

**AN 'EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY':
UJA MISSION CROSSES THE ALLENBY**
By Cynthia Mann

AMMAN, Jordan, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- About 100 top donors to the United Jewish Appeal visited Jordan this week, marking the first visit by an American Jewish group since Israel and Jordan last month declared an official end to 46 years of war.

Summing up the sentiments of many on this unprecedented mission, Felicia Weber, a delegation member from Atlanta, said: "To be an eyewitness to history being made, and seeing peace on the horizon, is like being part of a dream."

The delegation was hosted Wednesday morning by Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan, who told the participants that Israel and Jordan must make peace between them to improve the "lot in life" of the "common man."

At the breakfast meeting, the prince praised the recent dramatic breakthroughs in relations between the two countries, saying, "they have surpassed expectations."

But he stressed that a lasting peace depends on "cutting through the rhetoric of politicians," and building an infrastructure for regional development, industry and a prosperity that is shared by all.

"This is a region which has been in the wilderness in terms of institution building," the prince said. "I hope to move ahead of passions and think soberly of practicalities of building the future."

Hassan called for the two countries to sit together and devise a joint strategy for the international economic summit planned for October in Casablanca, Morocco, to promote development in the Middle East.

The prince made the remarks to a group of nearly 100 top donors to the United Jewish Appeal, many of whom are major business executives, who were in the region as part of the annual Prime Minister's Mission.

Participants in the Prime Minister's Mission make a minimum contribution of \$100,000 to UJA/Federation's annual campaign plus an additional gift to Operation Exodus for the resettlement of immigrants in Israel.

Prince Hedges On Palestinian Statehood

Joining them was another UJA group from Boston, which included Steven Grossman, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Also at the breakfast were Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Salam al-Majali, the ministers of finance, information and transport, and other top royal aides.

Hassan was warm, good-humored and relaxed as he spent nearly two hours with the group, flanked by Grossman on one side, and Richard Pearlstone, national chairman of UJA, on the other.

In his speech, the prince acknowledged that the autonomy agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization was a surprise, saying, "We were all playing catch-up."

But he emphasized that Jordan's support for Palestinian rights and "struggle for identity" is "total."

While he implied he backed Palestinian statehood, the prince hedged on an overt endorsement.

"Let us see what evolves in the next two years," he said. "The last three weeks have been dramatic enough."

Hassan referred subtly to Jordan's claim to Jerusalem's holy places, saying it "would be very difficult to envision" the upcoming celebration of Jerusalem's 3,000th anniversary without the participation of the three monotheistic religions.

And he stressed that Syria is an integral part of the regional peace process.

"We can't afford to think there are any wild cards out there when we think about peacemaking comprehensively," he said.

Members of the mission left Jerusalem on Tuesday morning in three buses, which got rerouted at an Israeli military checkpoint outside of Jericho before crossing the Allenby Bridge into Jordan.

"It's overwhelming to be part of such a historic time," said Arthur Schechter, a member of the mission from Houston.

"Who'd have thought I'd be shaking hands with King Hussein in Washington one week and having breakfast with Prince Hassan in Amman the next?" he said. "It makes you very optimistic about the peace process."

'Maybe We Can Help Be A Catalyst'

The delegation had earlier visited Morocco, where members were accorded what they described as extraordinary hospitality by King Hassan II, including a reception at the summer palace and round-the-clock security by dozens of royal guards.

The visit also received front-page coverage, replete with pictures, in the Moroccan press.

Pearlstone said the special attention given the Prime Minister's Mission in both Morocco and Jordan reflected the belief of Arab leaders that the American Jewish community has the kind of connections that can help promote peace and a strong regional economy.

"Maybe we can help be a catalyst," he said. "Some of our leaders do bring to bear a political power that can only help the peace process."

"Jews in America can do an awful lot (to) build bridges -- economic and social, and even as tourists," said Brian Lurie, executive vice president of UJA.

Pearlstone, meanwhile, applauded what he described as the Jordanian prince's "nuts-and-bolts approach, because that's what it takes to make peace," he said.

He also said he was overwhelmed by the warmth shown by the Muslim Arabs to the group. "We've all had these misconceptions, but like (Morocco's) King Hassan II said, 'We all come from Abraham.'"

Prince Hassan and other Jordanians "have displayed a great deal of courage over these past few weeks, and the support Jordan has received

from the president and the Congress has been significant," Grossman said.

"We look forward to tangible progress and a peace treaty," he added.

Grossman said the prince's most important point to the group was "that economic development and regional interdependency are the linchpin that will secure peace in this region for generations to come."

