UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO FIGHT ANTI-SEMITISM AT HOME
By Ilana Wernack

NEW YORK, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- In his first meeting with American Jewish leaders, newly elected Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma pledged to fight anti-Semitism in his country.

"We are not indifferent to cases of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, but the malignant term of neo-Nazism does not exist in Ukraine," Kuchma told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations here Sunday.

"I promise to fight against such phenomena," he said.

The Ukrainian leader said he recognized that his country's history "had black and bloodshed chapters" vis-a-vis the Jewish people and called for the establishment of a museum at Babi Yar, the site of one of the worst massacres of Jews during World War II.

"What was important was that the president of Ukraine was making a statement to fight anti-Semitism and reach out to the Jews," said Rabbi Arthur Schneier, chairman, of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

The meeting also addressed a potential problem that had cropped up last spring, but appears to have been resolved.

Ukrainian officials had objected to some programs run by the Jewish Agency for Israel that encouraged young Jews to visit or move to Israel.

Jewish Agency, Ukraine Sign Agreement
At Sunday's meeting, Yehiel Leket, acting chairman of the Jewish Agency, expressed his satisfaction that the issue had been resolved and thanked the government of Ukraine for its ongoing cooperation with the Agency's work.

An agreement was signed last week between the Jewish Agency and the government of Ukraine which allows the Agency to facilitate aliya, Jewish education and Hebrew-language education in Ukraine.

The agreement will make it possible for 500 youngsters to join the 591 youths already in the Na'Al'eh 16 program in Israel.

They will be arriving in Israel in the next two weeks.

At the meeting, Kuchma expressed his support for the Agency's efforts.

He also noted that Ukraine had the most rapidly growing Jewish community in the former Soviet Union.

Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, who is originally from Brooklyn but now resides in Kiev and acts as chief rabbi of Ukraine, thanked the Ukrainian government for supporting Jewish life and enabling the reconstruction of the Jewish community there.

When asked after the meeting about a recent "60 Minutes" episode that suggested that Ukrainians were perceived as "genetically anti-Semitic," Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said that Kuchma proved this was not the case.

"In terms of this president, I think the answer is given by virtue of his visit to the Holocaust Museum and by virtue of his forthright remarks" at the meeting, he said. Kuchma visited the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington on Monday.

JEWS DEBATE VALUE OF ANTI-BOYCOTT PROVISIONS IN UPCOMING GATT BILL
By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- As Congress gears up for the battle over the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Jewish activists are debating the effect little-known provisions of the free-trade agreement will have on the Arab boycott of Israel.

Lawmakers have attempted to use GATT as an instrument to get the Arab League to abolish its boycott of Israel.

In July, the House Ways and Means Committee approved an amendment to GATT implementation legislation recommending that the World Trade Organization prohibit any countries who adhere to or impose any boycott from joining.

Although the amendment does not mention the Arab League's boycott of Israel specifically, it was clearly aimed at that.

Congress is poised to consider the GATT treaty during a special lame-duck session next week.

But Jewish observers are divided over the effect such language in GATT will have on the boycott, and whether it is even worth the effort.

Some say the language is too general to affect the Arab boycott, which is, by all accounts, winding down. Others say the language, however general, could act as a check on Arab countries who may say they renounce the boycott but nonetheless continue to enforce it.

"You shouldn't waste any time on (boycott language) in GATT," said Will Maslow, who edited the now-defunct Boycott Report for the American Jewish Congress.

The amendment is not only too general, but also too difficult to enforce, Maslow said.

"GATT is not an organization that you can get any action on the boycott from. Nobody's bothering to enforce (the regulations in GATT). There are more direct routes (to deal with) the Arab boycott," he said.

Maslow said he believes the boycott is on its last legs, anyway. In September, the Gulf Cooperative Council, which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahia, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, terminated the secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel.

Maslow noted that some American and European companies that did not do business in Israel, like General Motors and Intel, are now opening plants there.

"All these are very good signs for the end of the boycott," Maslow said.

