

**PERES AND ARAFAT REPORT PROGRESS
IN RESOLVING DIFFERENCES ON ACCORD**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- Following marathon negotiations in Switzerland, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization have apparently made headway in resolving their differences.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who met with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in the Swiss ski resort of Davos for eight hours Saturday night, was upbeat in his comments at a news conference after their talks, saying an agreement for implementing the Palestinian self-rule accord was "very near."

But Peres, who entered Sunday's news conference holding hands with Arafat, would not describe the status of the talks. Instead, he spoke of the enormous challenges facing the two sides and of the promise for world peace that an Israeli-PLO agreement would represent.

Sitting beside Arafat, Peres thanked the PLO leader "for his supreme effort to bring our two peoples together in the domain of peace and hope."

Peres said that if the two sides could reach a peaceful settlement of their differences, it would provide hope "that the world can solve all of its biggest problems."

Peres and Arafat got together during a world economic conference held at Davos through the weekend.

The results of these latest talks were more promising than those last week in Cairo, when the Israelis and PLO were unable to iron out their differences over implementation of the historic accord that was signed in Washington last September.

The Cairo negotiations resulted in a stalemate over several security issues, including who would control border crossings between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, and between the West Bank town of Jericho and Jordan.

Arafat told reporters in Davos that the two sides were "on the way to bypassing all the obstacles which have been placed in the last weeks, to have very soon, very soon, the final agreement to start directly the implementation of the peace agreements."

No Details Provided

Neither side provided details of any agreements they reached, but Palestinian officials said a written agreement had been completed and was awaiting approval.

According to Israeli army radio, both sides made compromises, especially the Palestinians, who reportedly made concessions to Israel on the border-crossings issue.

Another issue over which the two sides have been deadlocked -- the size of the Jericho area that will fall under Palestinian authority -- reportedly remains unresolved.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin reacted cautiously Sunday to Arafat's upbeat comments.

During remarks to reporters in Tel Aviv, Rabin noted that past optimism about the negotiations had sometimes proved premature.

Rabin added that oral understandings reached

in recent talks often fell into dispute once an effort was made to commit them to writing.

Rabin said he preferred waiting for a complete written agreement before he would provide any definitive comments.

But Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa, whose country has served as a mediator in the stalled Israeli-PLO negotiations, was as upbeat as Arafat in his assessment of the Davos talks.

The two sides had made "definite progress toward agreement," he said.

Moussa also indicated that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had invited Israel and the PLO to come to Cairo for the signing of the implementation agreement.

Moussa said the signing would take place within two weeks.

**U.S. WOMEN ARE STONED
AT PRAYERS AT THE WALL**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- A group of American Hadassah board members was stoned by some Orthodox worshipers after trying to pray at the Western Wall with a Torah and later were escorted away by police.

The women decided to go to the Wall last Thursday, the day after the Supreme Court rejected a petition by an Israeli women's group seeking to pray aloud at the Wall with a Torah and prayer shawls.

The Hadassah women said they had not heard about the court decision. One of them wore a prayer shawl and a yarmulke, while a Torah they brought stayed wrapped in a prayer shawl on a table, said Barbara Goldstein, a vice president of Hadassah.

According to Goldstein, some of the ardently Orthodox women at the Wall began throwing stones and dirt and spitting at the Hadassah women, while both men and women cursed them. Ultimately, the women were led away by police and guards from the Religious Affairs Ministry.

Ze'ev Rosenberg, director general of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, first charged the women were in "contempt of court." But when told the women said they had not heard of the court's decision, he was surprised and referred to their action as a mistake.

The Hadassah "women can pray there, but they must pray according to the rules and customs" at the Wall, he said. Those customs call for women to pray silently in the women's section, without prayer shawls or Torah.

"If they want to do it at home, no one will say anything," said Rosenberg. "But this is not the way to behave" in a place where "99 percent of the Jews come" to pray in a traditional way.

"Everyone understands, even non-Jews," he said, "that all men need a kipah (yarmulke)" to pray in the men's section, even though Reform Jews don't wear them in their synagogues.

Meanwhile, said Goldstein, "we were looking for a spiritual experience and had no idea the court had issued anything."

She called it a "crazy thing" to come to Israel and be barred "from fulfilling the very thing you come to fulfill, the highest expression of Judaism."

"I may understand it, but that doesn't excuse it," said Goldstein.

She said the issue will be taken up by the board of Hadassah, which includes women from all streams of Judaism and is based on religious pluralism. She said it was likely the organization would move to forge closer ties with Israeli women's groups.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin told the group that he regretted the incident. He said the government has long focused exclusively on national security and not paid enough attention to social issues such as pluralism and tolerance.