In a sign of the changing times, the breakfast meeting was open to several members of the Jordanian and international press.

"These are important Jewish organizations," said Ayman al-Saladi, a reporter with the Jordan Times. "It can only help for us to get together and communicate and explore our views about the peace process. It can only help increase understanding between us."

"A lot of news we have of each other reflects bias and propaganda that went hand in hand with the conflict," he continued. "Now is a good opportunity to break some of the barriers and know each other for what we really are."

Still, Saladi cautioned, peace would take time.

'We Have To See Real Results'

"You can't get over years of conflict overnight," he said. "It's a gradual process. Now there's euphoria, but down the road we have to see real results to be willing to put (the conflict) behind us."

Michel Hamarneh, the prince's aide, echoed similar sentiments.

"On the East Bank, we must take it step by step. After 46 years of enmity, you can't press a button" and expect everything to change, Hamarneh said.

Still, he said he believes people are ready for peace. "People don't have to love each other, but they have to learn to live together."

After arriving in Jordan on Tuesday morning, most of the mission delegates continued, accompanied by a police escort, almost 200 miles south on the desert highway to Petra, the capital of the ancient Nabatean city whose rose-red sculpted mountains are the stuff of songs and legends and lure tourists from around the world.

"Crossing the Allenby Bridge was very historic for me and the leadership of the American Jewish community," said Darell Friedman, president of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

"All these years, those of us in the Diaspora have wanted peace so desperately in the region," Friedman said.

By "taking this ride into a country at war with Israel for so long, and touching and seeing and talking to the people, we were part of history," he said.

Pearlstone and the other mission organizers said UJA's meetings with Arab leaders reflect a responsiveness to changes in Israel and the region.

"We're showing we're relevant to where Israel is going," he said, adding that UJA's fundraising campaign "is changing to adjust to the new reality."

"We're not negotiating for Israel," Lurie said. "We're following Israel's lead and trying to be constructive."

Lurie recalled last year's Prime Minister's

Mission, which was dedicated to regional peace prospects and which flew members to the Sinai border town of Taba to meet with Egyptian business leaders.

"UJA has really tried to be at the cutting edge," Lurie said.

He pointed to this week's visit to Petra, for years a magical, yet unattainable place in the eyes of Israelis.

"Petra captured the yearning of Israelis to go to an imaginary kingdom," Lurie said. "It symbolized how Israel was in a claustrophobic state with all its neighbors refusing to open their borders. It captured their yearning to be normal and accepted and part of the Middle East."

DESPITE MINOR BUREAUCRATIC HASSLES, TOURISTS BEGIN CROSSING INTO JORDAN

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Encountering only a few bureaucratic nightmares along the way, foreign tourists eager to take advantage of new arrangements for passage between Israel and Jordan began lining up to cross the border this week.

Even as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Crown Prince Hassan were cutting the tape for a new border crossing some two miles north of Eilat on Monday, tourists attempted to cross the Allenby Bridge separating Jordan and the West Bank further north.

And on Tuesday, about 100 other tourists started using the border crossing that had been opened with much fanfare the day before.

For now, only foreign nationals and Israelis with a second passport are allowed to cross between Israel and Jordan -- a trip made possible under the terms of the July 25 Washington Declaration that officially ended the 46-year state of war between the two countries.

Jordanians and Israelis without a second nationality will have to wait for the signing of a final peace agreement before they can make the trip.

But for those who were able to make the crossing this week, it was not all smooth sailing, although the bureaucratic snafus they encountered were ironed out within a matter of hours.

The group at the Allenby Bridge, seeking to cross into Jordan with visas obtained in advance by a tourist office, was held up for nearly four hours.

The delay occurred because nobody had told them that they needed a special stamp by the Israeli Interior Ministry, which had apparently not yet caught up with the fact that Israel and Jordan were no longer locked in a formal state of war.

The problem was ironed out when an Interior Ministry official in Jerusalem was finally found who was ready to risk a breach of bureaucratic protocol and put the stamp into the tourists' passports.

And the tourists who left via the new crossing point at the foot of the Dead Sea were surprised to find that Jordanian border officials were not prepared to recognize foreign passports issued by foreign consulates in Israel.

But there, too, broad-minded border officials were finally found to help speed the tourists on their way.

ARGENTINE PRESIDENT URGES EXPULSION OF IRANIAN ENVOY OVER LINKS TO BOMBING

By Raul Kollmann

BUENOS AIRES, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Argentine President Carlos Menem this week called for the expulsion of Iran's ambassador to Argentina after a judge issued arrest warrants for four Iranian diplomats wanted in connection with the July 18 bombing of the Jewish communal headquarters here.

