon's mandate is broader than that of his predecessor and its profile has been raised, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"I am very impressed," said David Clayman, Israel director of the American Jewish Congress. "He's a high-powered diplomat who realizes what he doesn't know and he's learning it."

Time To Start A Little 'Soul-Searching'

Divon said he plans to set up regular meetings with Clayman and the other local representatives of Diaspora Jewish organizations.

The peace process has begun to free Israelis to stop a nearly exclusive focus on security issues and start a little "soul-searching," said Divon.

That soul-searching includes a serious re-examination of the relationship to Diaspora Jewry, which is changing and grappling with new and serious issues of its own, he said.

"In Israel, the whole concept of Diaspora Jewry is a very distorted one," Divon remarked. In the 1950s, the Diaspora meant "food parcels," and then later it meant "dedicating forests or buildings," and "a memorial plaque."

Even to professionals in the field, the role of Diaspora Jews was reduced to "a political lobby or a schnorrer," he said.

"It's not our fault," he added. "No one taught us. Jewish history lessons ended after the Second World War."

At the same time, for many Diaspora Jews who never visit, Israel is reduced to "what they see on television about the intifada," Divon said,

referring to the Palestinian uprising. And those who do come under the auspices of a typical United Jewish Appeal mission get exposed to what Divon called an "over-saccharined package" of a mythical country.

"It's artificial," he said. "Then they go back and dream about making aliyah, and when they come, they get disappointed. They go to City Hall and get the shock of their lives" over the bureaucracy and hardships of daily life in Israel.

"They need to get a more balanced picture," said Divon. The biggest achievement of Israelis is their ability to maintain "their sanity and their democratic system" in face of enormous pressures.

On both ends, Divon stressed, "there must be much more sincere dialogue, not just an effort at the top to solve world Jewish affairs."

The Foreign Ministry's newly intensified interest was reflected in the recent establishment by Peres of a committee slated to look at relations with the Diaspora, to be chaired by Uri Gordon, head of the immigration and absorption department of the Jewish Agency.

But several sources say the effort ran aground when other Jewish Agency leaders protested that the ministry was stepping on their turf.

The sources say those at the agency were hypersensitive after Beilin attacked it as anachronistic.

Divon, the diplomat, said he worked with the agency on the rescue of Ethiopian Jews, "and they did a tremendous job."

'An Opportunity To Reach Out'

"But we feel we have our (diplomatic) missions and they give us an opportunity to reach out to Jewish communities in an unprecedented manner. We're not trying to replace any establishment, but we think we can add" to others, he said.

An ambassador or a consul general is the highest Israeli representative in a country, said Divon, "a symbol that can be used to stimulate new thinking."

Divon envisions these representatives getting involved in the discussions now absorbing Jewish communities on Jewish identity and continuity, on intermarriage and on assimilation.

"If we are a Jewish state, then these are also problems of Israel, and we have to be concerned," he said.

He would also like to see Israeli mission heads involved in the discussion of UJA allocation of funds.

"(We hear) it is more and more difficult to support Jewish education, and we feel that when Israel is suddenly stronger, it's more important to share these funds with local needs," said Divon.

The ministry wants to change the formula, he said, "so Israel is not just on the receiving end" but looks at "what Israel can contribute."

For now, one of Divon's main tasks is to monitor Diaspora reaction to the peace process and to try to keep Jews abroad informed.

He said he and his bosses do not expect uniformity on the issue, but do expect support in the final crunch.

In the meantime, he wants the Jewish world to put the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization agreement in context and recognize that for Israel, far broader changes have already occurred.

"To stand with a stopwatch is ridiculous. We need a year" to gauge the impact of the current flurry of events, he said.