

**COMMUNITY REPULSED WHEN FARRAKHAN EMBRACES MESSAGE, IF NOT ITS MESSENGER**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- Outrage and revulsion rippled through the American Jewish community this week when the controversial Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam refused to distance himself from anti-Semitic remarks made by a top aide.

At a news conference Thursday, Farrakhan announced he was dismissing the aide, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, not for the message but for the manner in which it had been delivered.

Farrakhan also strongly attacked the Anti-Defamation League, which had publicized the remarks of the aide Muhammad.

"Louis Farrakhan's words at his press conference today spoke for themselves. It was classic anti-Semitism," ADL National Chairman Melvin Salberg and National Director Abraham Foxman said in a statement.

David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, said his organization was "repulsed by Louis Farrakhan's comments today. It is the same old bone-chilling hate delivered with a smile."

And Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said that "Farrakhan not only reaffirmed the essential validity of what Muhammad said but repeated for the television audience and the press the distortion of Jewish history which has become the stock weapon in his anti-Semitic arsenal."

Amid heavy security at a downtown hotel here, Farrakhan said he considered Muhammad's speech to be "vile in manner, repugnant, malicious, mean-spirited and spoken in mockery of individuals and people, which is against the spirit of Islam.

"While I stand by the truths that he spoke, I must condemn in the strongest terms the manner in which those truths were represented," Farrakhan said.

Proves Message Is Inherently Racist

"I have warned my brother Khalid several times about his manner of representing the truth," Farrakhan said.

The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council said, "By deliberately choosing to ignore that his aide's speech was quintessentially racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic and homophobic, Minister Farrakhan proves that his own message is inherently racist."

The council said it was "deeply dismayed that Mr. Farrakhan continues to disregard the obligation to denounce bigotry, racism and anti-Semitism wherever they exist in our society."

The contents of the speech were widely publicized by ADL in a full-page advertisement in the New York Times on Jan. 16.

In his remarks, Farrakhan ripped into the ADL, calling it "anti-black and even anti-American."

Farrakhan charged that the ADL aimed "to destroy the reputation and character of Louis Farrakhan in the eyes of the world, and to ultimately destroy the Nation of Islam."

In a telephone interview Thursday, Foxman

called the news conference "a performance by a master of hate."

Farrakhan's words, Foxman said, were "doubletalk, doublethink, acrobatics and semantics."

"He did not reject the message, he did not reject the messenger," but he rejected "the delivery," Foxman said of Farrakhan's comments on Muhammad's speech.

Farrakhan had been under growing pressure to distance himself from Muhammad's comments, which were made Nov. 29 at Kean College in New Jersey.

In the speech, Muhammad said that Jews were "sucking our blood in the black community," that Jews controlled the White House, the media and the Federal Reserve, and that they brought the Holocaust on themselves.

The speech also included remarks seen as anti-Catholic and anti-white.

Farrakhan said Muhammad had been invited to the college to discuss the controversial Nation of Islam book "The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews."

Senate Condemns Aide's Speech

In the course of the news conference, Farrakhan offered a spirited defense of the book, saying he agreed with "the truth of this book."

The book includes a discussion of the alleged Jewish role in the slave trade.

On Wednesday, Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), the head of the Congressional Black Caucus, said at a news conference that the caucus was distancing itself from a previously announced "sacred covenant" with the Nation of Islam.

"It is clear that the Congressional Black Caucus' ability to work for change with the Nation of Islam (is) severely jeopardized as long as there remains a question by some of our membership about the Nation of Islam's sensitivity to the right of all people and all religions to be free from attacks, vilification and defamation," Mfume said.

Also Wednesday, the Senate, by a vote of 97-0, passed a resolution sponsored by Sens. John Danforth (R-Mo.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) condemning Muhammad's speech.

Farrakhan's remarks were punctuated by applause and shouts of approval from the crowd, which apparently included a number of supporters in addition to members of the media.

In his remarks, Farrakhan criticized what he called "an internal and secret document put out by the civil rights division of the Anti-Defamation League" that dealt with Farrakhan.

He said ADL had "a history of spying not only on black leaders but all those leaders and organizations that have popular support, black, white, Arab, and even other Jews."

He charged that ADL "seeks total control of the Jewish people, many of whom would have dialogued with us if it were not for the wicked aim and purpose of the ADL and its leadership."

Farrakhan also responded to Vice President Al Gore's criticism of Muhammad's speech, saying it showed "possible collusion between the ADL and the United States government."

Farrakhan said Muhammad was remaining in the Nation of Islam and had accepted his discipline.

