

HEBRON MASSACRE INQUIRY EXONERATES GOVERNMENT, IDF; BLAMES GOLDSTEIN ONLY
By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 26 (JTA) -- The Rabin government and the Israel Defense Force greeted with a sigh of relief the findings of the official commission of inquiry investigating the circumstances surrounding the Feb. 25 Hebron massacre.

Following six weeks of closely watched hearings, the panel, headed by Supreme Court Chief Justice Meir Shamgar, issued a 350-page report Sunday indicating that Kiryat Arba settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein had been solely responsible for the slayings of at least 29 Palestinians at a Hebron mosque.

Though it found that security had been lax at the Tomb of the Patriarchs on the day of the killings, the five-member panel, which included an Israeli Arab judge, ascribed no negligence to government officials or senior army officers.

The panel did, however, note that several border guards were not at their posts at the time of the incident. But it did not recommend that proceedings be initiated against the guards on charges of negligence.

Terming the Feb. 25 killings "one of the harshest expressions of the Jewish-Arab conflict," the Shamgar Commission found that Goldstein had planned the massacre alone, concealing his plans even from his wife, Miriam.

The panel rejected testimony that a secret accomplice had helped Goldstein carry out the killings.

Breakdown Of Law And Order

But if the commission was reluctant to attach blame to any one person or authority beyond Goldstein, it was quite adamant that there had been a breakdown of law and order in the territories.

The situation was compounded by a lack of clarity in IDF orders regarding how to react to a situation in which settlers were found firing on Palestinians, according to the report.

Israeli soldiers testifying before the commission had stated that, according to their so-called open-fire orders, they were not to shoot at settlers, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the situation.

The commission recommended that the police force in the territories be substantially increased and that the police officers, rather than the IDF, be responsible for maintaining law and order.

The commission also recommended that neither off-duty soldiers nor settlers be allowed to carry arms into Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs.

The only people allowed to do so will be members of the permanent guard stationed at the site, which is sacred to both Jews and Muslims, according to the recommendations, which the government adopted on Sunday.

While no restrictions will be placed on Jews and Muslims using the same central prayer hall, arrangements will be made to ensure there will be no contact between the two groups.

The commission also urged that security devices such as those used in airports be installed at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

Until these measures are taken, the panel determined, the site will remain closed, as it has been since the day of the massacre.

The panel further recommended that Israeli settlers who use their weapons for any reason be required to report immediately to the police regarding the circumstances under which they were used.

As a result of the panel's findings, permits allowing settlers to own and carry arms will now be reviewed annually.

The panel also determined that the IDF's open-fire orders should be reviewed and reworded in the clearest possible language so that there can be no misunderstandings in the future.

In an effort to aid the police in maintaining order, the Shamgar Commission further recommended that firm action be taken against so-called "extreme elements" in the territories, including members of the banned Kach and Kahane Chai movements.

'All Must Be Equal' Before The Law

The panel approved the government's decision to ban the extremist groups, which it did within weeks of the massacre.

As for the IDF's open-fire orders, the panel said, the policy must be reviewed and disseminated in the clearest possible language to avoid any misinterpretation.

The law, the panel determined, must be "enforced energetically and all must be equal before it."

Within days of the Hebron massacre, the Cabinet called for the formation of a commission to investigate the slayings.

In the ensuing six weeks of hearings, most of which were held in open session, the panel heard 106 witnesses, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, during 31 sessions.

Some witnesses said that ongoing tensions in Hebron prior to the killings made the incident entirely predictable.

But the Shamgar Commission in effect endorsed the opinion of the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, who testified that the massacre had come like "a bolt from the blue" and that the act of one gunman was not something that could have been either foreseen or entirely prevented.

Members of both ends of the Israeli political spectrum expressed disappointment with the panel's findings.

Critics on the left noted that the Shin Bet General Security Services had warned more than once against the danger posed by extremist settlers.

Members of the political left were also critical that the panel did not recommend that the 400 settlers living among the some 70,000 Palestinians in Hebron be ordered to leave the West Bank town.

And on the right, settlers groups complained that the panel had not addressed the issue of

what they see as repeated Palestinian provocations of settlers.

Reaction among Palestinian leaders was also critical of the commission's findings.

Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natshe, expressing his disappointment with the report, said, "The army did nothing. The settlers are still there."

His words were echoed by Saeb Erekat, a leading Palestine Liberation Organization official from the West Bank town of Jericho who was recently named minister of local government in the newly formed Palestinian governing authority.

