

**ATTACK IN AFULA STUNS ISRAEL,
BUT PEACE PROCESS REMAINS ON TRACK**
By David Landau and Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 6 (JTA) -- Despite the outrage felt throughout Israel after Wednesday's devastating terrorist attack in Afula, the peace process continued this week on its now fast-moving course toward Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

Talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization continued in Cairo and Paris, and the Israel Defense Force continued trucking vast quantities of materiel out of the two zones earmarked for initial Palestinian self-government.

At the Cairo and Paris negotiations, and also at multilateral talks on the environment that opened in The Hague on Wednesday, PLO representatives made a point of expressing their sorrow over the Afula attack.

In a certain way, those statements underscored the virtually unstoppable nature of the peace process now. Restarted last week after a month in suspension, it has acquired new momentum as the two parties strive to meet the terms of the self-rule accord signed last September in Washington.

Just 40 days after the Hebron massacre -- the end of the Muslim mourning period for the victims of that attack -- the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement kept its word to avenge those killed at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

A 19-year-old member of Hamas' armed wing, the Izz a-Din al-Kassam brigade, blew up a bus with a car bomb that killed eight people, including four teen-agers, and wounded more than 50 at noontime Wednesday in the northern Israeli town of Afula.

Among those killed and wounded were the driver of the bus and junior high school pupils who had just started their lunch break.

Witnesses said they saw people torn to bits by the explosion, children whose hair had been completely burned away and body parts strewn across the ground.

Car Had 385 Pounds Of Explosives

An anonymous caller, who said he represented Hamas, named the suicide bomber as Raed Zakarneh. He indicated that 385 pounds of explosives had been used in the attack.

The explosive-laden car was parked only some 10 feet from the bus stop where the Afula-Migdal Ha'emek bus was loading passengers.

Zakarneh, of the West Bank village of Kabatiya, was released from an Israeli jail three months ago. He was said by fellow villagers to have recently become intensely religious.

A Hamas spokesman in Jordan promised further attacks in retaliation for the Hebron massacre of Feb. 25, in which at least 29 Muslim worshipers were killed by settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

The police and army had been on high alert after Hamas threatened to retaliate for the Hebron killings. But, as a somber national Police

Chief Rafi Peled told reporters Wednesday, there is no realistic way of preventing every single terror attempt.

The timing of the attack -- coming on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day and on the day when Palestinian police were to have taken over a large police installation in Gaza -- cast a dark cloud over the entire country.

The bomb was "meant to murder the chances of Jews and Arabs living at peace together in this country," said Israel's President Ezer Weizman. "But on this day, as we stand about to remember the dead of the Holocaust, the hell unleashed here shall not succeed in killing our will for peace."

State Department Issues Condemnation

The U.S. State Department condemned the attack in the "strongest possible terms" and urged PLO leader Yasser Arafat to condemn it as well.

"We certainly hope that Chairman Arafat would condemn this act of violence," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said. "The language would be of the chairman's choosing, but it would be helpful if he expressed himself on this incident."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa expressed his sorrow at the attack in a telephone call to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Nabil Sha'ath, the head of the Palestinian delegation to the Cairo talks, said the bomb attack showed "how important it is to sign an Israel-Palestinian accord as soon as possible. We are pushing forward with the talks precisely to put an end to the killing on both sides."

Leaders of Israeli opposition parties called for Israel to put an immediate end to the Cairo talks, as the PLO had done after the Hebron massacre.

"The negotiations with the PLO must be called off immediately," said Likud leader Bin-yamin Netanyahu, who linked the attack to the Rabin government's "policy of surrender" in dealing with the PLO.

Police were quick to take preventive action in Afula, which lies close to the northern border of the West Bank and which is also surrounded by Israeli Arab villages.

On at least one occasion in the past few years, when Afula was the site of another terror attack, angry mobs almost lynched Arab workers in the town.

At the United Nations, Israeli Permanent Representative Gad Yaacobi called on the Security Council to censure the bombing. On March 18, the Security Council passed Resolution 904, condemning the Hebron massacre and calling for international observers to guarantee the safety of Palestinians in Hebron.

The international community and the nations of the Middle East, Yaacobi wrote in a letter to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, must not surrender to crazed fanatics who seek to destroy the chances for peace.

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Larry Yudelson in New York.)

WITH BLACKMUN'S EXIT FROM COURT, JEWISH CAUSES LOSE STAUNCH FRIEND

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, April 6 (JTA) -- Justice Harry Blackmun's retirement later this year from the Supreme Court means that the Jewish community will lose a strong supporter of abortion rights, religious liberties and church-state separation.

