

**TO HELP COMBAT TERROR, RABIN SAYS HE IS RELYING ON PALESTINIAN POLICE**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- In a week that saw a number of Israeli victims of terror, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said he would rely on the future Palestinian police force to serve as Israel's "partner" in combating terrorism.

"They will have something to lose if they don't exert control," he reportedly said Sunday.

"They will have an enormous stake in securing the peace. If they fail and the bloodletting continues, they know they will not arrive at their destination and will not get what they wish to achieve beyond Gaza and Jericho," Rabin said, referring to the two sites where the accord will be implemented first.

The prime minister's comments came amid another wave of violence in the administered territories and within Israel.

On Sunday, an Israeli reportedly belonging to Shin Bet, the country's secret police, was shot and killed during a terrorist attack in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Two other Israelis were wounded in the ambush.

The three were shot during a Shin Bet operation in Ramallah, military sources said. The incident prompted the Israeli military to close the area and launch a massive search for the assailants.

Noam Cohen, who was killed in Sunday's attack, was reportedly the first member of Shin Bet to be killed in a terrorist incident since January 1993.

A member of the Izz a-Din al-Kassam, the military wing of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, later claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred at the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The incident occurred several days after a taxi-driver and a farmer were murdered by terrorists.

**Calls Made To Replace Palestinian Workers**

The body of 23-year-old Ilan Sudri was found Friday near the Negev city of Netivot, not far from where his blood-stained taxi had been found the day before. He had been shot several times in the head.

The fundamentalist Islamic Jihad movement claimed responsibility for the killing.

Sudri had been a member of the border police in the Gaza Strip, but he left the force and reportedly bought a taxi only a week ago.

Naftali Sahar, 75, was murdered last week in his orange grove near Rehovot. He was reportedly killed by an Arab worker, who hit him on the head with an iron bar.

The murders of Sudri and Sahar prompted renewed calls to replace Palestinian agricultural workers with foreigner laborers.

At Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Agriculture Minister Yakov Tsur proposed that Israel allow into the country 1,000 non-Palestinian foreign workers, but debate on the question was postponed.

**JUDGES STUN RABBINICAL COURT, RULING CIVIL LAW APPLIES IN DIVORCE**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- In a landmark decision, Israel's Supreme Court has ruled that rabbinical courts must apply civil, rather than religious, law to property settlements in divorce cases.

Last week's decision overturns a ruling by the Supreme Rabbinical Court here, which had not recognized the rights of a divorcee, Chana Bavli, to half of all assets accumulated in her marriage.

The groundbreaking ruling is sending shock waves through the religious establishment, which views this as an unprecedented erosion of its traditional jurisdiction and has vowed to resist the measure.

"The Jewish judges will not (comply with) the decision, because it is not according to halachah," or religious law, said Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Dahan, director of Israel's rabbinical courts.

More staunch rejection of the ruling came from Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, a Knesset member from the United Torah Party.

"The so-called Supreme Court," he said, "is not supposed to mix in and give orders to the rabbinic courts, to order them to make decisions according to secular principles."

Ravitz had been poised to formally request a government response to the ruling but said he was asked by Justice Minister David Libai to postpone his request for a week so that Libai could examine the ruling before responding.

A special Knesset session has been called for this week to discuss the ruling.

Ravitz described the ruling as "not only chutzpah" and "provocation" but also as a violation of the secular law that provides that rabbinical courts make their decisions according to halachah.

He also said no religious judge would abide by it.

The decision has delighted many women, who see more justice in a law that divides marital assets in half. Civil courts call for equal division of all marital assets upon divorce.

Miriam Isserow, attorney for the Israel Women's Network, called the ruling "precedent-setting" and said it would "neutralize the current disadvantage women have in the rabbinical courts."

Naomi Blumenthal, a Knesset member from the Likud, also hailed the decision.

"Women are victims of the religious courts in matters of personal status," said Blumenthal, who chairs the Knesset subcommittee on violence against women.

Blumenthal said she has high respect for religious law and is not seeking a separation between religion and state.

But she said she is "asking for justice for women" in a religious system which discriminates against them.

Under Israeli law, rabbinical courts have enjoyed sole jurisdiction over marriage and divorce between Jews. But couples have had a

choice between civil and religious courts on "incidental" matters such as property settlements in divorce cases, Isserow explained.

In rabbinical courts, commonly held assets are divided in half, but assets in the name of one spouse, such as employment pensions, remain with that spouse, said Ben-Dahan of the religious courts.