"The report did not address the root of the problem -- the settlers," said Erekat.

Nabil Sha'ath, minister of planning and international cooperation in the Palestinian authority, said a copy of the report had been sent to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in Tunis.

Sha'ath said the PLO leadership -- which broke off its negotiations with Israel in the weeks following the Hebron massacre -- would react to the commission's findings after it has had a chance to study it.

JORDAN SECURES U.S. PLEDGE ON DEBT AS REWARD FOR PROGRESS IN PEACE TALKS By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 26 (JTA) -- President Clinton has pledged to ask Congress and U.S. allies abroad to help reduce Jordan's \$6.6 billion debt as a reward for its progress in peace talks with Israel.

The offer came at a meeting with King Hussein during his visit here last week.

After the hour-long session last Wednesday, Clinton said he was "very encouraged by where we are in the whole peace process."

A Jordanian official hailed Clinton's move as a "positive step for the future of Jordan."

Debt payments amount to almost 30 percent of Jordan's total annual budget, according to the official.

White House sources dismissed reports that Clinton offered to go to Congress and ask lawmakers to forgive Jordan's \$650 million debt to the United States at this time.

Instead, they said, Clinton will ask America's European allies to either forgive or reschedule Jordan's debt.

But administration officials said that if there is an open summit between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Hussein or other public displays of normalized relations, the White House will ask Congress to set aside Jordan's debt.

Opposition Is Already Mounting

Under an agreement reached two weeks ago in Washington, Jordanian and Israeli negotiators are scheduled to meet in the Middle East next month to discuss water and territorial issues.

But even if the administration opts to forgive Jordan's debt in the future, coming up with the money will be no easy task, according to observers.

Any debt forgiveness, which would incur cost to the American taxpayer, would have to be offset by increased revenue or savings.

In order to approve spending the funds to offset the debt, Congress would have to vote on such a measure either separately or as part of another piece of legislation.

Opposition is already mounting to Clinton's proposal in Congress.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, (R-N.Y.), has said he will oppose forgiving Jordan's debt unless Hussein extends formal diplomatic relations to Israel and acknowledges the Jewish state's right to exist.

Some Jewish groups are also planning an assault on the Clinton pledge.

Herbert Zweibon, executive director of Americans for a Safe Israel, said, "I'm opposed to doling out benefits to people who just come to the table. The entire process is flawed."

Zweibon said Jordan should "not make peace for money but for the sake of making peace."

But in the view of Mark Rosenblum, political director and founder of Americans for Peace Now, giving Jordan debt relief now is "consistent with Israel's self-interest in peacemaking."

"It's a helpful step to show the Arab nations that peace does pay," Rosenblum said.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, "The conditions being set are reasonable and if Jordan delivers, that would be the basis (to forgive the debt)."

During his meeting with Hussein, Clinton also offered to host a Washington summit between Hussein and Rabin.

Hussein apparently did not reply directly to the offer, although he told reporters in Washington that he hopes to meet openly with Israeli leaders in the near future.

The Israeli prime minister, for his part, said last week that he was "ready to meet with King Hussein whenever and wherever he wants in an attempt to further peace between Jordan and Israel."

KEY SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES \$3 BILLION AID PACKAGE FOR ISRAEL By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- Israel's \$3 billion aid package came one step closer to passing Congress earlier this month when a key Senate committee sent the foreign aid bill to the full Senate for a vote.

The House of Representatives passed a similar measure by record numbers last month.

The Senate Appropriations Committee also approved an amendment sponsored by Sens. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) and Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) for \$80 million in refugee assistance to Israel.

A Lautenberg amendment also secured an additional \$7 million for the Middle East Regional Cooperative Fund for joint research ventures between Israel and other Middle East states.

For the first time, the Senate Appropriations Committee "earmarked" Israel's aid package, meaning the United States is obligated to give these funds to Israel.

Although Congress has never withheld the money after passage, earmarking funds is an important step to ensure that the aid is delivered in future years, analysts said.

As in the House, the Senate bill calls for a total of \$13.6 billion in foreign aid spending, down \$700 million from last year.

The bill proposes \$2.1 billion in aid for Egypt and \$78 million for the Palestinians for health, education, roads and other infrastructure development in Jericho and the Gaza Strip.

JEWISH AGENCY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS EXTENDS LEKET'S TERM THROUGH OCTOBER

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, June 26 (JTA) -- As anticipated, the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors on Sunday extended Yehiel Leket's term as acting chairman of the agency and the World Zionist Organization until its next meeting in October.