But Menem, speaking to a radio interviewer Wednesday, said the final decision regarding the expulsion should rest with the Foreign Ministry.

Menem made the statement after federal Judge Juan Jose Galeano decided Tuesday to issue warrants for the four diplomats, whose current whereabouts are unknown.

Galeano has been spearheading the investigation into the bombing that killed 99 people and left more than 200 wounded.

The four Iranians were identified as Ahmad Allameh Falsafi, Mahvash Monsef Gholamreza, Akbar Parvaresh and Abbas Zarrabi Khorrasani, all of whom reportedly worked at the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires.

Galeano issued the warrants based on the testimony of an Iranian refugee, Monousheh Moatamer, who is currently in Caracas, Venezuela, under the protection of the U.N. high commissioner for refugees.

Moatamer has been variously described as a former secretary in Iran's Ministry of Culture and as a high official in the Iranian secret service, before fleeing Teheran a month ago.

Galeano's findings were criticized as lacking concrete evidence by Ruben Beraja, president of the DAIA, the Jewish communal umbrella organization whose offices were among those destroyed in the bomb blast.

The judge's finding "ratifies Iran's participation, but has no solid elements (of evidence)," Beraja said Wednesday.

The Foreign Ministry's second-in-command, Fernando Petrella, said Wednesday that the Supreme Court would have to determine whether Galeano had a sufficiently strong case to warrant an international manhunt for the four missing diplomats.

Iran And Hezbollah: 'One Entity'

Israeli and American officials have blamed the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement for the bombing.

Another Lebanon-based group, known as the Supporters of God, has taken responsibility for the terrorist attack. Little is known about the group, but it is believed to be closely associated with Hezbollah.

Earlier in the week, Argentine officials spoke of the possibility of cutting off relations with Iran, but the threat was later withdrawn out of fear of reprisals.

Summoning the Argentine charge d'affairs in Teheran, Iranian officials on Wednesday strongly protested the issuance of the warrants. Argentina withdrew its ambassador to Iran shortly after the July 18 blast.

According to Iran's official news agency, the four wanted in Argentina are currently in Iran. Three of them, the agency stated, had not served at the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires for years,

and the fourth was in Argentina on an official visit in December but had not returned since.

In Washington on Wednesday, Mohammad Mohaddessin, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the Iranian National Council of Resistance -- which is seeking to overthrow the current government in Iran and replace it with a secular, democratic government -- said the bombing had been planned and carried out by the Iranian government and Hezbollah.

He described the government and the terrorist group as being, in effect, "one entity."

Mohaddessin, speaking to reporters at the National Press Club, charged that the attack was planned in Teheran by the Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, as well as by the Intelligence Ministry and the Foreign Ministry.

He also said the attack was approved by the regime's Supreme National Security Council, which is chaired by Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Mohaddessin said the Iranian Embassy and envoy in Buenos Aires had also been "deeply involved" in the attack. "The regime's embassy in Argentina and Foreign Ministry played a role in solving the logistical problems like providing explosives and transportation of the terrorists involved in this explosion," Mohaddessin said.

He added that involvement of Iranian diplomats in terrorist activities is widespread.

When asked what proof he has linking Iran to the bombing, Mohaddessin said he has no evidence such as "paper or videotape" because there is no "paper trail" for such terrorist acts.

He claimed that sources within the Revolutionary Guard had provided the Iranian National Council of Resistance with the information.

(JTA staff intern Michael Shapiro in Washington contributed to this report.)

CJF REPRESENTATIVE URGES CONGRESS NOT TO CUT BENEFITS TO IMMIGRANTS

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- As the welfare reform debate continues in Congress, Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federations Washington Action Office, turned up the heat on members of the congressional committee charged with the task of writing new welfare law.

CJF is spearheading opposition to provisions in proposed legislation that would cut benefits to legal immigrants by extending the amount of time from three to five years that American relatives are held financially responsible for new immigrants.

"To rob from one low-income program to pay for another simply makes no sense to us," Aviv said in her testimony Tuesday before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources.

President Clinton's welfare reform proposal funds new benefits to welfare recipients and work training programs by cutting aid programs for legal immigrants. The cuts could affect tens of thousands of Jews across the country, many from the former Soviet Union.

This proposal would "have the effect of enshrining in law that legal immigrants are not really welcome in the U.S., especially if they need help," Aviv said. "Surely there are other ways to finance welfare reform,

NEWS ANALYSIS:**AS MIDEAST PEACE TRAIN GATHERS SPEED,
SYRIA IS STILL WAITING AT THE STATION**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Aug. 10 (JTA) -- Amid a Middle East peace process that is steaming along on several fronts, Syria remains the wild card.

