

**VATICAN LIKELY TO ISSUE STATEMENT
ACCEPTING "GUILT" FOR THE HOLOCAUST**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- A draft of a groundbreaking Vatican document that places unprecedented "co-responsibility" and "guilt" for the Holocaust on the Roman Catholic Church is being hailed by Jewish interfaith experts as one of the most important Catholic statements since Vatican Council II.

The draft speaks of "shame and repentance" and calls on God for forgiveness for that responsibility.

"It can only be described as mind-boggling," said Rabbi David Rosen, director of interfaith relations and Vatican liaison for the Anti-Defamation League in Jerusalem.

The draft statement is not the first in which the church has condemned anti-Semitism or accepted responsibility for anti-Semitism, he said.

"But the extent to which the church talks of the blame and guilt of the church in the tragedy (of) the Jews" and "in taking on the burden of the Holocaust, is absolutely unparalleled," Rosen said.

The draft document on "Anti-Semitism, Shoah and Church," was prepared at the request of the Vatican by a team of German Catholic theologians in collaboration with a French theologian, the Rev. Bernard Dupuy.

It has not yet been approved by the Holy See and may undergo some changes before it is accepted as an official church declaration.

But Rosen said the chances are "very good" that the document will be accepted by the Vatican "even if it is trimmed at the corners."

Even "the fact they are sharing it openly is cause for optimism," he said.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, told reporters: "We promised our Jewish friends we would try to produce a document from the Catholic side which would speak about the Shoah and condemn all forms of anti-Semitism."

'We Were All Astounded'

Cassidy was in Jerusalem for a conference here of the International Liaison Committee for Relations between Jews and the Vatican, where the report came to light.

While the authors asked that there be no discussion of the report after its presentation, it was clear the contents of the document stunned Jewish participants.

"We were all astounded," said Rosen. "Not even the most optimistic expected it to be as brutally self-confrontational."

In the United States, those involved in interfaith dialogue were equally impressed.

"This is not just one more nice statement being made by the Catholic church," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee. "It is an extraordinary statement with global meaning."

Rudin said the draft statement is the culmination of 30 years of Catholic-Jewish dialogue,

which has been carried out since Vatican Council II in the 1960s.

Under the accords of Vatican II, Jews could no longer be referred to as "Christ-killers" and anti-Semitic references were removed from the Catholic liturgy.

The draft is a part of a path to normalization of relations, said Rudin, that was forged through Pope John Paul II's warm attitude toward the Jews and the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel in December of last year.

"Normalization," he said, "means that you can face up to the difficult issue of the Vatican's role in anti-Semitism and the Holocaust."

Teachings Helped Encourage Anti-Semitism

Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of the ADL's department of interfaith affairs, called the draft "a great step toward a recognition of Christian involvement with anti-Semitic tendencies in the West."

The statement includes an admission by the church that some of its teachings have provided the context and rationalization for much of Europe's history of anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust.

"There is a fault there that the church has to recognize," Klenicki said.

The draft, according to German professor of theology Hans Hermann Henrix, who issued the report, recapitulates the history of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism.

But it goes beyond the recognition that "the tradition of theological and church anti-Judaism was an important element on the way toward the Shoah," which Henrix defined as the historical "co-responsibility" of the church.

The church, said Henrix, must also, for "reasons of moral theology," accept "ethical responsibility" by confessing its "guilt" for the Shoah.

The German and Polish Bishops Conferences have prepared their own similar documents, said Henrix. And they are recommending the church adopt their "confession of guilt" by adopting the following text found in the current draft of the Vatican document.

"She (the Church) confesses that she bears co-responsibility for the Shoah and that she has burdened herself with guilt.

"A long-standing theology and preaching had soothed the conscience of (Christian) people and had weakened their ability to resist when in Europe and Germany, the National Socialist anti-Semitism came up with all its brutality and criminal energy.

"Many Christians together with their bishops were so prejudiced that they did not have the necessary clear-sightedness in order to recognize the evil of anti-Semitic persecution by National Socialism and consequently they did not react against it.

"Despite the exemplary behavior of some individuals and groups, we were nevertheless as a whole a church community who kept on living their life in turning their back too often on the

fate of this persecuted Jewish people, who looked too fixedly at the threat to their own institutions and who remained silent about the crimes committed against the Jews and Judaism.

"This led to the manifold guilt of many Christians and in the church."

The church "feels shame and repentance and recognizes the need for conversion.

"We invoke God to grant us forgiveness and we request the Jewish people to hear this word of conversion and will of renewal," the draft statement read.