Blackmun, who announced Wednesday that he would retire at the end of this year's court term, is best known for authoring the landmark 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Most Jewish groups support a woman's right to choose abortion to terminate a pregnancy.

But the liberal Blackmun, 85, was also a strong backer of church-state separation and religious liberty issues, causes high on the priority list of most Jewish groups.

Legal experts at Jewish organizations praised Blackmun upon hearing of his imminent retirement.

Overall, "he was very much a friend on the court on church-state issues," particularly in the area of free exercise of religion, said Steven Freeman of the Anti-Defamation League. "We'll miss him."

Among the cases in which Blackmun took a position in line with that of the Jewish community was in the 1990 case *Employment Division vs. Smith*, known as the "peyote" decision.

Blackmun dissented from the majority opinion which upheld a law barring Native Americans from using the hallucinogen peyote in religious rituals. Jewish groups had opposed the law, out of concern for the possible banning of other religious practices.

It was the *Smith* decision that brought a broad coalition of Jewish and other religious groups together to lobby successfully for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, signed by President Clinton earlier this year. The act was designed to overturn the effects of the *Smith* decision.

"He shared and took very much to heart the concern over free exercise of religion" that unifies the Jewish community, said Richard Foltin of the American Jewish Committee. "Justice Blackmun has been our friend on these issues."

Foltin said that AJCommittee had presented Blackmun with its most prestigious award, the American Liberties Medallion, at the group's annual meeting in 1992. The award is presented to someone who makes a significant contribution to human rights, Foltin said.

A Solid Vote For Strict Separation

On the "establishment clause" issues dealing with separation of church and state, Blackmun provided a solid vote for strict separation, experts said. Blackmun wrote a dissenting opinion to last year's 5-4 court decision allowing a deaf student enrolled in a parochial school to have access to a sign language interpreter paid for with public funding.

The justice argued that "until now, the court never has authorized a public employee to participate directly in religious indoctrination. Yet that is the consequence of today's decision."

That case, *Zobrest vs. Catalina Foothills School District*, sharply split the Jewish com-

munity. Blackmun stood with the bulk of the Jewish community on other issues. "He reflected the consensus position of the Jewish community" on issues including abortion rights, women's rights, civil rights, the free exercise of religion and church-state separation, said Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

David Zwiebel, general counsel for Agudath Israel of America, a group representing the positions of fervently Orthodox Jews, said that for his group, Blackmun was "a friend on some issues, and a reliable opponent on others."

Many Orthodox Jews oppose abortion, and take a different, less strict position from the rest of the Jewish community on separation of church and state.

Zwiebel said that he expected Blackmun to take a position in the controversial *Kiryas Joel* school case, now before the court, opposite to that of Agudath Israel. "He is not likely to support the establishment of the school district," Zwiebel said.

Lone Dissenter On Haitian Refugees

Kiryas Joel vs. Grumet, argued last month before the Supreme Court, questions the constitutionality of a special New York public school district set up to serve handicapped Chasidic children.

Last June, Blackmun was the lone dissenter in a court decision upholding the U.S. policy of intercepting Haitian refugees at sea and returning them to Haiti without holding asylum hearings. A number of Jewish groups disagreed with the majority ruling in that case.

Appointed to the court in 1970 by President Richard Nixon, Blackmun was expected to provide a reliable conservative vote. But over the years, he became more liberal and the court more conservative. At this point, Blackmun is viewed as one of the staunch liberals on a somewhat conservative court.

Clinton, who spoke warmly of Blackmun on Wednesday at a joint appearance with the retiring justice, is expected to pick Blackmun's replacement soon.

Most legal experts at Jewish groups said they expected Clinton to select a nominee whose views are similar to those of Blackmun.

Thus, the experts do not expect Blackmun's departure to affect greatly the composition of the court.

Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress said he expected Clinton to focus more on reproductive rights than on church-state issues when choosing a new justice. "There's no (political) mileage" in focusing on church-state issues, Stern said.

Blackmun's retirement affords Clinton his second Supreme Court selection. Clinton's first pick, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who joined the court last year, was praised by Jewish groups. Ginsburg, viewed as a moderate, is the first Jew to sit on the court in 25 years.

Names circulating in Washington for Blackmun's successor include Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Maine), who plans to retire from the Senate after this year; Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt; and U.S. District Judge Jose Cabranes of Connecticut, who would be the first Hispanic appointed to the court.

GORE URGES: 'TELL THE STORY' IN SPEECH AT HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, April 6 (JTA) -- Vice President Al Gore told a large group gathered to commemorate the Holocaust this week that in order to prevent such an atrocity from ever happening again, those who care must "tell the story."

