



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Most American Jews continue to support the Israeli-Arab peace process, but that support has declined in the past two years, according to a new national survey sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. [Page 1]**

■ **Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization set Sept. 21 as a new target date for signing an accord for extending self-rule in the West Bank. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO head Yasser Arafat are expected to meet to resolve outstanding issues.**

■ **A Senate subcommittee voted to include a long-term extension of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act in its foreign aid bill, paving the way for a full Senate vote on the measure next week. The legislation allows U.S. foreign aid to go to the Palestinians. [Page 3]**

■ **Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, made an unexpected appearance at Gracie Mansion as New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani hosted a gala reception in honor of Jerusalem 3000. Indyk's presence followed last week's flap because he was a no-show at Israel's official Jerusalem 3000 kickoff at the Knesset. [Page 2]**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Ukraine for trade talks with President Leonid Kuchma and Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk. The visit comes before a trip to Moscow, where Rabin is expected to discuss a Russian plan to sell nuclear technology to Iran.**

■ **Swiss bankers announced a plan to assist in the return of funds of Holocaust victims to their rightful heirs. The announcement came as world Jewish leaders held a conference in Brussels to discuss issues on the agenda of European Jewry. [Page 4]**

■ **The Los Angeles-based University of Judaism announced that it would launch the nation's first full rabbinical school west of the Mississippi next year. A \$22 million gift will enable the university to expand its existing two-year preparatory program into a full four-year program offering Conservative ordination.**

## U.S. Jews back peace process, worry about PLO, survey shows

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Most American Jews continue to support the Israeli-Arab peace process, but that support has declined in the past two years, according to a new national survey sponsored by the American Jewish Committee.

More than half of those interviewed for the survey by an independent research firm indicated that they mistrust the Arabs as peace partners, with the exception of the Jordanians.

Mistrust of the Palestine Liberation Organization runs especially deep, with 71 percent saying that it "cannot be relied upon to honor its agreements."

Fully 62 percent of the respondents said Israel should not "compromise on the status of Jerusalem as a united city under Israeli jurisdiction" in the "framework of a permanent peace with the Palestinians." The numbers are similar to those of previous years' surveys.

Only 20 percent said they favor an immediate move of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, however.

Meanwhile, almost 90 percent said they "see a need for a continuing U.S. role in the Middle East peace process."

The results, released Tuesday, come at a time when public attacks against the peace process appear to be escalating, prompting expressions of concern by the Israeli government and peace process supporters here.

For them, the survey results were welcome.

"The clear message is that there is continued support by American Jews despite despite vigorous efforts by the enemies of the peace process to discredit it," said Gary Rubin, executive director of Americans For Peace Now. "Clearly they have not succeeded."

"It's reassuring to see a strong majority of Jews backs our efforts to support the peace process," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

### 'Optimism tempered with caution'

At the same time, Raffel said he is not surprised by the erosion of support since the signing of the Declaration of Principles two years ago by Israel and the PLO.

"It was incorrectly described as a peace treaty when it was merely a framework for messy and complicated negotiations," he said.

People underestimated the difficulties that were to follow, especially "the acceleration of terrorism," and the numbers reflect their disappointment and frustration, he said.

These findings "demonstrate broad general support for the peace initiative under way in Israel and a sense that the process is likely to lead to regional peace," said David Harris, AJCommittee's executive director.

But "the growing level of distrust of the Arabs, in general, and the PLO, in particular," underscores that the American Jewish community's "optimism remains tempered with caution," he said.

Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America, singled out the mistrust factor in his reaction to the findings.

The results "reflect the fatigue and exhaustion that most Jews feel with respect to continued terrorism by Arabs against Jews," he said.

"Most Jews clearly recognize the PLO continues to encourage terrorism by [PLO Chairman Yasser] Arafat's calls for jihad and praises of terrorists as heroes.

"Thus, more American Jews now believe a real peace with the Arabs is becoming more elusive," said Klein.

The survey was the third of a series initiated by the AJCommittee since the signing of the Declaration of Principles.

In the current survey, 1,000 people who identified themselves as Jews were interviewed by telephone during the second week in August.

When asked in general terms whether they "support" or "oppose" the "Israeli government's current handling of the peace negotiations with the Arabs," 68 percent said they "support" the process.

That is down from 77 percent in August of last year and 84 percent

in September of 1993. A total of 15 percent said they "oppose" the process, while 17 percent said they are "not sure."

And 66 percent said they believe that the past two years of negotiations between Israel and its Arab negotiating partners "increase the likelihood of peace with the Arabs," while 18 percent said they believe that they "increase the likelihood of another war."

But most respondents said they do not trust the Arabs' motives in the talks.