The move essentially buys time for the Diaspora fund-raisers to try to find another candidate for the post, while Leket will use the extension to demonstrate that the best man already occupies it.

Leket was appointed acting chairman in February to replace Simcha Dinitz, who stepped aside after being indicted on charges of fraud related to the alleged misuse of agency credit cards.

The struggle over the chairman's post reflects the complicated organizational structure of the Jewish Agency.

The agency's \$500 million budget represents the bulk of the money raised for Israel by the United Jewish Appeal and by Keren Hayesod, UJA's international sibling.

The structure attempts to balance power between Diaspora fund-raising organizations and the WZO, composed of democratically chosen representatives of Israel's political parties and Diaspora Zionist organizations.

The chairman is elected within the Israeli party system but must be ratified by the fund-raisers.

The Board of Governors was meeting this week against the backdrop of calls by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin to dismantle the Jewish Agency because it is an outmoded form of Israel-Diaspora partnership.

Rabin has dismissed such calls as nonsense and damaging to the fund-raising campaigns.

At the board meeting Sunday, Board of Governors Chairman Mendel Kaplan, who represents the fund-raisers, praised Leket's job performance "under very difficult circumstances."

Kaplan said, "There is nothing more we could have asked of him."

Praise But No Endorsement

But Kaplan appeared to go to great lengths to explain that the extension was a technical requirement and not an endorsement of Leket for the top job.

Leket's acting chairmanship ended officially on June 10, rendering him unable to sign official agency documents without a board-approved extension.

Kaplan said that while it is in the "best interest of the organization" to pick a permanent chairman as soon as possible, the board has been unable to come to an agreement with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on a candidate.

Rabin heads the Labor Party, whose Central Committee must elect the chairman of the Jewish Agency and WZO.

Kaplan and members of the board's committee, which must approve the candidate for chairman, have in recent days informed Rabin they want former Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat for the job.

Lahat recently resigned from the Likud Party but does not belong to Labor.

That means he cannot be put forward by Rabin without Rabin flouting the rules and antagonizing his party at a time when the party is already riddled with chaos and infighting.

Fund-raising sources said Rabin's weak posture means they will "sit tight until October."

"We're between a rock and a hard place," said one who asked not to be identified.

The Jewish Agency executive also approved Sunday a controversial contract agreement calling for the Jewish Agency to be the exclusive recipient in Israel of funds raised by the United Israel Appeal and Keren Hayesod.

The UIA is the conduit by which UJA funds reach the Jewish Agency.

The agreement is slated to last five years with an option for either party to terminate the arrangement after three.

But the agreement has not yet been signed.

Whether it will be signed, sources say, depends on whether the Zionist General Council -- the WZO's legislative body -- approves some fundamental structural changes in the Zionist organization aimed, in part, at depoliticizing the Zionist body.

The Zionists have scheduled a secret ballot on the proposals for Wednesday night.

U.S. AND ISRAEL PLEDGE MILLIONS TO FUND JOINT ECONOMIC PROJECTS

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 26 (JTA) -- The United States and Israel pledged \$15 million each last week to fund joint economic projects through a science and technology commission.

Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and Israeli Minister of Commerce and Industry Michael Harish announced the agreement following the second meeting of the U.S.-Israel Science and Technology Commission held here June 20.

American Israel Public Affairs Committee President Steve Grossman, who is a member of the commission, called the agreement a "breakthrough" in U.S.-Israel relations.

"This is the kind of agreement where co-equals are coming together," Grossman said in a telephone interview after the commission meeting.

"This is on the fast track and is very exciting, because it will create jobs through feasible projects where everyone involved will benefit," he added.

The initial \$30 million is intended to encourage private industry to participate in joint projects both technologically and financially.

The commission is "the newest concrete example of President Clinton's commitment to working closely with Prime Minister Rabin in creating high-technology jobs and economic growth in both countries," Brown said.

Brown and Rabin agreed to establish the commission during Brown's trip to the Middle East in January.

On July 6, the United States is scheduled to open a Science and Technology Center in Tel Aviv.

The center will assist U.S. companies seeking to do business in Israel.

"This is a prime example of the effective partnership two countries can forge together," Harish said of the agreement and of the forthcoming center.