The interfaith gathering at which the paper was presented has been meeting since 1970 on issues of anti-Semitism, the state of Israel, education and human rights. Cardinals and bishops represent the church, while the Jewish community is represented by members of the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultation, or IJCIC.

At the last biennial meeting of the Liaison Committee, held in Baltimore in 1992, the Vatican and Jewish leaders issued a joint statement on anti-Semitism, calling it a sin against God and mankind.

That communique also pledged a statement by the Vatican on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

This year, the formal focus of the meeting was on ecology and the family. But the atmosphere clearly was charged by the recent establishment of formal relations between the state of Israel and the Vatican.

The Vatican's failure to recognize Israel diplomatically had been a stumbling block to the work of the interfaith committee, conceded the participants.

The question of diplomatic relations "had been hanging unsolved and we were not the ones who (could or) had to solve it," said Cardinal Cassidy.

This was the first time the group had ever met in Jerusalem.

"This meeting in Jerusalem marks a historic milestone in Catholic-Jewish relations because of its location and its determination to tackle the generations-old problem of anti-Semitism," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Pamela Druckerman in New York.)

PERES MEETS WITH CHRISTOPHER AND GORE; STAYS HOPEFUL PLO WILL STICK TO ACCORD By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, May 25 (JTA) -- As confusion surrounding the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian accord continued back home, visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met this week with Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Vice President Al Gore to review the Middle East situation.

Prior to his meetings, Peres told a group of Middle East experts and journalists that the implementation of Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho would be successful.

"This is a period of transition which is full of difficult problems and dangers," Peres told a symposium sponsored by Middle East Insight magazine. "We can see the hopes, feel the blood and the tears and the suffering."

But "I don't have the slightest doubt that this will succeed," Peres said at Wednesday morning's event.

Among the problems that have flared up recently are statements made by Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat. In a speech at a Johannesburg mosque this month, Arafat called for a "jihad" for Jerusalem. The Arabic term is generally translated as "holy war."

He also compared the Israeli-Palestinian accord to an agreement made by the prophet Mohammed with the Koreish tribe in the year 628. That agreement was abrogated by Mohammed two years after it was signed.

Arafat has tried to explain away these statements. But they have raised grave concerns in Israel, and have resulted in Israeli demands -- backed by the United States -- for Arafat to reaffirm his commitment to the peace accords.

Prior to a meeting with Peres on Wednesday, Christopher told reporters it would be "very helpful to have a reaffirmation" of Arafat's commitment.

Peres And Christopher Discuss Talks

In their meeting, described as routine, Peres and Christopher discussed the four negotiating tracks between Israel and the Palestinians, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

They also discussed the implementation of the Gaza-Jericho agreement, and the multilateral component of the Middle East peace process, a State Department spokesman said.

Peres, at the Middle East Insight event, criticized another recent Arafat decision -- to issue an order returning the newly autonomous Palestinian area to pre-1967 laws.

He called the decision "irrelevant, unimportant and unnecessary," and said that the area should be governed by the joint declaration of principles signed by the two sides.

He said he hoped the Palestinians intended to stick to the declaration.

"If one of the two" parties violates the accord, he said, it will "endanger the agreement."

The Israeli foreign minister also spent a good deal of Wednesday's speech talking about the problematic Syrian track in the Middle East peace negotiations, viewed by many as the key to the entire process.

Peres stressed the importance of gestures from Syrian President Hafez Assad, in an era when television diplomacy plays such a key role.

He said that "people are watching and asking: is President Assad really interested in peace?"

"Why can't we see it on television?" he continued. "Why hide it away?"

He also spoke about the perennially controversial issue of Jerusalem, saying that it was a "politically closed" topic.

But he said that the topic was religiously open, and that it was Israel's responsibility to allow access to the holy places of all religions.

Before meeting with Peres, Christopher gave reporters a sense of the American government's views about the future of the Middle East peace talks.

The secretary said that some of the talks would eventually resume in Washington, and others in the region, depending on which location seemed most appropriate for that particular track.

BEILIN FLOATS PROPOSAL TO MERGE LABOR WITH MERETZ

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- The ideological divisions within the Labor Party have come to the fore this week. A proposal to merge Labor with the left-wing Meretz party collided with an almost simultaneous critique by 14 Labor Party Knesset members who claimed the government has drifted too far to the left.

The revolutionary proposal by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin to fuse Labor and Meretz into an "Israeli Democratic Party" brought down a welter of criticism on the ambitious 44-year-old.

