



VIOLENT INCIDENTS ARE 'WAKE-UP CALL' FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN BLACKS, JEWS
By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, March 3 (JTA) -- When his phone started ringing after the shooting of four Chasidic students Tuesday, Howard Teich was told that the Rev. Al Sharpton was on the line.

Teich, co-president of the New York metropolitan region of American Jewish Congress, said the controversial black activist, who recently announced his bid for the U.S. Senate, was outraged about the shooting and wanted to do something.

Within 24 hours, Teich and Sharpton had gathered more than 30 grass-roots representatives of the Jewish and black communities at the AJCongress offices where they discussed strategies to defuse the kind of racial tensions that may have motivated Tuesday's attack.

Among the participants were students, pastors, heads of local Islamic groups, ministers who run anti-drug programs, as well as academics and political representatives.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the AJCongress, said the meeting was most significant because it brought together local leaders who ordinarily leave it to national and high-level representatives to carry on interfaith and inter-racial dialogue.

Despite lasting tensions between Sharpton and Jews, including ongoing charges of anti-Semitism, Siegman said the time has come for all interested parties to start talking about what they have in common.

"Rather than standing in our separate corners hurling epithets at each other, we wanted to explore the possibility of doing something concrete together," he said.

'Dark Underside' Of World As Global Village

Siegman said the Hebron mosque murders and the shooting of Chasidic students on the Brooklyn Bridge served as a "wake-up call" to New York's minority communities that a further escalation in ethnic violence threatened to "Balkanize" the region, referring to the ethnic strife that has ravaged through the former Yugoslavia.

"We're learning the dark underside of what we thought was an attractive principle, that the world is a global village," Siegman said of speculations that the attack in New York came in retaliation for last week's murders of dozens of worshipers in Hebron by a Jewish settler.

Many who were at the meeting said the major breakthrough was that members of the Jewish and black communities who ordinarily have little or no contact with each other were able to sit down, explain a little bit about themselves and then exchange telephone numbers.

Siegman said some Muslims at the meeting were shocked to hear that the Hebron killings had been summarily denounced by nearly every major Jewish organization in America.

Many had heard only reports from Israel of militant Jewish groups who were praising the attack, Siegman said.

Likewise, Siegman said Jewish leaders were surprised to hear from black Muslim leaders that their communities were "revolted" by the hate rhetoric of black separatist Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam.

"Their communities discuss this in churches and clubs, but it's not reported in The New York Times," Siegman said. "We only know it when we sit down and talk."

The Rev. Johnnie McCann, pastor of St. Luke's Baptist Church in Harlem, said he left the meeting with a "sense of unity" and a feeling that things were "starting to heal."

McCann, who had never before participated in a meeting with Jewish groups, said he was surprised to learn that the diversity of Jewish sects and movements parallels that in the African American community.

A college student from Brooklyn's fervently Orthodox Lubavitch community suggested that blacks and Jews get together to publish an underground newspaper, Siegman said.

Tuesday's attack on the Chasidic students sparked fear and concern throughout the Jewish community. A police department spokesman said security has been stepped up at Jewish institutions throughout the city, including synagogues and schools.

Rabbi Moshe Krupka, director of national programs for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, said there is a tremendous fear in the Jewish community of further racially motivated attacks.

"In the back of your mind," he said, "you're wondering, should we allow our children to walk home from school unattended? Are men with beards and payot (sidecurls) walking targets now?"

There are plans for a second meeting to be hosted by Muslim representatives in Brooklyn, focusing on tolerance and economic problems.

But Siegman and others say the real fruit of the meeting would be an easing of informal relations between members of all groups.

GROUP TARGETS SYRIAN JEWS AFTER HEBRON MOSQUE MURDERS
By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, March 3 (JTA) -- In an apparent threat of reprisal for the killing of Muslim worshipers by a Jewish settler in Hebron, a Syrian Muslim group has circulated a leaflet calling for massive violence against Syrian Jews.

American Jewish groups called on the Clinton administration to ask the Syrian government to prevent any of the violent threats from being carried out.

State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said at a briefing Thursday that while the department had not yet seen the actual leaflet, the department had read a translation "which has clearly got a great deal of inflammatory and despicable language" in it.

He said the U.S. government was looking into the matter through its embassy in Syria and was trying to verify the document's authenticity.

A department source said late Thursday that, according to U.S. Embassy officials in Syria, the Syrian government is aware of the pamphlet and has taken "appropriate actions." The source would not elaborate.

