

**ISRAEL AND PLO SIGN SELF-RULE ACCORD  
DESPITE A LAST-MINUTE DELAY BY ARAFAT**  
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 4 (JTA) -- It almost didn't happen.

After nearly seven months of tough negotiations, the long-awaited moment when Israel would cede to the Palestinians control over the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank nearly did not come to pass.

The decorum of the signing ceremony in Cairo on Wednesday morning was shattered when Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, who was about to sign some of the documents, balked.

He had been presented with what apparently were maps of the autonomous region around the West Bank town of Jericho. Details of the size of that region were one of the points that had not yet been agreed to.

The principals, including U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who had carefully nursed the negotiations along for so many months, abruptly left the stage.

There, Arafat was reportedly assured that explicit reference to the need for further negotiations on certain issues, including Jericho, was included in the documents.

Within a matter of minutes, the principals returned to the stage. Arafat smilingly signed the documents, and history was made.

"Today we declare that the conflict is over," Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said, as the accord that for the first time grant the Palestinians a measure of self-rule was signed.

The ceremony, before an audience of 2,500, culminated a rocky road that began last fall in Washington with a handshake between longtime enemies that shook the world.

**A Fragile And Complex Affair**

The break in diplomatic protocol in Cairo on Wednesday was more than an embarrassment to the participants. It sent a powerful, if spontaneous, signal that negotiating this agreement has been a highly fragile and complex affair.

It suggested that the ceremony had been organized before sensitive details had been completely clarified to the satisfaction of both parties, in deference to intense U.S. pressure to sign.

And it highlighted the fears, felt by many on both sides, of the daunting challenges that lay ahead, as a new era in Israeli-Palestinian relations dawned.

The agreement signed this week marked only the beginning of a five-year interim period, by the end of which time the two sides are supposed to have worked out a permanent arrangement for the territories.

In his speech Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the break in that morning's proceedings "the tip of the iceberg of problems we shall have to overcome in the implementation of even the first phase of the declaration of principles.

"To overcome 100 years of animosity, suspicion, bloodshed -- it's not so simple," he said. He called the agreement "a very daring project."

Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, was in Cairo and called the moment "very dramatic, a very serious episode."

He added that there was little of the euphoria that had been present at September's ceremony in Washington, when Israel and the PLO signed the declaration of principles that this week's agreement fleshed out.

Pollack attributed this sense in part to Arafat's last-minute recalcitrance and in part to the violence that has plagued the region in the interim.

During this time, a Jewish settler gunned down at least 29 Palestinians at a Hebron mosque in February and the Palestinians launched numerous terrorist attacks before and after that incident.

**'Now It Is In The Hands Of Arafat'**

Steven Grossman, president of the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee, was also in Cairo. He said the moment of truth had now arrived for Arafat.

"For months Arafat has said he couldn't control anything in the (territories) because he didn't have the authority," Grossman said. "Now it is in the hands of Arafat and the PLO to make this work, to control violence and begin to put in place the leadership" to "create a new reality for the Palestinian people."

Underlining concerns that the PLO may not be ready to assume control of its new territory, Rabin told reporters after the ceremony Wednesday that Arafat had asked for up to a three-week delay in implementing the handover of authority.

Rabin said Israel would likely agree to the delay, albeit reluctantly.

At the ceremony, Peres good-naturedly told the audience after the glitch with Arafat that they had witnessed a live birth.

"What really happened is that we finished our negotiations by half past 2 in the morning and apparently we were short five minutes. We apologize for taking these five minutes from you.

"We have had a dream before we have had a map. Now we have a map and a dream together," he said.

"Chairman Arafat, our partner in a very difficult journey," said Peres to Arafat, "we did it."

The Israeli foreign minister also added: "We assure you we shall not stop here. We shall reach peace with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, and make it comprehensive and durable." He also pledged to continue negotiating with the Palestinians for a permanent solution.

After a few remarks in English, Rabin switched to Hebrew to address his constituency in Israel and to recount the history of the bloody conflict between Israel and the Palestinians over the land.

"What did we want?" he asked. "We wanted to return to the land of our forefathers. We

wanted a homeland, a refuge, a place to lay down our heads, to be like all people, to live."

Turning toward the Palestinians, he said, "We have killed you, and you have killed us. We must try to put an end to the cycle of terrible violence."

"Today we stretch out our hands to each other," Rabin said. "Let the future flourish."

In his speech, Arafat saluted, one by one, leaders of other Arab countries, thanking them for their support, and saying he sought stronger links with them.