The wife is usually awarded a token sum, as specified in the marriage contract.

Rabbi Simha Meron, a lawyer and former director of the religious courts, said the ruling's impact is "not all that meaningful" if measured by the number of affected cases.

He maintained that most couples who come before the religious courts have already reached a halachically determined agreement.

"The main problem," said Meron, is that "the court said the rabbis must judge according to civil law."

"The Knesset gives the rabbinical courts the power to judge with rabbinical law," he said. "If you take away rabbinical law, you don't need rabbinical courts."

Meron said the Supreme Court's decision will not stick.

"The rabbis cannot and will not break (Jewish) law," he said. "They have no right to rule against halachah."

Moreover, he predicted, now "people will go more and more" before the high court.

Ben-Dahan predicted that the ruling will make it more difficult to divorce in rabbinical courts.

He said wives will come before the religious courts expecting to get half the marital assets and the husbands will refuse to grant the get (divorce), "because they will say it is against halachah."

Isserow, the attorney for the women's network, observed that rabbis will no longer be able to use advantageous property settlements to induce recalcitrant husbands to grant divorces.

The issue goes to the heart of the "delicate balance" between religion and state, said Blumenthal, "which lies at the root" of Israel's foundation.

She said, "We have to be sure" that the fervently Orthodox will not tip "the balance in their favor and against women."

"Women are the victims of the injustice of concessions made as part of this balance," she said. "We suffer because we don't have the political power to fight."

According to the Israeli newspaper Davar, Rabbi Sha'ar Yeshuv Cohen, chief rabbi of Haifa, called for all Israel's chief rabbis and rabbinical judges to assemble to discuss the matter.

The former Israeli chief Ashkenazic rabbi, Shlomo Goren, suggested that couples interested in dividing their property according to halachah in the event of divorce sign a prenuptial agreement to that effect, Davar reported.

#### **EX-EDITOR TO HEAD PALESTINIAN BANK**

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The former editor of a Palestinian newspaper published in eastern Jerusalem has been tapped to head a new Palestinian banking venture backed by an international consortium.

Hanna Siniora, previously the editor of the

Al-Fajr newspaper, will become the senior officer of the International Palestinian Bank, a co-venture to be established by Bank Leumi in cooperation with a Palestinian, Spanish and Moroccan banking consortium.

The bank, slated to have \$40 million in start-up capital, is expected to be an important source for economic development in the territories after the implementation of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

The consortium has requested the approval of the Bank of Israel to open branches in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

As part of its backing of the new banking venture, Bank Leumi has apparently agreed to train workers and provide computer services for the Palestinian bank.

#### **PERES TELLS U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP ISRAEL IS SAFEGUARDING PALESTINIANS**

NEW YORK, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Addressing the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Israel is doing its utmost to protect the human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Peres, who spoke before the commission on Feb. 10, is the first Israeli foreign minister to address the U.N. body, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

In his speech, Peres also stated that current regional peacemaking initiatives are not being conducted under the threat of a gun, but are taking place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and good will.

Last week, the commission, which is holding its annual six-week session, focused on human rights issues in the administered territories and on the broader issue of racial discrimination.

Morris Abram, a former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. body and now chairman of the Geneva-based U.N. Watch, a human rights group, spoke out forcefully last week on the issue of anti-Semitism, calling on the commission to reject it explicitly in all its forms.

"The commission has never condemned anti-Semitism -- the oldest existent form of prejudice -- one which has brought unmentionable horror, terrors and tragedies to all of mankind," said Abrams.

"Why should there be any reluctance by any member (of the commission) to condemn that which every modern pope has condemned, to denounce what every religious leader has denounced?"

"Let us never forget that anti-Semitism starts with the Jews, never stops with the Jews and finally destroys democratic institutions and the rule of law," he said.

Andree Farhi, representing the International Council of Jewish Women, made a similar demand of the commission.

"There continues to be a blatant lack of any mention of anti-Semitism during the commission's annual discussions on racism," Farhi said. "How could this omission be justified?"

Farhi called on the commission to request a study of anti-Semitism with the aim of ultimately developing an international convention to combat it.

*(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Tamar Levy in Geneva.)*

## HOUSE DEFERS VOTE TO CONDEMN SPEECH BY NATION OF ISLAM AIDE

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Another controversy about the Nation of Islam came to a boil last week on Capitol Hill.