But the idea, floated by Beilin early this week, is not likely to disappear. Political observers here expect it to surface again, in one form or another, in the months and years ahead, as Israeli politics move away from their long-set mold in which a socialist Labor Party perennially vies against a hawkish Likud bloc.

Many observers see this month's Histadrut election upset, in which Labor renegade Haim Ramon beat his former party for the leadership of the powerful trade union, as the first major step toward new constellations in Israeli politics.

Ramon ran for secretary-general at the head of a list comprising Meretz, his own followers from Labor and the Sephardic Orthodox Shas party. Many Likud supporters in the Histadrut voted for Ramon's list.

Beilin, launching his scheme amid the comfortable surroundings of his own circle of supporters within the Labor Party, argued that there is little by way of ideology or political outlook separating Labor and Meretz today.

Centrists React Vehemently

The Labor-led government's peace policy has been everything that its junior Meretz partners had hoped for, and more, Beilin noted pointedly.

Meretz campaigned in 1992 on a platform of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. This is precisely what the Labor premier, Yitzhak Rabin, has brought about.

Centrist elements of the Labor Party reacted vehemently, arguing that if Labor and Meretz have become indistinguishable, the answer is not a merger but for Labor to reassert its own course.

Knesset Member Ori Orr, chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, contended that the peace offensive has led to an undue strengthening of the dovish wing of Labor, at the expense of the more centrist forces in the party.

Beilin's proposal is a reflection of that trend, he said. Orr is expected to put forward his candidacy for a ministerial appointment if Shas rejoins the coalition; so, too, is Beilin.

An indirect response along these lines came from 14 Labor Knesset members who participated in a founding meeting of a new non-partisan grouping in the Knesset on Tuesday.

Calling themselves "The Third Way," they criticized the government for veering too far to the left, and called for the inclusion of more coalition partners to balance Meretz on the right, such as the right-wing Tsomet party or the United Torah Judaism party.

Among the Labor participants were Economic Minister Shimon Shetreet, and Knesset member Avigdor Kahalani, who heads the Knesset's Golan lobby. Also present at the meeting were members of the Religious Kibbutz Movement and Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who heads the religious pro-peace Meimad movement.

Kahalani expressed concern that Rabin would move to the left in order to reach an agreement with Syria before the elections.

And, regarding Beilin's proposal, he said that "if someone wants to merge with Meretz, let him join them."

Beilin's ideological opponents are not the only ones casting doubts on the wisdom of his proposal. Beilin ran into opposition even from among his close friends.

And Beilin's proposed match seemed to leave the prospective bride, Meretz, fairly frigid too.

Minister for Environment Yossi Sarid, the No. 2 figure in the Citizens Rights Movement component of the Meretz bloc and a likely future head of Meretz, said Meretz itself was engrossed at this time in the task of melding its three constituent elements into a single party. It was not an opportune time, therefore, to open a debate on a possible fusion with Labor.

Despite the lack of immediate endorsement for the Beilin plan, however, pundits are not dismissing it.

Beilin has long been close to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and is drawing steadily closer to Rabin. He would hardly have floated an idea like this if he had had reason to believe the two party elders were flat against it.

Moreover, by drawing the explicit analogy with the U.S. Democratic Party, Beilin deliberately sought to make his "Israeli Democratic Party" an attractive proposition in the eyes of supporters of the Israeli peace camp among Jews and other friends of Israel in the United States.

TOUVIER APPEAL REJECTED

By Michel Di Paz and Beatrice Luzzatto

PARIS, May 25 (JTA) -- The Court of Appeals of Versailles has rejected the release request filed by Paul Touvier, the first Frenchman to be convicted of crimes against humanity.

Touvier, 79, former head of intelligence for the Lyon collaborationist militia during World War II, was sentenced on April 20 to life imprisonment for his role in the execution of seven Jewish hostages in Rillieux La Pape, located near Lyon in southeastern France, on June 29, 1944.

The executions were carried out in retaliation for the murder the day before by the Resistance of Philippe Henriot, Vichy's minister of propaganda.

Jacques Tremolet de Villers, Touvier's lawyer, filed a release request for his client on the grounds that the court's sentence was "illegal." The court rejected the argument.

Touvier appeared Tuesday in front of the Court of Appeals of Versailles behind closed doors. Touvier looked very calm, wearing the same grey jacket and red shirt he had worn during his trial.

Tremolet de Villers said he will now appeal to the Cour de Cassation, France's Supreme Court. The high court is not expected to render a decision for several months.

WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBERS SENTENCED TO PRISON TERMS OF 240 YEARS; NO PAROLE
By Jeannie Rosenfeld

NEW YORK, May 25 (JTA) -- The four Muslim fundamentalists convicted of bombing the World Trade Center were each sentenced this week to 240 years in prison, without the possibility of parole.