He also emphasized the accord was a first step in the road toward increased Palestinian autonomy. "It's only a beginning to open doors to remove the occupation altogether and build to new relations between our peoples, for our children and your children's future."

He said it required "even more courage for the next step," as well as vision and patience to build a strong and comprehensive peace.

Arafat criticized the recent closure of the territories, which was imposed for security reasons and bars the entry of Palestinians into Israel. He said it is counter to the spirit of peace and damages the Palestinian economy.

For his part, Mubarak, who played host to the ceremony, praised the leaders of Israel and the PLO, saying they were "heroes" who showed "great courage." He said they "proved they have a vision and were determined to reach peace despite the challenges."

"It's time you all shake hands and clear your hearts from the past and look into your (own) interests and forget your animosity," he said, addressing the Israelis and Arabs.

"It's time to use your resources to build and repair what has been destroyed," he said, "to plant roses and not mines."

Christopher called the achievements realized in the agreement "remarkable" and he praised both sides for their perseverance in the face of countless difficulties.

"To their eternal credit," he said, "Israelis and Palestinians pressed forward in the face of extremists who sought to kill faith in the future by inflaming the hatreds of the past. We're here today because unspeakable acts of violence could not still the voices of peace or weaken the resolve of the peace-makers."

"For Palestinians, the challenge now is to build democratic, accountable institutions, to provide for the economic well-being of their people, to uphold the rule of law and to guarantee respect for human rights."

All the speakers paid tribute to Egypt's centrality in the peace-making process.

Syria and Lebanon were pointedly not represented, with Syria on Wednesday calling the accord an obstacle to peace.

#### **LITTLE SIGN OF REJOICING IN ISRAEL AS RABIN AND ARAFAT SIGN AGREEMENT By Dvorah Getzler**

JERUSALEM, May 4 (JTA) -- There was little sign of rejoicing on Israeli streets this week as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, in Cairo, signed the agreement for implementing Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Scores of youths belonging to the B'nei Akiva youth movement converged on Jericho on the eve of the signing, intent on defying an army order that called for closing the ancient synagogue in Jericho.

The Israel Defense Force had an active night chasing the youths, who had come into town by back roads.

Many of the group held a sit-in near the synagogue. In tears, they protested that Israel had been "sold to that arch-murderer Arafat."

Some 200 of the group were taken away from the site by military police.

The IDF later blamed National Religious Party Knesset member Hanan Porat for instigating the youngsters' protest.

Speaking at a press conference at the Knesset, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu said of Gaza and Jericho, "They are cancerous cells. Our first job will be to stop that cancer spreading. The second is to replace this government of failure as soon as we can."

#### **A Call For Early Elections**

Netanyahu vowed to have his supporters out on the streets signing up the public in a mass petition for early elections before the next scheduled voting in 1996.

As a first step in that direction, the opposition planned to submit a bill to dissolve the Knesset and call elections within 100 days.

Fifteen Knesset members joined Netanyahu in a protest staged Wednesday at the ancient Jericho synagogue, where they signed a covenant pledging to do whatever is legally within their power to prevent the concession of territory to the Palestinians.

The group defied an IDF order to leave the area, claiming their right of parliamentary immunity.

Following discussions between Netanyahu and the IDF commander in charge of the central sector, Gen. Ilan Biran, the group agreed to return to Jerusalem after signing their document.

On Arab streets within Israel, there were mixed reactions to the Cairo ceremony, despite the joy that prevailed among Palestinians in Gaza and Jericho.

In Jerusalem, there seemed to be a sense of disappointment. Two former members of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, Faisal Husseini and Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi, said of the document that was signed in Cairo, "This is not the agreement to which we had been looking forward."

But for some 1,000 Palestinian families in Gaza and throughout the territories, today was a holiday no matter what their view of the future, as their relatives were released from the Ketziot prison camp in the northern Negev.

None had Jewish blood on their hands, but among those released were two members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement and two members of Islamic Jihad.

They were released after they signed statements expressing their support for the peace process.

Under the terms of the Cairo agreement, Israel will release a total of 5,000 prisoners within two weeks.

Israel also allowed on Wednesday the return to the territories of 14 Palestinian deportees.

**NEWS ANALYSIS:****SIGNING OF FINAL AGREEMENT IN CAIRO  
HERALDS NEW ERA FOR ISRAELIS AND PLO**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 4 (JTA) -- With the myriad disputes and differences of interpretation finally whittled away in laborious negotiations, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization embarked this week on a new phase of their historic peace process.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat signed a final agreement in Cairo on Wednesday to inaugurate an era of self-government for close to 900,000 Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The actual areas are tiny, but the significance of this accord is vast.