The House of Representatives deferred action on a resolution condemning a speech by the Nation of Islam's Khalid Abdul Muhammad after several members objected to various aspects of the resolution.

In a related development, one of the resolution's co-sponsors, Rep. Pete King (R-N.Y.), called for a halt in federal financing for two programs associated with the Nation of Islam. One program deals with security services, while the second is concerned with AIDS awareness.

"Although the Nation of Islam has correctly targeted the drug problem in the inner cities," King said in a statement, "any continued federal funding of their programs would constitute the government's tacit approval of the vile, racist message of its leadership."

After an emotional debate among House Democrats, the House leadership decided last Thursday that the resolution to condemn Muhammad's remarks should be detoured to a committee, instead of heading straight for a quick vote on the House floor.

The resolution, introduced by Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and co-sponsored by at least 18 other members, condemns Muhammad's speech as "outrageous hatemongering of the most vicious and vile kind; and condemns all manifestations and expressions of racism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism and ethnic or religious intolerance."

Among the co-sponsors of the unusual resolution to condemn someone's speech -- not something the House normally does -- were several African-American members.

### Questions Of Free Speech Remain

Muhammad's speech at Kean College in New Jersey last Nov. 29, in which he verbally attacked Jews, Catholics, whites and gays, has exploded into a controversy with wide repercussions.

At a meeting of House Democratic leaders and other Democratic members last Thursday, several representatives -- black and white -- raised objections to the resolution, sources said.

Members questioned it on free speech grounds and wondered what sort of precedent the resolution would set and whose speech would or should be condemned.

The resolution was also criticized for not including any reference to homophobia.

Defending the resolution at the meeting, Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) argued emotionally that people had ignored hate speech in the 1930s and had not taken the Nazis seriously.

"That cannot happen again," he said.

The Senate voted unanimously Feb. 2 to condemn Muhammad's Kean College speech.

At a Feb. 3 news conference in Washington, Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, announced that he was disciplining Muhammad for his remarks but not for their "truths."

Lantos' office played down any hint of controversy, saying the vote was put off because of scheduling and weather concerns.

## JEWISH GROUPS SPLIT IN REACTION TO SCHOOL PRAYER AND VOUCHER VOTES

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- Jewish groups have reacted with mixed emotions to three controversial Senate proposals dealing with the role of government and religion in public schools.

Two of the amendments, dealing with school prayer, were approved by the Senate as part of the Clinton administration's education package known as "Goals 2000." A third amendment, regarding school vouchers, was defeated.

One amendment passed would require schools to allow students to engage voluntarily in "constitutionally protected prayer," or lose their federal aid.

Critics of the bill claim that the ambiguous definition of "constitutionally protected prayer" -- language chosen to attract more votes for the bill -- will give school administrators headaches over which prayers they should allow and which they should not.

Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress, a strong opponent of prayer in schools, called the proposal "troublesome."

The bill will cause school boards fearful of losing crucial federal funds to err in favor of allowing prayer, even if the prayer is not constitutionally protected, Pelavin said.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) introduced the amendment, which passed Feb. 3 by a 75-22 margin.

### Awareness Of 'A Supreme Being'

The Senate also passed a controversial resolution Feb. 4 supporting a moment of silence during the school day that would allow students to pray if they so desired.

The "moment of silence" amendment, sponsored by Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.), passed 78-8.

Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, national director of American Friends of Lubavitch, strongly supported the resolution.

"A moment of silence brings about the awareness in children of the existence of a supreme being," Shemtov said.

Opponents of the amendment argue there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding its implementation, as for example, who would be responsible for it, said Michael Lieberman, associate director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Other opponents say the legislation has little purpose, as no school has ever prevented a student from engaging in a moment of silence, said Richard Foltin, legal counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

Danforth's bill was offered only as a "sense of the Senate" resolution, and did not threaten school boards with the loss of federal funds.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 8 the Senate rejected an amendment calling for federally funded school vouchers, which would free up public funds for use as vouchers used to pay for private schools.

The Orthodox Jewish community has supported school voucher proposals that have appeared on several state ballots.

AJCongress opposed the amendment, which was sponsored by Sens. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) and Joseph Liebermann (D-Conn.), as violating the constitutional separation of church and state.

**BITTER FIGHT OVER CHANGES IN JUDAISM  
TEARS FRENCH RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION**  
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS (JTA) -- A bitter dispute is dividing the Paris Consistoire, the body that oversees the religious needs of the Jewish community of Paris and its environs, and if a resolution is not reached soon, a non-Jewish administrator may be appointed to oversee the organization.