JORDAN'S CALL FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON STATUS OF JERUSALEM RAISES HACKLES By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- A suggestion from Jordan's King Hussein that there be an interfaith dialogue among Muslims, Christians and Jews to discuss sovereignty over holy sites in Jerusalem has drawn fire.

The subject is a touchy one, because the future status of Jerusalem is one of the most contentious issues in the Middle East peace process, with both Israelis and Arabs making claims to sovereignty.

And the issue is complicated by the fact that Jerusalem, the Israeli capital, is the site of Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy places.

"King Hussein's suggestion is particularly hypocritical given the fact that during Jordan's 19 years of control over East Jerusalem, Jordan practiced a policy of unmitigated religious intolerance towards Christians and Jews," the national chairman, Melvin Salberg, and national director, Abraham Foxman, of the Anti-Defamation League said in a statement Wednesday.

Israel, for its part, maintains that it allows total freedom of access to the holy sites to people of all religions.

"Since we recognize the importance of Jerusalem and the holy sites to all three religions," an Israeli official said Thursday, the Israeli government allows "full freedom of access to all denominations and all religions to all holy sites."

"It is a policy we intend to keep," the official said.

Meanwhile, during his visit here, King Hussein made some major gestures toward Israel. He spelled out his vision for a full peace between Israel and Jordan and stated his desire to meet soon with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

But one analyst said the King Hussein's suggestion about the holy places in Jerusalem was not timely.

"Whatever his intentions may have been, I don't see how this could be anything but counter-productive," said Richard Haass, an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment who served as a top Middle East adviser in the Bush administration.

AFTER BEILIN'S GAFFE, RABIN MENDS FENCES WITH U.S. JEWS By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- Following some poorly received remarks by the deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has assured leaders of American Jewish fund-raising organizations his strong and ongoing support.

"I see great importance in the continuation -- even more, the intensification -- of fund-

raising efforts among the Jews of the free world, and in deepening education activities for the strengthening of Jewish identification with Israel," Rabin wrote to the head of the United Israel Appeal, Shoshana Cardin.

Rabin's letters, to Cardin and to Jay Yaskowitz, the executive vice chairman of the UIA, came after Beilin's criticism of Diaspora fund-raising.

In several speeches and media appearances, Beilin suggested that Israel's current economic and political strength made the traditional form of United Jewish Appeal-Federation fund-raising obsolete. He recommended the dismantling of the present UJA-to-Jewish Agency funding structure, in which the UIA serves as a middleman. He suggested that the funds raised would be better used to finance Jewish education in the Diaspora.

Rabin called Beilin's remarks "idiotic."

In his letters, written last week and made available to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, he referred to "recent statements made in Israel about the role of Jewish fund-raising campaigns overseas."

"The central role of the state of Israel is to serve as a sanctuary for Jews from distressed communities, as well as to present a challenge for Jews from developed countries who wish to build their homes here," he wrote.

The immigrations from the former Soviet Union, from Ethiopia, Yemen and other countries, Rabin wrote, "have placed and are placing before the State of Israel, the Jewish people and the various campaigns one of the greatest Zionist challenges since the state was established.

"I believe that the Jewish organizations in the Diaspora have a very important role to play in strengthening the Jewish and Zionist infrastructure of Jewish communities, and in the building and development of Israeli society.

"The involvement of Diaspora Jewry with Israel, its problems and accomplishments, is the key to reinforcing the relationship between us and deepening the connection of Diaspora Jews with Israel.

"Fund-raising should bring with it," Rabin said, "investment in the Israeli economy. It should be conducted as part of a comprehensive educational effort whose purpose is to make Israel the center of Jewish identity and experience."

NAZI ALLY DIES AWAITING DEPORTATION

NEW YORK (JTA) -- Mikelis Kirsteins, a Utica, N.Y., man accused of assisting the Nazis in murdering 30,000 Jews in World War II Latvia, died in a hospital Wednesday, before the U.S. Justice Department could order his deportation.

A deportation hearing had been postponed since 1991, when Kirsteins suffered a stroke.

Kirsteins, 77, was a member of the Arajs Kommando, a notorious Latvian killing squad sympathetic to the Nazis, which murdered Jews and Communists.

In testimony told to the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations in 1987, Kirsteins admitted that he aided the Nazis by patrolling an area in which Jews were being shot, but said that he never pulled a trigger himself.

Kirsteins had been living in the U.S. since 1956, but agreed to relinquish his citizenship in 1991 in a settlement with OSI.

In return, OSI said it would not begin efforts to deport him unless his health significantly improved.

RABIN URGES EUROPE TO HELP END THE ARAB BOYCOTT AGAINST ISRAEL

By Joseph Kopel

STRASBOURG, France, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called on Europe last week to help eliminate the Arab boycott against Israel and to increase its involvement in the Middle East peace process.