Gore's remarks highlighted the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's annual Days of Remembrance ceremony commemorating the victims of the Nazis. The weeklong commemoration coincides with the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day on the Jewish calendar, which this year fell on April 7.

"Certainly on this week after Passover, a commemoration of freedom from slavery over 3,000 years old, there is this lesson: Tell the story," Gore told those gathered in the grand Capitol Rotunda beneath the Capitol dome.

Several hundred guests, including Holocaust survivors and members of Congress, attended the somber ceremony, which was dedicated this year to the Jews of Hungary and the Gypsy community which perished during World War II.

"The purpose of this memorial, of this day, is to tell the story to each generation," Gore said. "We tell the story to remember those who died. We also tell the story to remember the need for vigilance."

The audience remained silent for a moment after Gore's stirring remarks, and then gave him a warm round of applause.

Benjamin Meed, a survivor and chairman of the Days of Remembrance Committee, spoke about the need of the world to remember history's "darkest chapter."

He also spoke of the importance of the U.S. Holocaust Museum, which "in only one year became the most proclaimed institution of remembrance in this nation."

The ceremony made continuous reference to Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish aristocrat sent to Hungary in 1944 who is credited with saving some 25,000 Jewish lives.

Also during the ceremony, Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, presented the Eisenhower Liberation Medal.

The medal, which honors those whose actions showed commitment to the highest moral principles and the defense of freedom, was received by Gen. Claude Kicklighter on behalf of the U.S. soldiers who helped liberate the Nazi concentration camps in 1945.

JEWS WELCOME MALAYSIAN REVERSAL OF BAN ON SHOWING 'SCHINDLER'S LIST'

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, April 6 (JTA) -- Australian Jewish leaders have welcomed Malaysia's decision to overturn its ban on the film "Schindler's List," but note that the government there has not yet actually approved showing the film.

Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's deputy prime minister and a likely successor to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as leader of the Muslim country, said the Cabinet observed that "the film deals with the atrocities of the Nazis against the Jews in Krakow, Poland, during the Second World

War" and that the film would be screened "in accordance with normal guidelines."

Last month, the Malaysian government banned the film, calling it too sympathetic to the Jews and too critical of the Nazis.

In a letter to the film's international distributor, the Malaysian film censor said, "The story of the film reflects the privilege and the virtues of a certain race only."

In announcing the reversal, Anwar said the censor's reasoning had been "unacceptable." He said, "The Nazis were brutal and cruel. And the victims, be they Jews or non-Jews, were victims, and our sympathies should be with them."

After protests of the ban by Australia/Israel Publications and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry received wide coverage in the Asian media, moderate Malaysian voices called for the government to review its decision on the film.

Kadir Jason, editor of the New Straits Times, an English-language paper published in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, wrote a column saying "I can only express my shock at the arrogance of the board" and "the kind of justification it put up to explain its actions."

Applauding Anwar's overturning of the ban, Colin Rubenstein, the editorial chairman of Australia/Israel Publications, applauded the fact that the criticism of the ban "had the desired effect."

"The film has a universal significance and it is to be hoped the Malaysian censors do not find a new reason to prevent their public viewing it," Rubenstein told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Michael Danby, public affairs consultant to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, said that "the most charitable spin" on Mahathir's "many dubious pronouncements about Jews, Europeans and other non-Malays is that he has simply sought to divert steam from Malaysia's own ethnic/Islamic pressure cooker."

Mahathir has previously banned the playing of a Jewish-titled symphonic piece by a Jewish composer by the New York Philharmonic, which canceled its engagement in Malaysia in response. He has also blamed Jews for controlling the media.

ISRAEL CONSIDERING FATE OF IRAQIS

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, April 6 (JTA) -- Israel, long the refuge for Jews fleeing persecution, is now considering how to deal with four Iraqis seeking asylum from Saddam Hussein's regime.

The Iraqis were arrested by the Israeli army when they crossed the border from Jordan last September. They say they will be executed if they return to Iraq.

Israel had planned to deport them. The Supreme Court turned down their appeal against deportation, on the grounds that they had entered Israel illegally from an enemy country.

But in the wake of intervention from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Israel has agreed not to deport them to Iraq, Jordan or Syria.

And a special committee reviewing the case is considering a request from the High Commissioner's office that the Iraqis not be deported until a third country can be found that will accept them as refugees. They are now being housed and fed by the Israeli army.

ITZHAK PERLMAN OPENS TUNNEL PROJECT, PROVIDING ACCESS FOR DISABLED AT KOTEL

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Growing up in Israel, violinist Itzhak Perlman was never able to visit many of the country's most important historical and religious sites.