Although the boycott seems to be ending, some argue the language in GATT banning countries involved in the boycott is still worth having.

The GATT language reaffirms that the Arab
boycott is a global trade issue, said Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus of Arab Americans.

"For those countries who are wavering on their support of the Arab boycott, GATT gives them an excuse to end their boycott activity," he said.

While countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have given assurances that they no longer adhere to the boycott, American companies still receive requests for boycott information from those countries, said Stacy Burdette, assistant director of the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office.

"Until we see requests for boycott information stop reaching U.S. (companies), we need these mechanisms in place; and until the policy directives of Arab leaders trickle down to the businessman, we need these mechanisms in place," Burdette said. U.S. law prohibits American companies from complying with requests from Arab boycott authorities.

Burdette pointed out that the Office of Anti-Boycott Compliance reported a sharp increase in the number of boycott requests from Saudi businesses.

She warned that it was too soon, statistically, to see what effect the Gulf Cooperation Council's recent statement against tertiary and secondary boycotts will have.

REPORT DOCUMENTS FAR-RIGHT THREAT TO DEMOCRACIES THROUGHOUT EUROPE
By Michel Di Paz
PARIS, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- The growth of far-right parties in Europe "threaten the civil and constitutional rights of certain minorities," according to a recent report issued by the Paris-based European Center for Research and Action on Racism and Anti-Semitism.

The 130-page report, issued by the Jerusalem-based Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, assessed the influence of more than 45 extremist political groups in 35 European countries and reached the conclusion that they are increasingly becoming a part of the European political establishment.

"Europe, which believed it had gotten rid of its old evils, has reached a stage where extremists have become players" in the mainstream political process, Serge Cwajgenbaum, secretary-general of the European Jewish Congress, said at a Nov. 15 news conference.

"Let's not be mistaken on their real intentions -- taking power or at least destabilizing (Europe's political) institutions," he added.

According to Cwajgenbaum, the report had two goals: to document the range of extremist parties in Europe and to assess the political prospects of the far right.

Noting that far-right parties "may well be in a position to influence the mainstream political agenda," the report also found that extremists could rush in to fill a political vacuum created by "the collapse of a political system or decline of a political party."

Jean Kahn, president of the EJC, told the news conference that political extremists were taking advantage of political freedom in an attempt to destabilize European democracies.

Kahn, who also heads a European Union committee investigating racism and xenophobia, added that some European countries have failed to crack down on the far right because of their adherence to principles of freedom of expression.

Cwajgenbaum voiced concern about the recent electoral victories of right-wing parties in Italy and Austria. "Those parties are indeed spinning a web. It is still a very fragile one, but the more they do, the more people they will catch," he said. "This potential danger shouldn't be overlooked."

KNESSET TACKLES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE; VOWS TO TAKE STEPS TO COMBAT PROBLEM
By Naomi Segal
JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- The Israeli government has resolved to take steps to combat the growing trend of violence against women in Israeli society.

At a special Knesset session devoted to the issue this week, dozens of Knesset members took to the podium to discuss the issue and make recommendations for legislation that would help ease the situation.

Labor and Social Affairs Minister Ora Namir of the Labor Party said her ministry has established 10 regional counseling centers for troubled couples and that the centers have worked with 1,200 couples so far this year.

She also said that financial support for battered women's shelters has increased dramatically over the past two years, and that some $1.3 million have been allocated to shelters this year.

Among the other speakers was Naomi Chazan of Meiria, who has introduced a bill that would recognize extenuating circumstances in murder cases stemming from domestic abuse.

She said the idea for the bill arose from two recent cases. In one case, a son killed his father, who had been abusing his mother for years. The other case involved a woman who murdered her husband, who had also been abusing her. Both individuals are currently in jail.

"Up to now there has been a compulsory 25 years to life sentence for murder, but there has not been an ability to take into account special circumstances," Chazan told Israel Radio. "The idea behind this law is (not) to condone murder, but to make it clear that there are extenuating circumstances which relate to violence."