A group calling itself the "Syrian Muslim Party of Justice" distributed the leaflet to Jewish homes and businesses this week threatening "that the blood of all Jews living in Syria will be spilled starting Sunday the 13th of March 1994."

That date marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"You only shoot your enemies when they are praying," the letter said, in obvious reference to the murders last week of at least 40 Muslim worshipers by militant Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein on Feb. 25.

The murders, which occurred at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron as Muslims prayed, sparked violence throughout Israel and has seriously threatened the Middle East peace process.

In the aftermath of the slayings, the world Jewish community carefully watched for terrorist acts committed against Jews in response.

The State Department source said the administration had never heard of the group claiming authorship of the letter. But if the letter proved to be authentic, the source said, the ramifications "could be an ugly business."

The letter, addressed to "You The Jews," was written in Arabic. A translation in English was provided to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

"For many, many years you are committing crimes not only against Arab Muslims people but against all human beings," the letter reads.

"We are going to take revenge from you continuously and in the near future you will see that Hitler was weak in comparison (to) what we will do (to) you," it continues.

'We Take This Threat Very Seriously'

Alice Harary, president of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews, said in a statement Thursday that the letter's reference to the Hebron mosque murders "demonstrates the depth of hatred that this Syrian group has for Jews, regardless of their innocence."

Jewish groups, including the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Canadian Jewish Congress, had called upon the Clinton administration to request preventative action by Syrian President Hafez al-Assad.

"We expect that our government will move swiftly to demand that President Assad take immediate steps to prevent the threatened bloody onslaught," said Seymour Reich, chairman of the conference's Task Force on Syrian Jewry.

"We take this threat very seriously," Reich said in a statement Thursday.

The U.S. government has previously come to the aid of Syrian Jews in efforts to have the Syrian government enforce a policy of free travel.

Following more than a year in which the number of Jews allowed to leave Syria was sharply curtailed, Assad promised Secretary of State Warren Christopher last December that he would grant travel visas to all Jews desiring them.

By February's end, the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews said all but a few members of the Syrian Jewish community had travel visas. Some 1,000 Jews remain in Syria.

NEW PRISONER RELEASE BY ISRAEL FAILS TO DEFUSE TENSION WITH PALESTINIANS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 3 (JTA) -- Amid continuing hopes that the move will ease tensions following the murders last week of at least 40 Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron, Israel has released a second group of Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Thursday's prisoner release -- the second this week and the fourth since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the self-rule accord last September -- involved some 400 prisoners, bringing the total of those freed this week to nearly 1,000.

The prisoner release earlier this week was not applauded by PLO leaders, who said the move offered too little and too late after the killings in Hebron.

But Israel Defense Force and police officials were nonetheless hoping that the second prisoner release would contribute to a calmer atmosphere in the territories, which have witnessed violent confrontations between Palestinians and the IDF during the past week.

In the six days of rioting that occurred in Hebron, Jericho and elsewhere in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and within the Green Line, 22 Palestinians and one elderly Jew have been killed and scores wounded.

But on Thursday, relative calm prevailed in the territories, with no violent confrontations reported.

B'Tselem Asks Army To Halt Reinforcements

The second prisoner release coincided with the publishing of a report by Israeli human rights group B'Tselem that harshly criticized the IDF's handling of the past week's unrest.

B'Tselem -- which means "in the image," a reference to the passage in Genesis that all people are created in God's image -- called on the army to stop pouring reinforcements into the territories at a time when emotions already were at fever pitch.

The group also called on the IDF to lift its curfews and closures of the West Bank and Gaza, steps it said could only further heighten tensions.

A spokesman said the group had studied 12 cases in which Palestinians had been killed by Israeli troops, and the group found that in not one of the cases had the lives of Israeli soldiers been threatened.

Israeli troops have longstanding orders not to shoot unless their lives are in danger.

B'Tselem further urged the IDF not to send poorly trained troops into the territories, especially those not fully aware of crowd-dispersal methods that do not involve lethal force.

On Thursday, the official commission established earlier in the week to investigate the killings in Hebron invited Israelis and Palestinians to provide any information that might prove useful for the inquiry.

The commission took out ads in the Palestinian daily Al-Nahar and in Israeli papers saying: "Anyone who wishes to give evidence, or submit a document or exhibit to the committee should apply in writing, giving an outline of the evidence he wishes to give, or of the text of the document, or a description of the exhibit."

ANTI-SEMITIC ACTS IN CANADA JUMP TO HIGHEST TALLY IN AT LEAST 12 YEARS

By Bram D. Eisenthal

MONTREAL, March 3 (JTA) -- Acts of anti-Semitic vandalism in 1993 increased 128 percent across Canada over the year before, according to B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights.