In an address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe here last Wednesday, Rabin said Israel had "made concessions in return for the abolition of the boycott" but "the boycott is still used as an illegitimate weapon against Israel."

"Europe's resolve and our joint cooperation can halt such actions once and for all," he said.

"For over 40 years, the Arab boycott has been a tool in the war against Israel, even though it contradicts the fundamental principle of free trade, as espoused" in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, "and in our joint free-trade agreement," the prime minister said.

"European states have all deplored its existence, though only a small minority have taken concrete steps to eliminate it," he observed.

In recent days, there have been hopeful signs that the Arab League may consider abolishing its boycott against Israel, which was established before the founding of the Jewish state in 1948.

Last Wednesday, the foreign minister of the Persian Gulf state of Qatar announced during a news conference with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher that "we are ready to take some actions" regarding the termination of the boycott.

And earlier this month, the Arab League's secretary-general, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, told U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown that the league will consider rescinding its so-called secondary and tertiary boycotts at its next ministerial meeting in March.

The secondary boycott imposes trading sanctions against companies doing business with Israel. The tertiary boycott imposes sanctions on companies that trade with firms that have broken the terms of the secondary boycott.

'Europe Has A Major Role To Fulfill'

Rabin, in his speech before the Parliamentary Assembly, also called on Europe to increase its involvement in the Middle East peace process.

"I believe Europe has a major role to fulfill on the arduous road to peace," he said. He suggested this role should be to "contribute to the transformation of the region through economic development and cooperation, rehabilitating refugees, developing water and natural resources, solving environmental problems and regulating arms control."

But he questioned Europe's "ambivalent" attitude toward Israel.

"I would like to see more understanding concerning our political positions, our security concerns and our economic needs," he said.

"Israel is ready for peace and is willing to take risks and make dramatic decisions. But any risk or decision should be well-calculated, for hasty actions could bring upon us irreversible results," he warned.

Speaking about Syria, which returned to the negotiating table with Israel this week in Washington after four months of suspended talks,

Rabin acknowledged that "our negotiations with Syria have been, since their beginning, serious, open -- and progress has been made."

But he asked the European countries to call on Syrian President Hafez Assad "to walk the extra mile in order to meet us in the middle of the road for peace and assure us a high degree of security about Syria's long-term intentions."

Rabin was invited to speak before the Council of Europe by its secretary-general, Catherine Lalumiere of France.

The council, which includes 32 nations from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, has played an important role in promoting the integration of Europe on the basis of the values of democracy and freedom.

In this context, Rabin insisted in his speech that the council lead the fight against the resurgence of racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance.

"We call upon you to vigorously oppose the growth of neo-Nazi movements," he told the assembly.

SENATE MEASURE OPPOSES ARAB BOYCOTT

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- The Senate expressed its overwhelming support last week to end the Arab economic boycott of Israel, unanimously approving an amendment that prohibits arms sales to countries adhering to the boycott.

The vote, taken Friday, was 93-0.

However, the measure included a provision that makes it likely the prohibition would not be carried out.

The measure, which was an amendment to the State Department Authorization Bill, authorizes the president to overrule the measure if he believes an arms sale would be in the national interest.

Nevertheless, Sen. Hank Brown (R-Colo.), who authored the amendment, said, "With this tool in place, the president has far more leverage to protect American businesses by forcing the end of the secondary and tertiary Arab boycotts."

The primary boycott is against Israeli products.

The secondary boycott imposes sanctions on firms doing business with Israel. The tertiary boycott applies to firms trading with firms that have broken the terms of the secondary boycott.

The State Department Authorization Bill is still under consideration on the Senate floor.

RABIN OFFERS AID TO L.A. QUAKE VICTIMS

JERUSALEM, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- In letters to the leaders of the Los Angeles Jewish Community, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has expressed his sadness over the death of 12 Jews in the earthquake there.

"The effects upon the Jewish community are very distressing," he wrote. "Tens of thousands of Jewish families have been personally affected. We know that many have lost their homes."

Rabin mentioned the damage to synagogues and other Jewish facilities and offered to the send the Israel Defense Force disaster relief unit to help with local rescue efforts.

"We in Israel are concerned with your difficult situation and would like to offer any support that you believe may be helpful to you during this difficult period," Rabin wrote.

"We stand with you and are ready to assist you in the spirit of Jewish solidarity," he wrote.

ISRAELI EMBASSY HONORS BLACKS, JEWS WHO WORKED TOGETHER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- In its annual ceremony to commemorate the work of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Israeli Embassy last week honored blacks and Jews who have long worked together to further civil rights.