Some 56 percent said they "agree" that the "goal of the Arabs is not the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel," up from 51 percent in 1994 and 42 percent in 1993. But 37 percent said they "disagree" with this statement.

Although 74 percent believe that the Jordanians are interested "in a true and lasting peace with Israel," only 38 percent believe this about the Syrians and 37 percent about the Palestinians.

Mistrust of the PLO runs deep, the survey shows.

A total of 71 percent said the PLO could not be "relied upon to honor its agreements and refrain from terrorist activity against Israel." That is up from 65 percent last year and 42 percent in 1993.

An overwhelming 91 percent said the PLO is "not doing enough to control terrorist activity against Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian extremist groups."

Respondents were asked about each track of negotiations.

Some 64 percent said they support the handling of the talks with the Palestinians, down from 70 percent last year. Fully 61 percent support talks with the Syrians, about the same as last year, and 92 percent approve of the peace treaty Israel signed with Jordan in October 1994.

### **Support drops for a Palestinian state**

Support for a Palestinian state has dropped, the survey indicates. A total of 46 percent said they support its establishment, down from 53 percent last year and 57 percent the year before.

A majority of respondents said they oppose any significant return of the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace. Twenty-six percent said "some of it" should be returned, 33 percent said "none of it" and 28 percent said "only a small part of it." Only 2 percent said the entire Golan should be returned.

Respondents were evenly divided over whether U.S. troops should be stationed on the Golan as part of a multinational monitoring force that might eventually do so.

The survey also explored the issue of dissent within the American Jewish community.

About half the respondents, or 53 percent, said they agreed that American Jews "should support the policies of the duly elected government of Israel," regardless of their individual views on the peace process. But 43 percent disagreed.

Most, however, reserved the right to publicly criticize Israeli government policy. Seventy-one percent said they disagreed with the statement that "American Jews should not publicly criticize the policies of the government of Israel." A total of 26 percent agreed, while 4 percent said they were unsure.

All three AJCommittee surveys were conducted with the same methodology by Market Facts, Inc., a research organization.

The current survey was demographically representative of the U.S. adult Jewish population in terms of age, income, gender and geographic region. Eight percent of the respondents identified themselves as Orthodox, 36 percent as Conservative, 32 percent as Reform, 1 percent as Reconstructionist and 23 percent as "just Jewish."

In addition, 55 percent said they belong to a synagogue or temple and 9 percent claimed an "excellent or good command" of Hebrew.

The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The survey also examined the depth and nature of the attachment of U.S. Jews to Israel.

Nearly 80 percent said that "caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew."

At the same time, nearly two-thirds said they have never been to Israel, while 22 percent said they have been once.

As a group, Orthodox respondents showed the closest attachment to Israel, according to the survey. At the same time, the survey found that a majority of them said they oppose the peace process. □

### **U.S. ambassador makes amends with presence at New York gala**

*By Lisa Hostein*

NEW YORK (JTA) — One week after offending Israeli and American Jewish officials by not showing up at Israel's official kickoff of Jerusalem 3000, the U.S. ambassador to Israel has made amends.

Ambassador Martin Indyk made an unscheduled appearance at Gracie Mansion here Monday night, as New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani hosted a garden reception at his home in honor of Jerusalem 3000, a 15-month celebration of the founding of Jerusalem.

Indyk's appearance came just days after Secretary of State Warren Christopher assured Jewish leaders here that Indyk's absence from the Jerusalem event was not intended as a boycott.

Monday's invitation-only event in New York, which featured an address by Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, was co-sponsored by the Consulate General of Israel in New York and the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

According to organizers of the gathering, Indyk, who was scheduled to be in town to address a meeting of the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday morning, made known on Monday afternoon that he would like to attend the celebration in New York.

Jewish leaders, who had protested Indyk's absence from the Sept. 4 Jerusalem 3000 celebration in Jerusalem, welcomed his presence.

Indyk's "presence is appropriate," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said after the formal speeches at the event.

With Christopher's letter and Indyk's presence in New York, the Clinton administration "has taken the steps to rectify" last week's situation, Hoenlein said.

Christopher's letter, in response to one from the Conference of Presidents, said the U.S. Embassy in Israel had opted to send its senior cultural affairs officer rather than Indyk because the State Department thought the celebration emphasized "the culture and history" of Jerusalem.

At the event in New York, Indyk did not address the hundreds of guests, but sat on the dais along with other dignitaries and organizers of the event. He refused to answer a reporter's questions about last week's flap before quickly leaving the reception.

But in Israel's view, Indyk's presence "cleared some of the misunderstandings," said Ambassador Colette Avital, Israel's consul general in New York.