The league publishes an annual tabulation of acts of vandalism and harassment, and the results for 1993 showed a disturbing trend, said the league's national chairman, Stephen Scheinberg.

"In a climate of economic uncertainty and political fatigue, we have witnessed an erosion of traditional taboos against expressing hatred, and an explosion of hate crimes directed against the Jewish community and institutions," said Scheinberg.

"Other identifiable groups have faced similar surges in hostility toward them," he said. "This is a national problem that requires a dramatic and coordinated response."

The statistics reveal 105 incidents of vandalism and 151 reported incidents of harassment last year -- the highest total reported in the 12 years that B'nai Brith has been tracking identifiable acts of anti-Semitism.

More than 60 percent of the reported incidents occurred in Toronto and Montreal, the largest population centers of Canadian Jewry.

In Toronto, there were 107 anti-Semitic incidents, representing a 10 percent increase over 1992.

In Montreal, there were 54 incidents, more than twice the number reported the previous year.

The B'nai Brith tabulations rely on information provided by their regional offices across Canada, and they are based upon the voluntary reporting of anti-Semitic incidents by the intended victims, whose accounts are later corroborated and documented.

It has been found that hate crimes, as is the case with spousal and child abuse, tend to be under-reported, and it is believed that the number of actual incidents is probably much higher.

Nonetheless, B'nai Brith believes its audit to be an accurate indicator of anti-Semitic trends. The group's tabulations serve as the basis for the planning and deployment of communal resources to combat racism.

Incidents of race-related hatred were also on the rise in high schools and on college campuses.

In 1993, the Human Rights Youth League was launched to teach young Jews how to take a stand against racism through non-violent, legal ways.

Scheinberg said, "Our position has been that we've been comparatively lucky in Canada compared to parts of the world like Western Europe, and we've sort of been waiting for things to get worse."

INITIATIVE TO CURB HATE CRIMES PASSES U.S. HOUSE BY VOICE VOTE

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, March 3 (JTA) -- The House of Representatives approved potentially far-reaching legislation this week that could establish hate-crime prevention programs around the country.

The Anti-Defamation League, which had been

working on the issue with congressional offices, hailed Wednesday's voice vote in the House.

"It's the first broad-based national initiative" on hate-crimes prevention, said Michael Lieberman, counsel for the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office. "It's a terrific thing."

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-N.Y.), was approved as an amendment to the massive education bill now making its way through Congress.

"Hate crimes have become an all too common occurrence in our communities," Velazquez said in a statement. "From anti-Semitic acts to race-inspired murders, these crimes threaten not only our safety, but also the richness of our diversity and who we are as a people."

"More importantly, we know that hate crimes, which stem from bigotry and ignorance, can be stopped through proper education and awareness," she said.

Among the examples she used to argue for her legislation was this week's shooting of Chasidic students in New York.

A staffer in Velazquez's office said that the congresswoman was "shooting for" a \$5 million to \$10 million pilot program for the first year, but that the dollar level would eventually have to be worked out in conjunction with Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

The program would award grants to local education and community groups to develop training programs and curricula to fight prejudice.

Lieberman said there was no companion measure yet in the Senate, but he added that ADL would be working to ensure that one would be introduced and that the proposal would be funded.

IN SURVEY, FRENCH SAY THEY WOULD VOTE FOR JEWS

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, March 3 (JTA) -- Only 13 percent of the French people would object to having a Jew as their president, according to a survey published this week by the Roman Catholic weekly La Vie.

More than 80 percent of those polled said they would not mind voting for a Jew; 6 percent refused to answer.

When asked if they would elect a candidate who was a naturalized French citizen, 56 percent said yes and 37 percent answered no.

The poll also asked several questions about the Dreyfus Affair, the nearly 100-year-old case in which a French officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was sentenced to life imprisonment for spying for the Germans. The sentence, motivated by widespread anti-Semitism within the French army, was later commuted.

A majority of those polled -- 51 percent -- said the case is neither taught sufficiently at school nor, according to 46 percent of the respondents, discussed sufficiently by the media.

Asked whether racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism had increased within French society since the Dreyfus case, 45 percent said yes, while 13 percent thought the problems had decreased.

Asked what could prevent the recurrence of another Dreyfus Affair, 81 percent said that human rights organizations were the best prevention, while the courts scored 57 percent, radio 43 percent, television 38 percent and the press 36 percent.