Israeli activists have long complained about the difficulty of compiling hard statistics on domestic abuse, particularly since police files on assault and murder do not specify whether a case involved domestic violence.

EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI TRADE SOARS
By Naomi Segal
JERUSALEM (JTA) -- After years of relations disparagingly referred to as a cold peace, trade between Israel and Egypt rose sharply this year.

According to figures released by the Egyptian Economics Ministry, trade between the two countries more than doubled during the first nine months of 1994 over the same period last year.

Israeli-Egyptian trade, excluding oil sales, stood at $30 million for the first three quarters of the year, up from $15 million from the same 1993 period.
ATTACK ON NETZARIM POST RENEWS
DEBATE OVER FATE OF GAZA SETTLEMENT
By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- Renewing a
debate that has been going on for months, gov-
ernment and opposition leaders traded barbs this
week about the fate of the isolated Jewish set-
tlement of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip.

Appearing before the Knesset Foreign Affairs
and Defense Committee on Monday, Foreign
Minister Shimon Peres repeated the position he
has taken several times before, calling the settle-
ment of some 30 families a thorn which must be
removed from Israel's side.

But Peres added that Netzarim should not be
dismantled now, in order not to give the impres-
sion that the settlement was being disbanded in
the face of opposition by Palestinian extremists.

On Saturday night, some 300 Hamas sup-
porters overtook an army checkpoint near Net-
zarim and raised a Palestinian flag after destroying
the post.

Following standing orders, the soldiers fled
the checkpoint under a hail of stones thrown by
the demonstrators.

The soldiers then took up positions at a pre-
arranged point to defend the 30 families in Net-
zarim, where a larger army presence is maintained.

They returned to the checkpoint after Pale-
stinian police had dispersed the protesters.

Sgt. Maj. Gil Dadon, 26, of Tel Aviv, was
later killed at the site, when a speeding car with
Gaza license plates opened fire on the army post.

It was the same post where, on Nov. 11, a
terrorist rode up on a bicycle and exploded a
bomb that claimed the lives of three Israeli
reservists and injured several others, including
Israeli soldiers and Palestinians.

Addressing the key Knesset committee, Peres
said some $8 million had been spent on guarding
the settlement, which is located south of Gaza
City.

OTHER SETTLERS SHOW SOLIDARITY
He said maintaining the settlement lacked
any justification from an economic or security
standpoint.

Peres was originally scheduled to brief the
committee on Israel's relations with neighboring
Arab states. But Likud Knesset member Ariel
Sharon had asked that Netzarim, and the army
checkpoint near it, be put on the agenda.

Sharon, who had visited the checkpoint
earlier in the day, attacked the government for
stationing soldiers there without adequate equip-
ment or the means to protect themselves effec-
tively.

Peres in turn defended the standing orders
that led Israeli soldiers to abandon the post
briefly Saturday night.

The Council of Jewish Communities in Judea
and Samaria, a leading settlers group, meanwhile
declared it was launching a show of solidarity for
Netzarim.

The head of the council, Uri Ariel, said
Monday the group would urge members of other
settlements to take turns living at Netzarim to
lend their moral support.

"People will not be living there permanently,
but will stay for a few days to show solidarity," he
told Israel Radio.

JORDAN NAMES AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL
AS OPENING OF EMBASSIES APPROACHES
By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- With Israel
and Jordan prepared to open embassies in each
other's respective capitals on Dec. 10, Jordan has
appointed Dr. Marwan Muasher as ambassador to
Israel.

Muasher, who served as spokesman of the
Jordanian delegation during earlier peace negoti-
ations with Israel, has also headed Jordan's infor-
mation office in Washington.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry was expected to
name an ambassador to Jordan by next week.
Israel Radio reported that the diplomat will be
chosen from the ranks of the Foreign Ministry.