"Whatever support we get from the United States government" concerning the unity of Jerusalem "will always be helpful," she said. □

**MEPFA takes leap forward with Senate subcommittee vote**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Senate is on the brink of passing a long-term extension of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act, which allows U.S. foreign aid to go to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations included the measure in its \$12 billion foreign aid bill on Tuesday by a unanimous voice vote.

The roller coaster ride that has marked the history of the legislation could come to an end as early as next week, when the full Senate is expected to vote on the measure.

Authored by Sens. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), the measure extends waivers that allow diplomatic contact with and aid to the PLO for an additional 18 months.

Congress has granted two 45-day extensions for the measure since it initially expired June 30. If approved, the measure would then go before a House and Senate conference committee to iron out differences between the chambers' foreign aid bills.

The House version of the foreign aid bill, which passed earlier this year, does not include any reference to the PLO waivers. But under congressional procedures, the House would be able to include the waiver in foreign aid legislation without a prior vote on the issue.

The foreign aid bill making its way through the Senate — and already passed in the House — includes \$3 billion in foreign aid for Israel and an additional \$80 million to assist the Jewish state in the resettlement of Soviet Jews.

The measure also includes \$2.1 billion in aid for Egypt and \$100 million for the Palestinians, which the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act enables them to receive.

**Covenant still calls for destruction**

The current proposal differs from the original legislation passed two years ago after the historic signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO in that it tightens the restrictions and requires greater compliance on the part of the PLO.

Like the old legislation, the new version requires the president to certify that the PLO is complying with its accords with Israel.

And the president must continue to submit compliance reports to Congress every six months in order for the Palestinians to receive U.S. foreign aid.

Under the new legislation, however, in order for the president to certify compliance, the PLO must have taken the following steps:

- established a judicial system;
- cooperated with Israel to pre-empt terrorism;
- and disarmed civilians not licensed to carry weapons.

As for the controversial item relating to the PLO's National Covenant, which calls for the destruction of the state of Israel, the new measure would not require the Palestine National Council to amend the covenant until a Palestinian council is seated after elections in the territories.

Most major Jewish organizations have supported the measure, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

The Israeli government has also supported its passage.

The Zionist Organization of America, which favors

completely cutting off aid to the PLO, led the unsuccessful charge against the measure.

ZOA President Morton Klein was lobbying senators this week to oppose the measure when the bill comes up for a floor vote.

The NJCRAC welcomed the subcommittee's action. "We hope that action will be taken on it expeditiously by the full committee and on the Senate floor," said Martin Raffel, the NJCRAC's associate executive vice chairman.

Meanwhile, every member of Congress received a letter signed by 1,000 rabbis from across the religious spectrum this week, urging support of the peace process and the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act.

The measure "has been an important and effective diplomatic tool for moving the peace process forward" and "a key element in the fight against terror," the rabbis from 47 states and the District of Columbia wrote. □

**Israel transfers to Palestinians seven new areas of civilian rule**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has handed over to the Palestinians seven spheres of civil responsibility in the West Bank.

Sunday's transfer of authority took place after the two sides signed an agreement for the handover last month in Cairo.

The seven new areas now under Palestinian control are: local government, statistics, fuel, labor, agriculture, trade and insurance.

An eighth sphere, postal responsibility, was not transferred because of remaining differences between the two sides over how it should be implemented.

Under the terms of a so-called "early empowerment" agreement between the two sides, Israel transferred to the Palestinians between August and December 1994 five other areas of civil responsibility in the West Bank — education, welfare, tourism, health and taxation.

The deputy head of the Israeli Civil Administration, David Bar-El, said Israel would provide some \$4 million in the coming weeks to help the Palestinians launch its administration of these new areas of control.

After Sunday's handover took place, four Palestinian mayors — including those of Jenin and Kalkilya — resigned because the Palestinian Authority said it planned to appoint new local councils in each of the towns. □

**IDF kills 3 gunmen in clashes**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three gunmen from the fundamentalist Hezbollah movement were killed Monday in clashes with Israel Defense Force troops in the southern Lebanon security zone.

The gunmen were on their way to carry out an attack against IDF and South Lebanon Army soldiers, Yediot Achronot reported.

The incident reportedly occurred when the IDF troops came upon a squad trying to enter the security zone.

Two gunmen were killed in the exchange of fire, and the third after a chase, Israeli sources said.

Israeli Capt. Uri Polack sustained moderate injuries.

