

CHRISTOPHER REPORTS NEW LEVEL OF TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, May 2 (JTA) -- After holding two meetings with Syrian President Hafez Assad over the weekend, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher returned to Israel on Monday and announced that Israeli-Syrian negotiations had entered a new, more promising phase.

"The negotiations (with Syria) have reached a new and a different substantive level," Christopher said Monday after a morning of discussions with Israeli leaders.

"The parties," he said, "are now talking on a broad, comprehensive range of issues."

Christopher, who had shuttled between Jerusalem and Damascus with new proposals from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for restarting the deadlocked Israeli-Syrian negotiations, vowed that the United States would "do all it can to try to serve the parties in their pursuit of peace."

Syria, he stressed, was committed to that pursuit as well.

Despite his optimistic words, analysts here speculated that Syria has rejected a reported Israeli offer to withdraw from the Golan Heights in stages over a period of five to eight years in return for a Syrian commitment to establish peace with Israel.

In rejecting the offer, Syria was still insisting on a one-time, complete withdrawal from the territory that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Still, despite the rejection, Syria is believed to be ready for discussions about establishing security arrangements on the Golan -- another key element of the Israeli proposals Christopher took to Damascus -- and for negotiations that would lead to a normalization of relations between the two countries.

Speaking to his Knesset Labor Party faction on Monday, Rabin defended his recently stated willingness to give up all settlements on the Golan in exchange for peace with Syria.

"Failure to negotiate for peace with the Syrians will bring about a stalemate in relations with our northern neighbors," said Rabin.

"A stalemate is bound to lead to a Damascus-Baghdad-Teheran strategic axis," Rabin said. "And in five-to-10 years' time that could lead to war, which will be fought with missiles and perhaps non-conventional weapons as well."

RABIN DEFEATS NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE AFTER RANCOROUS DEBATE IN KNESSET

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, May 2 (JTA) -- The government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin defeated a no-confidence motion brought before the Knesset on Monday to challenge the signing of an agreement that will bring Palestinian self-government to the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

While the no-confidence motion was handily defeated by a vote of 52-41, the debate preceding the voting was stormy, even by Israeli standards.

Likud Knesset member David Levy, a former foreign minister in the government of Yitzhak Shamir, charged that the agreement scheduled to be signed later in the week in Cairo was nothing less than "the charter for a Palestinian state."

Defending the government's position, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres countered that "the die is cast and we are on the right, the historic, the moral road."

As Peres spoke, the Knesset bore more resemblance to a soccer stadium than to a chamber of deputies as the Likud benches erupted in frenzied, near hysterical rage, all but drowning out the foreign minister's words.

But Peres was undeterred.

"We have no desire to oppress another people. Instead, we want to enable the Palestinians to run their lives with dignity. And 84 per cent of Israelis back our withdrawal from Gaza," he said.

"You were in power for 15 years, and you had no solution to the problem," he taunted his Likud opponents, adding that the whole concept of Palestinian autonomy had originally been espoused by former Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin when he signed the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979.

Just prior to the vote, two Knesset members from the right-right Moledet Party, Rehavam Ze'evi and Yosef BaGad unfurled black umbrellas to cries of "Chamberlain! Chamberlain!"

They were referring to former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who had attempted to appease Adolf Hitler prior to the start of World War II.

The two Knesset members were expelled from the chamber.

SOUTH AFRICA JEWS VOICE OPTIMISM AS NATION ELECTS FIRST BLACK LEADER

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG, May 2 (JTA) -- South Africa's Jewish community has been caught up in the almost euphoric feeling of the general population following the country's first all-race democratic elections last week.

The elections -- extended to three and even four days in some areas to give all a chance to vote -- went off without intimidation and violence for the duration of the voting.

There were long lines at the polling stations -- some stood for up to seven hours waiting to cast their votes -- and people saw a mingling of black and white in a spirit of unprecedented camaraderie.

With President F.W. de Klerk conceding defeat Monday after some 40 percent of the ballots had been tallied, the new government of national unity will have an African National Congress majority, to be headed by ANC President Nelson Mandela. De Klerk's National Party will be the main opposition.

In recent days, members of the Jewish communities in Johannesburg and Cape Town, where the vast majority of the country's Jews live, voiced their hopes and fears regarding the

future -- and optimism was the predominant sentiment they expressed.

Fueling this optimism, Mandela, in a statement of reassurance and reconciliation to the country's white population, stated this week that he will find ways to bring Christians, Muslims and Jews into his administration to raise the moral tone of government.