Last Friday's commemorative event, the embassy's 10th annual program honoring the slain civil rights leader, took place in the wake of public denunciations by black leaders of anti-Semitic statements made by officials of the Nation of Islam.

The event was co-sponsored by the embassy and the Religious Action Center of the Reform movement and was partly funded by the Barbara Streisand Program for Black-Jewish Cooperation.

The program served both as an awards ceremony and as a forum to praise the long history of black-Jewish cooperation that has been undermined of late by acerbic anti-Semitic remarks made by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and his followers and that mainstream black leaders have sought to redress.

"We cannot continue to allow large audiences to hear words of bigotry," said Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), recipient of the embassy's 1994 Civil Rights Leadership Award.

Racist speech, she said, should be met with "careful rebuttal and moral teaching."

Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly of the District of Columbia spoke of the long friendship between the African-American and Jewish communities in the fight for civil rights.

"The more (racists) attempt to malign and divide us, the more we will come together as a community to combat hatred," Kelly told the audience of 200 persons.

Addresses were also delivered by Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States.

Both speakers lauded King's work to foster civil rights in America.

"I think of Moses when I think of Dr. King," said Rabinovich. He observed that both men led their people on a journey to the promised land but did not live to see them get there.

But while Jews arrived in the Land of Israel, Rabinovich said, blacks have not yet reached their promised land.

Saperstein praised King as "an essential part of the moral glue that bound together black and Jewish communities."

An award for black-Jewish relations was given posthumously to the family of the late Rabbi Eugene Lipman, a pioneer of civil rights activities in the Reform movement and founder of its Joint Commission on Social Action.

Lipman, who died Jan. 14, took part in anti-segregation marches with King.

DELEGATION OF JEWISH LEADERS IS FETED BY ROYALTY OF MOROCCO

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 30 (JTA) -- In what were the first such meetings since the signing of the Palestinian self-rule accord in September, King Hassan II of Morocco has met with two delegations of Jewish leaders.

The king met over the weekend with an 11-member delegation from B'nai B'rith International

that included the organization's president, Kent Schiner, and the president of B'nai B'rith Europe, Rabbi Bent Melchior.

Earlier in the month, the king hosted representatives of the Jewish Heritage Council, who went to Morocco to explore the possibilities of renovating and preserving Jewish sites.

The king told the B'nai B'rith delegation that peace in the Middle East is possible "because the problem is political, not religious."

Schiner said his delegation was pleased to learn of Moroccan Jews' ability to conduct a full and unhampered Jewish communal life. The delegation visited Jews in Casablanca and Marrakech.

Serving as the delegation's host was Andre Azoulay, an adviser to the king on economic affairs and a leading member of the community.

Israel and Morocco have been working in recent months toward closer cooperation. After the signing of the Palestinian self-rule accord last fall, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited King Hassan before returning to Israel.

In the spring, Morocco will serve as host for Jewish and Muslim businessmen, who will discuss economic strategies for the Middle East in the wake of the Rabin government's peace initiatives.

The delegation from the Jewish Heritage Council, which is a division of the World Monuments Fund, toured historic Jewish sites in Morocco in mid-January, when they met with local Jewish community representatives and senior government officials.

The trip was planned to test the feasibility of creating a "Jewish Heritage Route" in Morocco for tourists.

They also met with local leaders to discuss renovation plans for synagogues, such as the 17th century Rabbi Ibn Danan Synagogue in Fez and the Rabbi Yitzhak ben Walid Synagogue in Tetuan.

Preservation Plans Exceed Expectations

The Jewish Heritage Route would be the first of its kind in a Muslim country, the council said, noting the delegation's trip came as reports indicated that El Al would shortly begin regular flights between Morocco and Israel.

The delegation included council Chairman Ronald S. Lauder, director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, and the chairwoman of the World Monuments Fund, Marilyn Perry.

Lauder said in a statement, "The interest in pursuing preservation plans, among both the Jewish community and Moroccan officials, exceeded our expectations. It was in marked contrast to the situation we found five years ago."

Lauder and Perry met for nearly two hours in the Cabinet room of the Royal Palace in Rabat with Azoulay and Mohamet Benaissa, the current Moroccan ambassador to the United States.

The delegation met with another Jewish official, Tourism Minister Serge Berdugo -- he is also the secretary-general of Moroccan Jewish Communities -- who pledged his support in both capacities. He told the delegation about several Jewish sites urgently needing restoration.

"As head of the community he vowed to assist in all efforts, including matching funds raised abroad," the council reported.

The delegation's itinerary -- which included Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, Tetuan, Fez, Meknes and Marrakech -- took in more than 20 active or former synagogues, some dating back centuries.

The group also visited several Jewish cemeteries and old Jewish quarters, which would form the basis of a Jewish Heritage tourist route.