SENATE AMENDMENT WOULD EASE JEWS' BID FOR ASYLUM IN AMERICA

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- The Senate this week voted to extend legislation that makes it easier for Jews from the former Soviet Union to seek asylum here.

The two-year extension, sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), was passed Tuesday as an amendment to the State Department authorization bill.

It allows refugees considered members of historically persecuted groups, including Soviet Jews and some Indochinese asylum-seekers, to meet a lower standard of proof for refugee status when trying to enter the United States.

A number of Jewish groups had backed the amendment and were pleased at its passage by a vote of 85-15.

"Given the continuing uncertainty in the former Soviet Union, it is very important to see a continuation" of the amendment, Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said Wednesday.

Both Levin and Martin Wenick, executive director of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, praised Lautenberg for his active support of the amendment.

Lautenberg and Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) circulated a "Dear Colleague" letter last week in the Senate arguing for passage of the amendment.

The Senate version of the legislation now heads for a conference committee with the House version, which does not include the extension of the Lautenberg amendment.

Pamela Cohen, national president of the Union of Councils, a group dealing with the concerns of Jews in the former Soviet Union, said in a statement this week that her group "urges and expects" that the House will accept the Lautenberg amendment.

The amendment is not connected to other government activities involving actual numbers of refugees allowed into the United States from various parts of the world.

The provisions of the Lautenberg amendment first went into effect in 1990.

SEVEN LUBAVITCH LIBRARY BOOKS RETURN TO U.S. ON AIR FORCE ONE

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- When President Clinton returned to Washington last month from his European trip, seven rare books accompanied him on Air Force One.

The books were from the highly sought-after Lubavitch library that had been confiscated by the Russian State Library some seven decades ago.

A team of Lubavitcher Chasidim, led by Rabbi Boruch Shlomo Cunin of Los Angeles, has been endeavoring to bring the books -- all 12,000 of them -- to the Lubavitcher rebbe in Brooklyn.

Cunin returned to Moscow last month for Clinton's summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"President Clinton pushed them (the Russians) very hard" on the books, the rabbi said.

Cunin also met with Strobe Talbott, U.S. ambassador at large and Russia specialist and now the president's nominee to be deputy secretary of state.

Talbott has been an integral part of an international effort to obtain the library, which

has scarcely any monetary value but is priceless to the Chabad Lubavitch movement.

The seven books -- another book from the collection was obtained by Vice President Al Gore in December -- were brought to America on a circuitous route.

This latest delivery of books was turned over by the Russians not to the Lubavitch community but to the Library of Congress, which had requested the books from the Russian State Library on behalf of the Lubavitchers.

The roster of those trying to get the books from Moscow to Brooklyn reads like a guest list for a state dinner: Talbott; Gore; Sens. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.); Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.); George Mitchell (D-Maine), the Senate majority leader; and Bob Dole (R-Kans.), the Senate minority leader.

Also, Anthony Lake, assistant to the president for national security affairs; Leon Furth, the vice president's assistant for national security affairs; and Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), who is chairman of the subcommittee on international operations of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and U.S. liaison to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Last Thursday, Cunin and the senators gathered at a meeting at the Library of Congress that was hosted by James Billington, the chief librarian, and including Russian Ambassador Vladimir Lukin.

The senators praised the Russians for turning over the seven books, but Cunin called it "a beautiful gesture but nothing more than a gesture."

The rabbi said the Russian ambassador promised last Thursday that by the following morning he would "arrange to have the books released" to the Lubavitchers and "work immediately to free the entire collection."

The seven books were released as promised, and Cunin brought them to the rebbe in Brooklyn on Monday.

Cunin has now also enlisted the attention of UNESCO, which just held a weeklong meeting in Moscow to discuss repairing the Russian State Library.

POPE HOPES WALL TO BE SITE OF RECONCILIATION, NOT TEARS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- Pope John Paul II hopes Jerusalem becomes "a significant center of peace."

He also hinted again this week that he hoped to make a trip to the Holy Land soon. Last week the pope said he wanted to make a pilgrimage to major biblical sites, and he has spoken frequently about his desire to visit Jerusalem.

Israel and the Vatican formally recognized each other one month ago, making such a trip probable.

In his sermon during a mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Wednesday, the pope said he carried the thought of Jerusalem with him during his many trips around the world. He said he "looked toward Jerusalem with love" and knelt in respect for its holy sites.

"May that wall, the remains of the ancient temple of Solomon, stop being the Wailing Wall and become a place of peace and reconciliation for the believers in the one true God," he said.

In Israel, the wall is known as the Western Wall.