DESPITE THE UNREST, ISRAEL DRAWS INTEREST AS ECONOMIC INVESTMENT
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, March 3 (JTA) -- Israeli leaders worked to instill confidence among delegates to an international business conference that, in spite of current tensions, the time is ripe for investment here.

More than 1,000 participants from 37 countries gathered here this week to explore business opportunities in Israel and the region in an era of peacemaking.

It was impossible to ignore the heightened tensions and the disruption of the peace talks following the murders at the Hebron mosque. But the conference's success appeared to be a strong testament to the conviction that the economic climate here is increasingly fertile for investment.

Participants included political leaders, such as the deputy prime minister of Thailand and the president of Slovenia, and corporate heavy-hitters, such as vice presidents of General Electric from Britain and Sprint International from the United States.

Nearly 40 percent of the participants were Israeli, while there were representatives from Japan, China, India, Korea, Tunisia and Qatar, an Arab state on the Persian Gulf that has recently stepped into trade talks with Israel while not establishing diplomatic ties.

"We were very anxious after what happened in Hebron," conceded Chaim Weiss, chairman of the Fourth Business Forum Conference, which was sponsored by the Israeli Forum.

"But what we have learned is the business community is mature and understands such events will not harm the (peace) process in the long run," Weiss said.

"Whoever wants to take part or share in the prospering economy of Israel and the region should be here without taking into consideration any such dreadful events," he said.

Ariel Seidman was born in the United States, raised in Israel and is now based in Luxembourg, where he works for Bank Hapoalim.

"By virtue of the fact that about 1,000 people are here, including a lot of non-Jews, the conference is a vote of confidence in the peace process and in its potential future economic benefits," he said.

'A Great Thing For Israel'

"The people here see Israel now as a place to invest, a net business opportunity, without any emotional attachment," Seidman said. This entrance "into the international market is a great thing for Israel."

The conference featured addresses by President Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel. U.S. Vice President Al Gore addressed the group via satellite hookup.

Delegates also took a daylong train tour through the Negev to sites designed to showcase Israel's advanced state of industry, research and development, trade and science.

The conference clearly was an opportunity to sell Israel to potential investors and partners for joint ventures. But the political difficulties in the region were not glossed over in the fundamental

recognition that, without political stability, economic investment is a risk.

Israeli leaders pledged to restore order and calm and to see that justice is done.

"What happened in Hebron was not Jewish, not Israeli, not civil," Weizman told the delegates on the opening day. "It is a terrible thing we will have to look very deeply into" and work a long time "to remedy the damage."

While he praised the achievements of the state since its founding, he acknowledged that the "Palestinian problem" had not yet been solved.

"We're still in the thick of it," he said, pledging that Israeli leaders would work quickly to "get things back on track."

"What happened in Hebron is a moral shame and a political problem and I wouldn't like to belittle it," said Peres, who gave the keynote address.

Peres cited the progress that had been made in the negotiations with the Palestinians and said that Israel would want to see the Palestinians "living in respect, dignity and prosperity."

The same is true, he said, of Israel's other neighbors.

"Only a fool can think Israel can remain an island of prosperity in a sea of misery," he said. "The higher the standard of living, the lower the standard of hatred. Their success is our success," said Peres.

Israel and neighboring Arab countries must fight the common threat of fundamentalism, which he called a "protest against poverty, corruption, disillusion, need and helplessness."

Meanwhile, Peres said the vast resources spent on arms in the region must be shifted to investment in "intellectual" resources of high technology and education and in cultivating the land. "We (all) have oversized armies and can't reduce them except regionally.

"What wars can produce is no longer important," he said, "and what's important wars can no longer produce."

Peace Process Is 'Irreversible'

Frenkel, of the Bank of Israel, told the conference that the while the Hebron murders were "bad news," there is "no doubt that the peace process is irreversible."

He called the business conference "urgent" because economic interests drive political reality.

The conference, he said, could increase the number of people and companies "committed to prosperity in the region," and these people could help spur the peace process forward through their lobbying.

Frenkel cited at length the recent improvements in Israel's economy, including high growth rates, reduced inflation and unemployment, bank restructuring, trade liberalization and other beneficial financial reforms.

He said Israel was a "natural candidate" for the financial center that will be needed in the Middle East as the era of peace dawns.

Jonathan Braude, treasurer of the South Africa-Israel Chamber of Commerce, said he traveled to the conference to explore opportunities for bilateral development and reconstruction projects both in South Africa and Israel.

"The economic climate is much better in both Israel and South Africa," he noted. "And both countries need economic development."