The exchange of ambassadors was made possible
by the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty that was

Meanwhile, Israel Radio reported Tuesday
that Saudi Arabian officials are interested in
being involved in the establishment of an in-
dustrial park to be located near the Erez crossing
that separates Israel and the Gaza Strip.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin report-
edly met with an official from the Saudi Embassy
in Washington during a conference held this week
in Aspen, Colorado, for business leaders from
Arab countries.

Beilin reportedly will discuss the proposal
with Arafat in Oslo on Dec. 10, when Arafat,
Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Min-
ister Shimon Peres will be in Norway to receive
the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.

PALESTINIANS DEMONSTRATE FOR ARAFAT
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- Thousands of
Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West
Bank streamed into Jericho on Wednesday to
demonstrate their support for Palestine Liberation
Organization leader Yasser Arafat and the Pale-
stinian Authority.

Observers said the mass demonstration in the
Jericho soccer stadium was intended as a show of
force in advance of a Hamas fundamentalist
demonstration planned for Friday in Gaza.

On Monday, some 10,000 supporters gathered
in a sports stadium in Gaza City to show their
support for Arafat, who told the crowd that he
held Hamas responsible for last Friday's riots, in
which at least 14 Palestinians were killed and
about 200 others were wounded.

Prior to the Jericho rally, pro-Arafat demon-
strations were held in many towns in the West
Bank.

Hamas activists called on Palestinians to
attend the rally and directed them to fleets of
buses waiting to take them to Jericho.

Meanwhile, Israeli security officials are
planning special precautions at Jewish settlements
in Gaza on Friday, following threats by Hamas
and Islamic Jihad to carry out anti-Israeli attacks
to retaliate for what they claim were Israeli-
initiated moves to foment last Friday's riots.

Because of the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, there
will be no JTA Daily News Bulletin published Nov.
25.
For years, Tzdik continued, Israeli Arabs suffered from the fact that Israel was at war with their people. "We pray that, when peace is at hand, we feel we must make our contribution to making peace happen," he said.

Tzdik told the newspaper Ha'aretz that the prompt intervention by him and other Israeli Arab public figures had stopped the bloodletting and brought an initial measure of stability to a highly volatile situation.

Some observers are also linking the high-profile Israeli Arab role in the Gaza strife to ongoing domestic political developments within the Israeli Arab sector.

Some 18 percent of Israel's total population of 5.4 million people are Israeli Arabs, and as the 1996 elections approach, both Tibi and the Islamic Movement are actively and publicly considering the possibility of forming political parties and running in the elections.

Tibi presumably would have the endorsement of his patron, Arafat. The Islamic Movement would meanwhile be building on a series of solid and impressive successes gained in municipal and local elections over recent years.

Many of the leading Arab mayors and local chairmen in Israel are members of the Islamic Movement and ran for election on an Islamic ticket.

However, some Islamic activists may be reluctant to delve into national Israeli politics because of the difficulty they may have, if elected to the Knesset, to swear the oath of allegiance to the Jewish state.

Some pundits familiar with Arab politics predict that Tibi and the Islamic Movement may run together on a single ticket.

Such a combined list would signal a radical realignment of political forces among Israeli Arabs and could spell the disappearance of the traditional parties, such as Hadash, which were Communist-based and have lost momentum since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The potential impact of a united Arab vote has been the subject of political speculation in Israel for decades.

Until now, those discussions have remained largely hypothetical because, in every previous election, the Arab vote has been dispersed over a large number of parties.

The next Israeli elections will be the first to take place alongside the reality of a Palestinian self-government.

This week's highly public Israeli Arab mediation effort graphically demonstrated the new role these leaders may yet play in the Israeli political process.

FRANCE TO FUND AUSCHWITZ PRESERVATION

PARIS, Nov. 23 (JTA) -- Saying that the dark history of the Holocaust "must be remembered," French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur announced this week that France will contribute about $2 million to the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation to help with preservation efforts at the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps.

Balladur also said he will ask the French Parliament to strengthen legislation against racist and anti-Semitic acts, and added that France and Israel will expand economic and cultural ties.