As U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher completed his fourth round of shuttle diplomacy in the region in three months, there were mixed signals regarding the status of the long deadlocked Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

At the same time, Israeli negotiators sat down this week with their Jordanian and Palestinian counterparts to seek agreement on the outstanding issues facing them.

And Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat to try to iron out some of their publicly aired disagreements.

But Syria remains adamant in its refusal to negotiate directly with Israel, preferring to have Christopher serve as go-between. It is a role the secretary has promised to repeat in September, when he is scheduled to return to the region for another round of diplomacy.

As an American official traveling home with Christopher on Tuesday reportedly said, it is preferable to have the U.S. secretary play the intermediary role rather than have Israel and Syria endlessly repeat their positions with no show of progress.

For months now, those stances have been the same, with Syria demanding a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for peace, and Israel calling for a detailed nature of the peace that will be established before it starts making a phased withdrawal from the Golan.

Even with Christopher serving as intermediary, there were no dramatic breakthroughs reported this week on the Syrian-Israeli track.

But all three parties seem satisfied that these periodic indirect talks are a worthwhile process with slow but real progress being made.

Can't Report Incremental Progress

Using his carefully polished diplomatic tone, Christopher told reporters during his flight home Tuesday, "I do not feel I can report incremental progress on specific issues."

But he added that he felt he had left Israeli and Syrian leaders "with a good deal for them to think about."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was more optimistic about the results of the Christopher trip, telling reporters Monday it was his impression that "further progress was made" following the secretary's five-hour session with Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus on Sunday.

On another positive note, American and Israeli officials were pleased that Syrian television had aired substantial footage of Monday's events at Aqaba, where Rabin and Jordanian King Hussein had met after the opening of the first border crossing between Israel and Jordan.

No editorial comment or criticism accompanied the Syrian television coverage, which some observers feel was aired to prepare the Syrians for eventual negotiations with Israel.

Similarly, Syrian television coverage of the July 25-26 Rabin-Hussein summit in Washington --

where the two signed a declaration officially ending the 46-year state of war between their countries -- was seen as an important indication of Damascus' desire to be seen as participating, albeit obliquely, in Middle East peacemaking.

In the meantime, Rabin and Arafat met Wednesday at the Erez border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel to review the state of ongoing negotiations between Israel and the PLO.

The Rabin-Arafat meeting is especially significant as it comes straight after Monday's high-profile opening of the border crossing some two miles north of Eilat and Aqaba.

The fast evolving Israel-Jordan peace process has caused strains in the Jordan-PLO relationship. The Palestinians are irritated by Israel's recognition, in the July 25 Washington Declaration, of Jordan's special status as guardian of the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem.

And some Palestinians also feel that the Jordanian track threatens to overshadow the Israel-PLO track, where much still needs to be negotiated and implemented.

A PLO team, led by Arafat aide Yasser Abed Rabbo and East Jerusalem leader Faisal Husseini, was in Amman for talks this week with senior Jordanian officials. They were meeting to discuss the Jerusalem issue in an effort to ease the strains and reach some understanding.

Arafat May Be Creating Wakf Alternative

As a backdrop to this mission, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Monday that Arafat is considering the creation of a Palestinian religious body in Jerusalem to vie with the Wakf, the Jordanian-funded, 2,400-strong religious "civil service" that runs the Mosques of al-Aksa and Omar on the Temple Mount, as well as other Muslim religious properties in the city. #

Another PLO negotiating team led by Nabil Sha'ath is meanwhile in its fourth week of talks with Israel in Cairo, where the two sides are pressing ahead on the "early empowerment" agenda.

This represents the next step in the Israel-PLO negotiating process whereby five major areas of civilian life -- health, education, welfare, tourism and taxes -- will come under Palestinian control not only in the autonomous regions of Gaza and Jericho, but throughout the West Bank as well.

Rabin and Arafat focused both on this problem and on the question -- still shrouded in uncertainty -- of the timing for elections in the West Bank and Gaza.

Under the terms of the declaration of principles signed last September in Washington, the elections were to have been held this summer.

But it now seems clear that even a tentative October date will be missed; Sha'ath has recently spoken of December.

But at the same time, Israeli officials this week pressed ahead with the advances made on the Jordanian front in both Washington and Aqaba by holding two sets of meetings this week with their counterparts from Amman.

At one meeting at the Moriah Plaza Hotel on the Israeli side of the Dead Sea, and at another held near the newly opened Eilat-Aqaba border crossing, the two sides discussed such outstanding nuts-and-bolts issues as water rights, borders, security and tourism.