COURT'S REFUSAL TO REOPEN FINTA CASE MAY THWART FURTHER WWII PROSECUTIONS

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, June 26 (JTA) -- The Canadian Supreme Court's refusal to reopen the controversial war crimes case of Imre Finta may thwart further prosecutions of others suspected of committing atrocities during World War II.

The assessment was made by Justice Minister Alan Rock.

"The judgment does make it more difficult for us to succeed in such prosecutions," Rock said.

He made his statement after the high court in Ottawa on June 23 turned down a request to clarify its March 24 judgment acquitting Finta.

Finta was the first person charged under Canada's 7-year-old war crimes legislation.

Finta, 81, a captain in the pro-Nazi Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie during World War II, had been accused of forcibly confining 8,617 Jews in the southern Hungarian city of Szeged from May 16 to June 30, 1944.

He was also accused of stealing the detainees' money, jewelry and other valuables while using threats of violence.

The detainees were later deported to Auschwitz and other concentration camps, where most of them perished.

By a 4-3 vote, the Supreme Court ruled on March 24 that the 1990 jury acquittal of Finta should stand.

Finta's lawyer, Douglas Christie of Victoria, British Columbia, who has defended many in Canada accused of Nazi or neo-Nazi crimes, had argued that Jews were seen as subversives in wartime Hungary.

Therefore, he said, Finta had been merely following orders.

But the government later argued that one of the high court's justices had wrongly relied on Nazi propaganda when making his decision last March.

The government was joined by B'nai Brith Canada and the Canadian Holocaust Remembrance Association.

Depended On Pro-German Papers

The justice, Peter Cory, had cited pro-German Hungarian newspapers from 1944 which reported that Jews were disloyal to the Hungarian war effort. This "gave an air of reality" to Finta's defense of only following orders, Cory wrote in March.

The government and the two Jewish groups asked the court to clarify its decision, arguing that following orders should not be considered an acceptable defense.

But the Supreme Court refused to offer a clarification of its earlier decision or rehear aspects of the case.

The high court's decision "represents a failure of the Canadian justice system to come to grips with the problem of alleged war criminals within our midst," B'nai Brith counsels David Matas and Marvin Kurz said in a statement.

"This decision sends another nail into the coffin of the criminal remedy in war crimes cases," they wrote.

The two lawyers urged the court to launch denaturalization proceedings against Finta.

CANADA JAILS WHITE SUPREMACISTS FOR OPERATING A RACIST HOT LINE

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, June 26 (JTA) -- Three members of the white-supremacist Heritage Front, including a Jewish member and the group's president, were jailed here last week for operating a racist telephone hot line in defiance of a previous court order.

Justice Danielle Tremblay-Lamer sentenced Heritage Front President Wolfgang Droege, 44, to three months in jail for willfully violating an August 1992 Federal Court injunction forbidding the white-supremacist group from broadcasting racist statements. He also received a fine of about U.S. \$3,600.

Gary Schipper, 42, who as an adopted child was raised as a Jew but subsequently renounced his family, was sentenced to two months. His voice appeared on prerecorded hot line messages targeting Jews, indigenous peoples, blacks and other minorities.

Schipper recorded some 505 messages on the Heritage Front hot line from the spring of 1992 until it was shut down by the Federal Court of Canada last October.

Another member, Kenneth Barker, 32, was sentenced to one month. The judge said she was taking into consideration the fact that Barker was a single parent raising a child.

In May 1992, following a joint complaint filed by the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Native Canadian Center, the Canadian Human Rights Commission launched an inquiry into the Heritage Front's use of telephone lines to transmit hate messages.

CANADA ARRESTS FORMER ARAFAT GUARD

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, June 26 (JTA) -- Officials with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canada's immigration department recently arrested a former bodyguard of Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat for being a threat to Canadian security, a spokesman with the immigration authorities revealed last week.

Wahid Khalil Baroud, 43, was arrested June 6 at his home near Toronto, where officials presented a rarely used National Security Certificate for his arrest.

The warrant, signed by Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi and Solicitor General Herb Gray, was based on information provided by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Canada's equivalent of the FBI and CIA. No further details were revealed.

Baroud, an officer in Arafat's mainstream Al Fatah organization, arrived at Toronto's Pearson International Airport from Greece in May 1991 with his wife and three children.

The family, traveling on forged Egyptian passports and claiming to be Israelis, filed for refugee status.

But Canadian officials issued an arrest warrant after Baroud missed two immigration hearings.

Baroud was reportedly in charge of coordinating PLO terrorist acts in Libya, Syria, Lebanon and Greece, where he had been stationed for eight years.