In the view of most observers -- and despite official Israeli protestations to the contrary -- implementation of the self-rule accord marks the first tangible step toward eventual Palestinian sovereignty over much, if not all, of the West Bank and Gaza.

For all the excitement the signing ceremony has already generated, the accord must be seen in a much broader context than that of the immediate security and administrative problems that implementation of Palestinian self-rule will entail.

Under the terms of the declaration of principles signed last fall in Washington, implementation of the accord triggers a five-year interim period of Palestinian self-rule.

Even if no further steps are taken to broaden Palestinian autonomy to the rest of the territories, the clock is ticking as of now: Israel and the PLO are committed to begin negotiating on the permanent status of the territories within two years at the latest.

They are also required by the terms of the declaration of principles to end the interim period in favor of a permanent Palestinian settlement within five years.

In historical terms, this "triggering" mechanism is perhaps the single most important aspect of this week's signing ceremony.

**Voices Raised For Cutting 5-Year Term**

Voices have already been raised on both sides in favor of cutting short the five-year interim term and moving more swiftly toward permanent-status talks.

Those voices are likely to grow stronger once the "trigger" has taken effect and the two sides' international legal commitment has entered upon its irreversible course.

Advocates of a quicker schedule argue that the rocky September-to-May experience that followed the signing ceremony in Washington does not augur well for the coming years -- particularly if they are to be years of partial and interim arrangements and ongoing negotiations.

These arguments, however, will doubtless not be settled solely with reference to the Israel-PLO track, but rather in the context of the broader peace process.

In this context there was a special significance to U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher's "mini-shuttle" between Jerusalem and Damascus this week in the days prior to Wednesday's Israel-PLO signing.

The secretary proclaimed "a new, substantive" phase in the Israeli-Syrian negotiating track following his lengthy talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad and Rabin.

But the broader context of the peace process includes other, farther-flung countries as well -- though by no means as intensely as it involves Israel and its immediate neighbors.

There was in this respect special importance to this week's session in Qatar, an oil-rich Persian Gulf emirate that is host to the multilateral negotiations on regional arms control.

That session was a "first" not only in that the official Israeli delegation -- led by Gen. David Ivri, director-general of the Defense Ministry -- was warmly welcomed in Qatar.

It was just as novel, and hardly less significant, that Qatar allowed Israeli reporters and photographers to accompany the delegation and report back to a fascinated public.

Coming hard on the heels of multilateral water talks in Oman last month, the session in Qatar reinforces the trend toward Israel's gradual acceptance in the region.

Meanwhile, Israel's "enfant terrible," Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, was reported Monday in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as making another one of his controversial statements, this one in reference to the Arab boycott.

The boycott, said Beilin, is effectively dead -- a point that perhaps needs little defense, since Israel's exports to the Arab world are close to \$1 billion annually.

Whether Beilin is guilty of over-optimism or not, there is no doubt that for the Israeli government the self-rule accord, coming as it does after many months of nerve-wracking frustrations, marks a new and buoyant point of departure.

"The future looks good," Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, one of the five Israeli ministers accompanying Rabin to the Cairo signing ceremony, said Monday.

**Forcible Occupation 'Costs Blood'**

Rabin, less given to declaratory bombast, put his position in more somber terms to his Labor Knesset faction Monday.

Forcibly occupying an alien people "costs blood," the premier said, referring to the Palestinian issue.

"I know only too well the dangers of diplomatic stagnation," he said, referring to the talks with Syria. Such stagnation, Rabin warned, could lead to the evolution of a hostile axis linking Damascus to Teheran and Baghdad.

Those possibilities aside, the immediate next worry is the takeover itself of Palestinian authority in Gaza and Jericho.

The IDF has undertaken to complete its withdrawal within 10 days of the signing in Cairo. But a terrorist attack on an IDF patrol near Rafah in Gaza on Monday that left two men badly wounded was a searing reminder of the dangers still facing Israeli troops from rejectionist forces within the Palestinian community.

After the withdrawal, any such attacks from Gaza and Jericho will severely weaken Israeli public support -- waning and fragile already -- for the peace process.

The PLO has argued that it cannot curb terrorists until it takes direct control of its areas of self-government. This is about to be tested.

## CONGRESSIONAL GROUP JOINS WITH ZOA TO MONITOR COMPLIANCE WITH ACCORD

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, May 4 (JTA) -- Members of Congress have joined the Zionist Organization of America in forming a bipartisan group to monitor the Palestine Liberation Organization's compliance with the Middle East peace accord.