Speaking from Cape Town, boutique owner Charlotte Resnekov, said, "Mazel tov on the birth of democracy -- something we have waited for and worked toward for so many years. Throughout the apartheid era, the blacks have lived with hardship while we have lived with deep-seated shame."

Resnekov said she is happy to be in South Africa "and not any other place in the world" at this time.

In her business travels abroad, she said, she was tired of being blamed for the evils of the apartheid system. "Now South Africa is no longer a pariah, we travelers no longer have to pretend we are Australian or British to avoid international criticism. We are free from the guilt and shame."

Resnekov added that the Cape is different from the rest of the country, since there has always been more social contact among the various races in that region.

Although expressing "slight nervousness" about the future, Capetonian Eris Silke, a former Israeli and one of South Africa's top artists, said her optimism outweighs her fears.

"I admire both Mandela and de Klerk personally. But I'm scared of crime and violence and hope the ANC can contain this.

"Also, as Jews, we are not madly popular with the Muslims, and I hope they will not think the new dispensation will give them an opportunity to express anti-Jewish or anti-Zionist sentiments.

"I am very glad to hear that there are provisions in the new constitution for minority rights," Silke said.

Former Johannesburg Mayor Harold Rudolph, professor of constitutional law at the University of the Witwatersrand, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the overwhelming majority of South Africans are pleased apartheid has ended.

Birth Pangs Of A Nation

"While the change from the old system to the new has unfortunately been very violent, we can just hope it was the birth pangs of a nation," he said.

He noted that the country's new constitution provided for a government of national unity, "but what is probably more important is the question whether the necessary good will prevails among all the political leaders to promote a spirit of give-and-take."

Rudolph believed there will be religious freedom in the new South Africa, adding that "in the process of national building, I can't see any government discriminating against any religious group."

Speaking as a constitutional lawyer, he said, "There are gaps in the constitution, but these would not impact on the Jewish community. I don't think, simply, that the Jewish community is an issue at all.

"The country has bigger problems -- the provision of facilities including housing and

education -- than to concern itself with a section of the community that probably does not constitute more than one-quarter of 1 percent of its population," Rudolph said.

Stockbroker Martin Lowenthal was upbeat in his assessment of the country, particularly regarding the South African economy. "The stock market reached record highs on Friday of last week (April 29), and that is telling us good things. People are already spending, parking areas in the shopping centers are full -- it is as if they are releasing all their pent-up emotions."

Lowenthal, who has lost many of his friends through emigration, stated emphatically: "I would like to encourage all young Jews who left for the wrong reasons to swallow their pride and come back. The opportunities are here and not in all those crazy countries they left for."

Banker Ilan Lessick shared Lowenthal's optimism about the economy, "especially in the short-term." While noting he was glad to see the end of years of oppression, he said his current concerns "focus on right-wing violence and potential right-wing violence when the ANC takes over control of their towns."

Welcoming fresh opportunities in the insurance industry, insurance broker Steven Adler said that many avenues will open in his field, contributing to an upturn in the South African economy. He added that the country's economic situation will be further enhanced by foreign investment.

A Tremendous Potential

"The potential is tremendous -- I'm positive and optimistic," he said.

But Adler, an observant Jew who holds several leadership positions in the religious community, also expressed some reservations.

"My fears are that, in the new South Africa, there may be changes relating to the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Jewish community vis-a-vis certain religious practices as well as the Jewish day-school movement," he said.

Jewish day schools currently receive a government subsidy.

"I also sincerely hope that the crime rate will drop now that the political uncertainty is over," said Adler.

Irene Green, a housewife and mother of three, said, "It's very exciting, but nerve-wracking at the same time, because you never know what is around the corner. I am afraid that the uneducated, who are expecting houses and motor cars, face the prospect of unfulfilled promises and then we will have more unrest."

Student Evan Cohen said, "We are living through history. Those who persevere will prosper in the new South Africa. Those who left have lost out on history in the making.

"I do not have any fears -- merely hopes and expectations," said Cohen.

Business journalist Berenice Margolis said the election was "almost a spiritual experience. This is the first time in my life I have been proud and happy to be part of South Africa -- and I hope that it's goodbye to bigotry.

"I think the road ahead is long and hard, but we are going to make it," she said. "And, although the Jews won't be an issue under the new dispensation, the Jewish community definitely has a role to play."