WITHOUT SPOTLIGHT, PEACE TALKS IN WASHINGTON PROMPTING OPTIMISM

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- Israeli and American officials expressed optimism this week about the progress of the Middle East peace talks taking place here, saying that the new format involving only delegation heads is helping the process along.

Those statements, however, seemed to conflict with comments made earlier by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres about the scope of the negotiations.

"We feel that we have to widen the scope of the negotiations because, if I can say a nice thing about ministers, as contrary to the other people in the government, they have the unforgettable right to make mistakes. And without making mistakes, I am not sure we can achieve peace," Peres said Wednesday in a speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Studies.

Syrian officials, in reports released Thursday, rejected Peres' call to widen the peace talks.

The current round of negotiations, occurring in undisclosed locations here, has involved only the heads of delegations and not the full diplomatic teams present in previous rounds.

This round, in which the Israelis are negotiating on four tracks with the Jordanians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians, has also been carried out without daily reports to the press.

In a Wednesday evening meeting with reporters from the Jewish media, Israeli officials said the smaller negotiating groups and the lack of news coverage have created a more intimate atmosphere suitable for serious negotiating.

"These negotiations don't warrant media attention every day," said Elyakim Rubenstein, chief Israeli negotiator with the Jordanians.

'No Big Thunderstorms'

"There are no big thunderstorms each day" that require media coverage, Rubenstein said.

Israeli Embassy spokeswoman Ruth Yaron said the present format has helped the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well, letting negotiators discuss highly sensitive topics not previously raised because of the intense media attention.

State Department spokesman Mike McCurry also gave positive reviews. "The new format has been conducive to productive, interesting exchanges between the parties," he said Thursday.

In the more informal format, negotiators with the Syrians discussed security arrangements, which were added to this round, Yaron said.

Rubenstein described the talks with the Jordanians as "positive" but "cautious."

Earlier Wednesday, Peres announced that Israel and Jordan would host a joint economic conference in Jordan later this year and said joint economic development in the region would help Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. No date for the conference had yet been set.

Peres said the delegations had been discussing energy and environmental concerns with an emphasis on water.

Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat met last weekend in Switzerland to discuss implementation of the self-rule accord signed last fall.

They will meet again in Cairo, probably Sunday.

Yaron said the Washington talks between Israel and the Palestinians are focusing on elec-

tions to be held in the new Palestinian territory and on the council that will be responsible for implementing the accord.

When asked about the American involvement in this round of negotiations, Yaron said U.S. negotiators are acting behind the scenes, offering advice when needed.

The American role in the talks has been in question since the more informal format began last week.

"We respect the American role, and feel that it is important," Yaron said.

The United States agreed Thursday to give \$25 million to housing projects in the Gaza Strip.

The deal was signed by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Palestinian Housing Council.

The contribution is part of the Clinton administration's commitment last year to donate \$500 million over five years to develop the area to be controlled by the Palestinians, according to Howard Salter, press officer for the agency.

The current round of talks concluded Thursday. State Department spokesman McCurry said Thursday that the talks will resume in Washington on Feb. 15.

VIOLENCE IN THE TERRITORIES MARS CLIMATE FOR PEACE TALKS

JERUSALEM, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- As Israeli and Palestinian negotiators continue to seek ways to end their deadlock, violence in the territories continues to mar the political landscape here.

On Thursday, a 27-year-old Arab resident of the West Bank city of Hebron was shot and seriously wounded by Israeli soldiers after he failed to stop at a military roadblock.

The incident took place near the site of a drive-by shooting of three Jewish settlers the day before.

The Izz a-Din al-Kassem unit of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement took responsibility for the attack on the settlers, who were wounded after their car was sprayed by machine-gun fire.

Security in the area was tightened in wake of the attack as Israeli authorities continued their search for the Hamas terrorists responsible for the incident.

In Thursday's shooting, the Arab man reportedly made a U-turn as he approached an Israeli roadblock and refused orders to stop, prompting the troops to open fire. The car apparently had been stolen.

Also Thursday, in the Gaza Strip, Israeli soldiers disguised as Arabs shot and killed a leader of the Fatah Hawks during a gunfight, Israel Television reported.

The Hawks are an armed wing of Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat's mainstream Al Fatah movement, but they oppose the peace accord Arafat signed with Israel.

The killing occurred when Israeli troops confronted a group of armed Palestinians in a refugee camp.

Also Thursday, Israeli soldiers in Gaza City shot and killed one Palestinian and wounded three others after their vehicle came under heavy attack by stones.

Gaza was the scene of yet another incident of violence on Wednesday, when Israeli border police accidentally shot a 10-year-old Arab girl during a car chase. That shooting is under investigation by the Israeli authorities.