At issue is the future course of the Consistoire, which has been caught in a widening rift between two conceptions of what it means to be a Jew in France today.

According to those opposing the group's president, Benny Cohen, the Consistoire has become overly committed to Orthodoxy at the expense of the needs of the community's less religious members.

"The Consistoire is not only the representative of the most Orthodox Jews, but of all Jews, even the non-religious ones," said Moise Cohen, the leader of the opposition, who is not related to Benny Cohen.

Four years ago, Benny Cohen was elected to the presidency of the Paris Consistoire, which among other duties oversees kosher slaughtering, administers the local Bet Din, or religious court, and issues kosher licenses to restaurants.

At the beginning of his presidency, Benny Cohen was perceived as a very active leader who built synagogues and mikvehs, or ritual baths.

But last year some of his programs -- including the building of a yeshiva in Israel's administered territories and another in the United States -- were subject to intense criticism, and the Jewish community here began to question how its money was being spent.

In hotly contested elections for the board of the Consistoire last November, half of the winning candidates supported Benny Cohen, while the other half backed the opposition's Moise Cohen.

As a result of the evenly split board -- which has Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews represented on each side in equal proportion -- the Consistoire has had no president since January.

**An Unprecedented Move**

In a move unprecedented since the inception of the Consistoire in 1808, one of Moise Cohen's supporters, Lazare Kaplan, has called on the French courts to resolve the impasse.

If the board cannot reach agreement within several weeks, the Consistoire will soon be run for three months by a non-Jewish administrator appointed by the Paris Tribunal.

Benny Cohen and his supporters, incensed by the action of their opponents, hotly opposed intervention by the courts. The notion of the Consistoire being run by a non-Jew, they point out, has been unheard-of since the days of the Vichy regime.

Moise Cohen is currently calling for new elections for the board -- a suggestion opposed by Benny Cohen.

Any Jew contributing financially to the Consistoire, which is often done in local synagogues, can cast a ballot in the elections to the board.

Out of an estimated population of 350,000 Jews in the broader Paris area administered by the Consistoire, some 30,000 are eligible voters.

**IN HISTORIC MEETING, ISRAELI ENVOY  
DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS WITH THE POPE**  
By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) -- Shmuel Hadas, assuming his position as Israel's first official envoy to the Holy See, discussed the Middle East peace process during a historic half-hour meeting with Pope John Paul II last week.

"It was a very good meeting, very warm, very informal," said Hadas, who was accompanied by Israel's ambassador to Italy, Avi Pazner.

"It was very, very good -- (the pope) was in a good mood," Pazner said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Hadas was named Special Representative to the Holy See with the rank of ambassador after the historic agreement signed by Israel and the Vatican Dec. 30, in which the two states agreed to grant each other diplomatic recognition.

He is expected to be confirmed as full-fledged ambassador within a few months.

Although the Feb. 10 meeting was described as a courtesy call, Hadas said the pope was interested in discussing the latest developments in the Middle East peace process, particularly in light of the accord on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho signed with the PLO last week in Cairo.

He also said the pope stressed that the agreement between Israel and the Vatican was a major step in dialogue between Judaism and Christianity.

Hadas said he officially assumed his position Feb. 9, when he participated in a round of talks with senior Vatican officials, including Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

**ISRAEL AND NAMIBIA FORGE TIES;  
12TH SUCH EVENT SINCE SEPTEMBER**

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israel and the southwest African nation of Namibia have established full diplomatic relations.

At a ceremony here last Friday, diplomatic documents were signed by Israel's U.N. ambassador, Gad Yaacobi, and his Namibian counterpart, Tunguru Huaraka.

Namibia is the 12th country to establish diplomatic relations with Israel since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed a declaration of principles last September.

The Namibian ambassador said his country saw "the famous handshake between (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak) Rabin and (PLO Chairman Yasser) Arafat as a brave act and a sign of Israel's willingness to solve the problems of the Middle East."

He also expressed hope for flourishing cooperation between the two countries.

A delegation of 15 Israeli business persons and economic experts were to travel to Namibia this week to explore opportunities for aid and economic cooperation.

Yaacobi said the establishment of relations was "another step for Israel toward normalization and cooperation with all the African countries."

The foreign ministers of the two nations met here last October during the opening of the U.N. General Assembly.

Namibia, which is home to about 1.5 million people, was a protectorate of South Africa until 1990.