The Feb. 26, 1993 bombing, the worst terrorist incident ever to take place on American soil, left six dead, over 1,000 injured and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

U.S. District Judge Kevin Duffy arrived at the sentences in an unusual manner. He said at the sentencing hearing Tuesday that he had consulted actuarial tables to ascertain the life expectancy of each of those killed by the blast. He then added together the years the victims were deprived of and arrived at 180.

The remaining years of each sentence reflect mandatory sentences of 60 years for two counts involving assault on a federal officer.

Each of the defendants was given a chance to speak in court. Mohammed Salameh used his time to express his support for Islamic causes around the world, including those in "occupied Palestine."

Salameh, 26, was found guilty on 10 counts for renting the van used in the bombing, the apartment in Jersey City where the explosive ingredients were mixed and the locker where the explosives were stored.

In handing down his sentence, Duffy said the terrorists tried to kill as many people as possible by detonating the bomb at lunchtime when the World Trade Center is at its busiest. He called Salameh a "a coward and a sneak."

"There has been no remorse, merely arrogance. Somehow you have a sense of achievement," Duffy added.

Soon after, an identical sentence was delivered to Nidal Ayyad, 26, a chemical engineer who prosecutors say helped to construct the bomb.

'You Turned Your Life Into A Total Lie'

Ayyad, who was found guilty on 9 counts, ordered chemicals needed to make the bomb and had them delivered to Salameh's storage locker. After the bombing, he sent messages to news organizations taking responsibility for the act.

Duffy noted that Ayyad, a college graduate, had a chance to make something of himself. "You are likely the biggest hypocrite in this room," Duffy told him. "You had the best breaks and instead you turned your life into a total lie."

Mahmud Abouhalima, 34, who was convicted on nine counts, put gasoline in the van that caused the blast on the morning of the act.

Ahmad Ajaj, 28, who was found guilty on 10 counts though he was in prison during the explosion, maintained several times that he had nothing to do with it. Ajaj gave a two-and-a-half hour statement in court, primarily about the suffering of Palestinians caused by "fascist Zionist gangs," supported by the United States.

To Ajaj, Duffy responded, "You were in this plot up to your ears. The others were low; you're even lower."

After a five-month trial, the defendants were found guilty March 4 on all 38 counts in the case and convicted on charges including conspir-

acy, explosive destruction of property, interstate transportation of explosives, assault upon a federal officer and using or carrying a destructive device during a violent crime.

The defendants in this case have been linked to fundamentalist Muslim cleric Shiek Omar Abdel Rahman, a key figure in a second, more complex case that is to be tried in September.

Rahman and at least 13 other defendants have been charged with plotting to blow up several New York City buildings and assassinate political leader.

All four men sentenced this week had dismissed the lawyers who defended them during the trial and have indicated that they will appeal their convictions.

KUWAITI LEADERS MEET FOR FIRST TIME WITH AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS IN D.C.
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, May 25 (JTA) -- Visiting Kuwaiti parliamentarians made their first-ever stop at the American Jewish Committee's Washington office last week to discuss the Arab boycott and other controversial issues.

Friday's meeting marked the first time leaders of the Kuwaiti National Assembly met officially in the United States with an American Jewish organization, said AJCommittee's Washington representative Jason Isaacson, who participated in the meeting.

"It went well," Isaacson said of the meeting, which included about 20 people, among them Mohammad Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States. "It was the opening of a door."

AJCommittee participants urged Kuwait to "take further steps and assume a leadership role" in working to end the Arab boycott of Israel, said Isaacson.

He added that the Kuwaitis gave "a thoughtful response, saying, 'we have moved and hope we will continue to move'" on the issue, said Isaacson. "There was no timetable given and none was asked."

Last year, Kuwait said it would no longer comply with the secondary and tertiary aspects of the boycott, dealing with companies that do business with Israel.

The two sides also discussed the plight of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a concern of both American Jewish groups and of Kuwait.

"They came with some knowledge of AJCommittee's and Jewish efforts generally on behalf of Bosnian Muslims, and they were eager to engage us on that issue," said Isaacson.

In addition, the participants discussed Iraq and the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, including the shared interest on the part of Kuwait and the United States to maintain United Nations sanctions against Iraq.

The Kuwaitis arranged for a camera from Kuwaiti television to record Friday's meeting, Isaacson said, adding that he was not sure whether it had been broadcast in Kuwait.

Because of the U.S. Memorial Day holiday, the JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published Monday, May 30.