Like thousands of other disabled Israelis and tourists, Perlman, who walks with the aid of braces and crutches as a result of a childhood bout with polio, had been forced to sit on the sidelines while family and friends explored the Old City of Jerusalem and the Western Wall tunnels.

But recently, Perlman, a vocal advocate of equal access for the disabled, finally got his chance. On March 23, Perlman joined dozens of young disabled Israelis at a ceremony inaugurating the Tunnel Access Project.

The project was initiated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, in cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. A substantial part of the funding came from Larry and Leonore Zusman of Dayton, Ohio.

Sitting in a borrowed wheelchair, the violinist toured the damp, narrow caverns under the Western Wall with the assistance of newly built ramps and elevators.

Off-limits to Jews until Israel liberated the Old City in 1967, the tunnels' 2,400 square yards of rooms and public halls include a section of the Second Temple and a Hasmonean water conduit.

The tunnel renovations constitute the first step in an ambitious project that will render many parts of the Old City accessible to all disabled visitors, including those with visual and hearing impairments.

Within a year, the route is expected to include such sites as the Cardo -- a Roman street now filled with modern shops -- the Burnt House Museum, the Herodian Palaces and the Sephardic Synagogues.

In parallel projects, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and the Tel Dan and Hula nature reserves are also in the process of being made accessible to the disabled.

'We Are Not No. 1. Believe Me'

Perlman's wife Toby, who accompanied her husband on the tunnel tour, reflected on the difficulties faced by people with mobility problems. "It's very difficult to travel, I can tell you. An ordinary curb or sidewalk can become a monumental obstacle.

"For someone in a wheelchair, an uneven stone floor can seem like a mountain," she said.

Though he was full of praise for the tunnel renovation, Itzhak Perlman agreed that "simpler renovations are equally important.

"Curb cuts in Tel Aviv and other cities would be real progress," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Asked how Israel rates, compared to other countries, in the field of accessibility for the disabled, Perlman said, "We are not No. 1, believe me."

Among the barriers, he said, are buildings without ramps and elevators, few parking spaces for the disabled and a general lack of awareness of disabled peoples' needs on the part of Israelis.

"In the past, we have had so many other

things going on here. That's not an excuse, just an explanation," Perlman said.

Gazing around him at the 50 wheelchair-bound young adults who had accompanied him through the tunnels, Perlman said, "This project and others like it prove that there is definitely more awareness now than there had been. Now we have to turn awareness into even greater action."

Miki Solarge, a 30-year-old Jerusalemite, called the tunnel renovations "wonderful but long overdue." Solarge, who uses a wheelchair, said that although she has visited the Kotel many times, "going through the tunnels seemed like an impossible dream."

Israelis, she said, "have a lot to learn about the problems of the disabled. The buses aren't accessible. There are very few ramps for sidewalks and buildings. Some of the movie theaters have several stairs. There are laws that require buildings to be handicapped-accessible, but the reality is very different," she said.

Even so, Solarge said that she fights these obstacles, tooth and nail. "If I want to ride on a bus, I ask people to help me on and off. If the bus driver yells at me, I yell back."

Solarge realized her lifelong dream of visiting Masada, the ancient fortress atop a mountain south of Jerusalem, while serving as a volunteer in the army.

"I didn't want to take the cable car, like old people tend to do. I wanted to go up the Snake Path (a steep, narrow dirt path leading to the top of the mountain) like other people my age," Solarge said.

"At the end of my 2 1/2 years of army service, the soldiers in my unit asked if they could do something special for me. I asked them to take me up the Snake Path, and they carried me on a stretcher, before sunrise," she recalled.

One day, Solarge would like to "climb" the Snake Path again, this time on her own steam.

"If these tunnels can be made accessible to the disabled," she asked, "why not the Snake Path up Masada?"

FOR TOURISM, ISRAELIS TACKLE CROCODILES

By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Israel has a new tourist attraction: men doing battle with crocodiles.

The scene of the unusual gladiatorial contests is a kibbutz at the southern tip of the Golan range, Hamat Gader, which has been raising crocodiles -- both as a tourist attraction and for their hides -- for several years.

The kibbutz, taking notice of similar ventures abroad, recently decided that Israelis would enjoy the sight of specially trained men pitting themselves against the toothy reptiles.

Local animal rights activists had petitioned the courts, winning a temporary restraining order while the court considered the matter.

But in the middle of the Passover holiday, the courts ruled in the kibbutz's favor.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid had said that the contests, if not actually cruel to the animals, certainly cause them discomfort.

Sarid appealed to the kibbutz, so far to no avail, to desist from what he terms "unnecessary violence in a society that has quite enough without this tasteless display."