The Peace Accord Monitoring Group will evaluate the PLO's progress in honoring the commitments it made to Israel in the declaration of principles signed at the White House last fall.

The declaration of principles, which grants self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, was put into effect this week with the signing of an implementation agreement in Cairo on Wednesday.

In its agreements, the PLO committed itself to renouncing terrorism and deleting provisions in its covenant calling for the destruction of Israel.

"The PLO must condemn each and every act of terrorism carried out in the Palestinian community, in Arabic as well as English," Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) said at a Capitol Hill news conference Tuesday announcing creation of the group.

If the PLO does not honor that and other commitments made to the Israelis, Engel said, the group will pressure Congress to withhold the \$500 million in aid that the United States has pledged to the West Bank and Gaza over the next five years.

The group, which had received the endorsement of over 15 members of Congress by Wednesday, was formed without the consultation of the White House or the Israeli government.

An Israeli Embassy spokesman on Tuesday declined to comment on the group's formation.

### Aid 'Must Not Be Used' For Terror Haven

"Aid from the United States must not be used to build the foundation of a terrorist haven," Engel, co-chair of the group with Rep. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.), said in a statement.

"The PLO leadership has to understand this from the outset and take specific steps to prove their deeds will match their words," Engel said.

Members of the group are particularly concerned that the PLO has failed to renounce individual acts of terrorism and to change the Palestinian National Covenant that calls for the destruction of Israel since the declaration of principles was signed last September.

The group vows to make efforts to halt the flow of U.S. aid to the West Bank and Gaza if these commitments are not satisfied.

The creation of the group "provides an independent means for Congress to analyze PLO behavior to determine if the PLO should receive" American aid, ZOA President Morton Klein said.

A provision in the State Department Authorization Act prohibits the PLO from receiving U.S.-backed international aid from organizations such as the World Bank if the PLO does not meet its commitments under the accord.

The group will also monitor the Clinton administration's periodic report on PLO compliance with the accord. The State Department is legally required to issue a report every 180 days.

Also attending the news conference were Reps. Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.), Bill McCollum (R-Fla.), L. William Paxon (R-N.Y.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

## IN SPEECH TO AJCOMMITTEE, GORE SOUNDS OPTIMISTIC NOTE ON ISRAELI-PLO ACCORD

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, May 4 (JTA) -- Addressing the American Jewish Committee on the day the Israeli-Palestinian agreement was signed in Cairo, Vice President Al Gore said the event was a cause for rejoicing.

But Gore took a cautiously optimistic tone overall, noting that the journey toward Middle East peace could be a difficult one.

"We rejoice and believe that if today's signing is our guide, we are emboldened to hope that there will be peace in the Middle East," Gore told several hundred participants at the opening of the group's 88th annual meeting.

"In the Middle East, we must temper these feelings of hope with an understanding that rough days" lie ahead, the vice president added.

In remarks at a luncheon session, in which Gore discussed both the Cairo signing and the historic elections in South Africa, he also spoke out against hate crimes in the United States. He commented that AJCommittee has been a force for "transcending differences" in American society.

Also speaking at Wednesday's lunch was civil rights leader James Farmer, founding director of the Congress of Racial Equality, who received AJCommittee's Public Service Award to mark his work for civil rights and social justice.

The veteran civil rights activist, introduced by former longtime AJCommittee Washington representative Hyman Bookbinder, spoke passionately about the cooperation between blacks and Jews during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

In remarks apparently referring to the controversies surrounding Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, Farmer said, "There are some obscene individuals who would blind the minds of our people to the facts" of the strong black-Jewish alliance "with their bitter lies and deceit, attacking our strongest allies in the struggle."

The meeting, lasting from Wednesday through Friday, was also scheduled to include a special presentation at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum late Wednesday afternoon to director Steven Spielberg for his film "Schindler's List."

Secretary of State Warren Christopher was scheduled to address the group Thursday night, upon his expected return from the Middle East.

### JEWISH GROUP REQUESTS HAMAS INQUIRY

NEW YORK (JTA) -- The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations has called on the FBI and the House and Senate Intelligence Committees to investigate ties between Hamas terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and their supporters in America.

Charging that Hamas has established "an international network of terror with direction from the United States," Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said the activities of Hamas must be stopped.

"Hamas imperils not only Israel but also moderate Arab states and other Muslim countries," he said. "There will be no peace for Israel, for moderate Arabs or for America itself as long as Hamas is permitted to carry out its savage schemes with impunity on our shores."