HOWARD UNIVERSITY FIGHTS PERCEPTION THAT IT IS A HOTBED OF ANTI-SEMITISM

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, May 2 (JTA) -- America's foremost black university is fighting perceptions that it is a hotbed of anti-Semitism, following the second appearance there in two months of controversial Nation of Islam member Khalid Abdul Muhammad.

While some news reports have cast Howard University's student body as largely sympathetic to the racist and anti-Semitic views espoused by the militant black Muslim group, many students, faculty and administrators claim that the school is under siege by a hostile media.

They claim news reports have exaggerated the prevalence of the views held by Unity Nation, the Howard student group which sponsored the Feb. 23 and April 17 rallies at which Muhammad appeared.

And on a campus that had been known more for its students' ardent preprofessionalism than for radical political involvement, many -- including outgoing President Franklyn Jenifer -- alleged that the media has honed in on Howard because most of its 12,000 students are black.

"You begin to wonder," said Jenifer, "why, of all places that (Muhammad) has gone, why is it that the press has focused in on Howard University?"

But Muhammad's appearances have not been the only cause of controversy at the campus in recent months.

In early April, a scheduled lecture by Yale University historian David Brion Davis was postponed by a faculty member because of concerns that Davis, a specialist in the history of slavery, would be heckled because he is Jewish.

And President Jenifer -- who holds two degrees from Howard -- resigned three days after Muhammad's April rally, amid speculation that the school's board of directors had begun talks on whether to oust him.

Many Seem Ready To Accept Group's Views

Conversations with Howard students revealed that while most categorically reject the Nation of Islam, many seemed willing to accept, or at least entertain, some of the group's radical views.

Howard, a 127-year-old institution that counts the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison among its alumni, may have more than its formidable reputation at stake.

Jenifer said he got hundreds of letters from Jews who said they were angry over perceived anti-Semitism at the school. Some threatened to withdraw corporate or personal financial support.

Howard's African American studies department reportedly received several anonymous phone calls from people who said they would ask their congressmen to stop federal aid to the school.

Though technically a private university, Howard depends heavily on government funding. In 1993, it received \$183 million in federal appropriations, more than a third of its yearly operating budget.

Jewish leaders in Washington have criticized Howard officials for not moving quickly enough to distance the university from Unity Nation and the

Nation of Islam following Muhammad's Feb. 23 appearance on campus. After his speech, a student led an estimated 1,000 people -- some of them Howard students -- in anti-Semitic chants.

"Had the university responded directly, forcefully, unequivocally and instantaneously, they would have been able to separate this event that took place on the Howard campus from an event that reflects the university's position on these matters," said David Friedman, Washington regional director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"But because they waited, the perception was that they didn't care or they tacitly agreed," Friedman said.

University officials did not publicly comment on that rally until one week after the event.

Attempting to reverse the negative publicity, a group of Howard faculty and administrators held a news conference prior to the April rally, in which they claimed that only a small fraction of Howard students were sympathetic to the Nation of Islam's views.

Of the estimated 2,000 people who later attended the event in Howard's Cramton Auditorium, only a smattering were Howard students. Most in the audience were working-class blacks from the Washington area.

At the rally, a series of speakers -- including Muhammad, City College Professor Leonard Jeffries and Wellesley College Professor Tony Martin -- charged that Jews bore primary responsibility for the African slave trade, and that they control large segments of American industry.

Officials Blame Media Imagination

Howard officials continue to insist that perceived anti-Semitism is a product of the media's imagination.

They claim that prior to the publicizing of statements made by Muhammad at Kean College in November, Muhammad had spoken at Howard several times -- with little or no fanfare and less than 50 students in attendance.

They say that, far from being sympathetic, many students attend Nation of Islam events out of curiosity, after being bombarded by extensive media coverage.

Nevertheless, university officials have taken steps to prevent further appearances of the Nation of Islam on campus.

Officials had insisted they were obligated under the First Amendment to allow Unity Nation to rent the school's facilities. But in a statement accompanying the announcement of Jenifer's resignation, Wayman Smith, the school's chairman, pledged the university will be "more assertive and aggressive in speaking out against those who promote racial and religious bigotry and ignorance."

Smith said that a commitment to free speech "does not mean that the university is required to open its doors to those who would destroy or violate the moral and intellectual integrity of the institution and what it stands for." He added that the board had established an ad hoc committee to review guidelines for the use of school facilities.

At the news conference held before the April rally, Jenifer insisted that talking with Howard students would clear up any confusion.

"All they need to do, if they want to know how Howard people feel, is come to dear old Howard," Jenifer said.

GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER MEETS WITH AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, May 2 (JTA) -- The German government is concerned about the recent rise of right-wing extremist groups and is addressing the problem, the German foreign minister told a group of American Jewish leaders late last month.

"It is something that the Germans are very angry and annoyed about," Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said through an interpreter in a meeting here Friday sponsored by the American Jewish Committee.

The increase in extremist activity in countries including Germany and Russia, where right-wing candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy did stunningly well in parliamentary elections last fall, has Jewish groups from around the world worried.

Kinkel acknowledged that German fascist groups, which have staged several violent demonstrations in recent years against minority groups including Jews, are believed to have ties with similar movements in Russia and Canada.

Kinkel fielded questions from the audience about topics ranging from the Middle East peace process to Germany's role in the world arena.

"It is very much in our interest to see the peace process" succeed, Kinkel said. The German government plans to help the process along by contributing economic assistance to the Palestinian authority in charge of implementing the self-rule accord in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, he added.

Economic and technological assistance should be made available to the Palestinian authority, he said, "to take the (financial) pressure off Israeli shoulders."

But political assistance should be left to the United States, which is the only country that can really exert influence over the parties in the Middle East, Kinkel said.

Kinkel said Germany, now the biggest country in Europe after its historic re-unification, has assumed a larger role in global politics.

Emphasis is being placed on the younger generation, he said, which is being taught about German history and about its responsibility as a major political and economic power.

Of the film "Schindler's List," Steven Spielberg's award-winning movie about the Holocaust, Kinkel said it "hit Germany like a bomb, but in the positive sense. "The film struck at the heart of the German people."

ARGENTINE JEWISH LEADERS VISIT GERMANY, OFFER TO COOPERATE AGAINST RIGHT-WING

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, May 2 (JTA) -- Argentine Jewish leaders who visited Germany last month offered to cooperate with non-governmental German institutions to combat right-wing extremism, according to Ruben Beraja, president of the Argentine Jewish federation, known as the DAIA.

Beraja said 12 Jewish experts are setting up a database on Nazis who found haven in Argentina, based on secret files dating to the time of World War II that were recently made available to the public by Argentine President Carlos Menem.

Beraja said right-wing extremists in Argentina imitate their German counterparts. "After

every violent act in Germany, we receive threats on the telephone and swastikas are smeared on the streets," he said.

The president of the Jewish Charity Association in Argentina, Norberto Lichtenstein, said Argentine Jews are deeply concerned about anti-Semitic acts in Germany, and especially over whether the silent majority of Germans will fight such activities.

Beraja and other Argentine Jewish leaders came to Germany as guests of the Bonn government. They met with German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel; the president of Parliament, Rita Sussmuth; the two candidates for the upcoming presidential election, Roman Herzog and Johannes Rau; and the head of the Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis.

Beraja also announced that Argentina's first Jewish university will be opened this year, in cooperation with Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

Beraja said the university is expected to help maintain Jewish tradition among young people, something particularly important as mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews in Argentina have reached 25 percent.

He said this is the most serious problem for Argentina's 325,000 Jews.

The new university, to be known as Hebrew-Argentine-Bar-Ilan University, will be open to members of all faiths. It will offer a Jewish curriculum as well as courses in liberal arts and science, Beraja said.

The university will begin operating with 100 students but will expand to 1,000 students over the next three years, he said.

COURT SAYS JEWISH COMMUNITY CAN'T SUE FRENCH BANK TO RECOVER EMBEZZLED FUND

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN (JTA) -- Germany's highest court recently ruled that the Jewish community here cannot sue a French bank to recover reparations payments embezzled by a former leader of the community.

On April 20, the Federal Court of Justice in the southwestern city of Karlsruhe dismissed a suit brought by the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Germany against the French bank Societe Generale-Elsass.

As a result of the decision, the Jewish community will not be able to recover any of the funds embezzled by Werner Nachmann, the late president of the council.

Nachmann, a businessman who died in 1988, had allegedly transferred through the French bank to his own private accounts some \$13.4 million of compensation payments paid by the German government to Holocaust survivors.

The council had accused the French bank of acting carelessly in the case and had filed suit for the immediate return of \$125,000.

In May 1988, when news of the embezzlement scandal first surfaced, leaders of the German Jewish community had explained that the missing money was the interest accrued on \$238 million worth of reparations payments provided by German federal authorities between 1980 and 1987.

The fund was to be used to distribute one-time payments to Jewish victims of Nazism in Eastern Europe who had been unable to make the 1965 application deadline for payments.