HADASSAH LEADERSHIP IS SUPPORTING WOMEN OF WALL AGAINST ISRAELI COURT

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- Hadassah's leadership has come out in support of the Women of the Wall, whose petition to pray aloud at the Western Wall wearing prayer shawls was rejected by the Israeli Supreme Court last week.

The women's Zionist organization called on the Israeli government to protect the rights of all women in all aspects of religious and secular life.

The call came in the form of an official resolution passed after heated and emotional discussion during the organization's mid-winter conference here.

Seventeen Hadassah members who went to the Western Wall last week to pray were escorted away by police after some fervently Orthodox worshipers spat on them, threw stones and shouted epithets.

The Hadassah women had brought a Torah with them, and one woman wore a prayer shawl.

The incident occurred the day after the Supreme Court rejected the petition of the Women of the Wall, as the Israeli women's group is known.

The Hadassah women said they had not known at the time of the court's ruling, which upheld Orthodox regulations governing worship at the Western Wall that call for women to pray silently and without a Torah or prayer shawls.

Despite their not knowing about the ruling, the director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs said the women were in "contempt of court."

Since then, several of the Hadassah women's group said the incident galvanized them to forge closer ties to Israeli women's groups.

Hadassah "believes that every Jew has the right individually and collectively to pray openly and freely at the Kotel, the Western Wall," their resolution reads.

"We are saddened and disturbed by the actions of the Israel Supreme Court, which has affirmed the regulations aimed against the Women of the Wall.

"We are angered and disturbed by any abusive behavior directed at women who wish to pray at the Kotel. We call upon the government of Israel to protect the rights of all women to pray in their own way at the Kotel," the resolution reads.

SUSPECTED COLLABORATORS SLAIN IN GAZA

JERUSALEM, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- Seven Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israeli authorities were murdered in the Gaza Strip in two days this week.

The Al Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization claimed responsibility for three of the killings. The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement said it was responsible for four.

Two weeks ago, Hamas declared an end to the so-called amnesty period during which collaborators could turn themselves in without being killed.

In January, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem called for a halt to the torture and killings of Palestinians alleged to be collaborators.

B'Tselem estimated that since the start of the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, in December 1987, Palestinians have killed between 750 and 950 of their own people accused of collaborating with the Israeli authorities.

U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS BODY CALLS FOR RELEASE OF PALESTINIANS

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 3 (JTA) -- The United Nations Human Rights Commission opened its annual six-week session with a report on human rights abuses in Israel and a speech by Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The human rights report, presented Wednesday by the former Swiss foreign minister, Rene Felber, called on Israel to free the 12,000 Palestinians said to be in Israeli jails and urged Palestinian and Israeli leaders to end the violence by groups opposed to the peace process.

The human rights group Amnesty International issued its own report Wednesday, which also accused Israel and the Palestinians of showing a continuing pattern of human rights abuses.

A similar rebuke came the day earlier from the U.S. State Department. But the State Department's annual human rights report had hopeful words for the future, noting the Israeli-Palestinian accord and other "positive human rights developments."

Felber, who visited the territories last month, was the first U.N. investigator in 25 years allowed to enter the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the purpose of gathering material for the report.

Felber singled out the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement and Israeli settlers as being particularly responsible for the continuing violence.

He also urged Israel to establish an independent judicial body to investigate allegations that Palestinian prisoners were beaten and tortured and to punish those responsible for mistreatment.

Questioning Israel's Commitment To Peace

Arafat, addressing the U.N. body on Tuesday, also called for Israel's release of its Palestinian prisoners, a number he put at 14,000.

While the tone of his remarks was not as inflammatory as in previous addresses to the commission, Arafat used the occasion to question Israel's commitment to the self-rule accord it signed with the PLO last September.

"I do not deny that there is continued violence in the territories by us," he said. "Unfortunately the conviction of the Arabs is that the Israeli government is not serious in implementing the accord."

Arafat called on the commission to continue condemning Israeli human rights abuses, saying "as the occupation continues and the Israeli practices have not changed, please pursue your efforts in ensuring legal and international protection for our people."

In its report, Amnesty International focused on the continued imprisonment of Palestinians by the Israelis and on the situation in southern Lebanon, where Israel and its allied South Lebanon Army continue to patrol a buffer zone protecting Israel's northern border.

Amnesty accused Israel of torturing detainees in southern Lebanon and charged that Israel was holding about 20 Lebanese prisoners in an effort to gain information about Israeli MIAs.

"If this is the case, then they are hostages and should be released immediately and unconditionally," the Amnesty report said.

The London-based organization said this also applied to any group that might be holding the Israeli MIAs.