The incident was part of a series of encounters in recent weeks in which IDF troops killed some 20 gunmen in southern Lebanon during operations and clashes.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak said recently that the stepped-up Hezbollah activity was a sign of desperation among the group's ranks. □

## Swiss bankers release details on return of Jewish accounts

By Joseph Kopel

BRUSSELS (JTA) — Swiss bankers released details Tuesday in Bern of their plan to return accounts of Holocaust victims to their rightful heirs.

The announcement came as world Jewish leaders held a conference at the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss issues on the agenda of European Jewry, specifically questions of restitution.

“We are seeking to write the closing chapter on the tragic history of the Holocaust,” said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

The European Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Restitution Organization co-sponsored the meeting at the European Parliament, the legislative arm of the European Union. Parliament leaders also were to attend the conference.

Jewish officials are scheduled to meet Thursday with the Swiss Bankers Association “to begin deliberations on the necessary next steps” to return funds held in Swiss accounts, Steinberg said in an interview.

At a news conference Tuesday, Swiss bankers said they have found tens of millions of dollars in their vaults that could be from secret accounts of Jews killed in the Holocaust. In a survey of a dozen banks this year, 893 pre-1945 accounts that belonged to Holocaust victims may have been found, the bankers association said.

The bankers association reportedly added that the accounts, which need further investigation, are worth \$34 million, after the addition of interest and reductions for fees and taxes. Others have estimated higher totals, peaking at nearly \$7 billion.

The Swiss banks’ premium on privacy and the difficulty of producing proof of ownership of an account that once belonged to a Holocaust victim have made it difficult for descendants to identify or claim assets.

Other steps taken by the bankers association include refraining from invoking Switzerland’s 10-year statute of limitations on dormant accounts.

### ‘U.S. has been exemplary’

The association made no reference to deposits made by Nazis who stole assets from Jews and other Nazi victims.

Earlier this year, Switzerland formally apologized for its treatment of Jews during World War II.

In addition to seeking a resolution to the Swiss bank accounts issue, Jewish groups are seeking “broad-based, forceful support on efforts of restitution” from Central and Eastern European nations, Steinberg said.

The United States has been exemplary in its support of the restitution effort, he said.

In a Sept. 8 letter to WJC President Edgar Bronfman, President Clinton wrote, “As the democracies of Europe and America seek to build a new and better world for the 21st century, we must confront and, as best we can, right the terrible injustices of the past.” Clinton also said in the letter that he supports the efforts to “resolve the question of Jewish properties confiscated during and after the Second World War.”

Jewish leaders are to meet with French President Jacques Chirac on Friday to further their efforts in Europe, Steinberg said.

Jewish officials met Monday with Belgian Premier Jean-Luc Dehaene, who expressed his “full support” of the restitution “endeavor,” which he called a “moral struggle.” □

(JTA staff writer Alissa Kaplan in New York contributed to this report.)

## Romania, Jewish groups sign agreement on compensation

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Romania has formally agreed to take specific steps toward compensation for Jewish property seized during World War II, said Elan Steinberg, World Jewish Congress executive director.

The agreement was signed last week by the Romanian government, the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities, he said.

“It’s a significant breakthrough,” Steinberg said of the Sept. 7 signing. “It will set the pattern for Eastern and Central Europe.” He added that the agreement was similar to one recently made with Hungary.

Points agreed upon include the following:

- Within a year, the Romanian government will submit draft legislation to Parliament on the compensation of seized Jewish property.
- An executive order will be issued to open relevant archives and files.
- In two months, the WJRO will submit a preliminary list of property seized.

The Jewish population of Romania was 600,000 before World War II. During the 1940-1944 rule of the pro-Nazi Ion Antonescu, more than 250,000 Jews died in territories controlled by Romania.

Another 400,000 have emigrated to Israel since the end of World War II. Some 15,000 Jews, many of whom are elderly, now live in Romania. □

## Germany returns property to Berlin Jewish community

By Miriam Widman

BERLIN (JTA) — The German government has formally returned four pieces of property in Berlin to the city’s Jewish community.

“This is yet another step toward the consolidation of Jewish life in this city,” said Jerzy Kanal, chairman of Berlin’s 10,000-strong Jewish community.

Kanal received the deeds to the four pieces of property from Berlin Finance Senator Elmar Pieroth at a ceremony earlier this month at the city’s gold-domed New Synagogue.

The New Synagogue, whose restoration was completed in time for the May 7 ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany, sits on one of the parcels returned to the Jewish community.

All the returned parcels are in the Jewish section of Berlin.

Kanal said the Jewish community had not pushed for the return of the property sooner because it was aware that other more pressing cases of former Jewish property were before the real estate authorities.

Sorting out property owned by Jews who used to live in Berlin but fled the Nazis in the 1930s has been a difficult and complicated task, said Berlin authorities, who rejected criticisms that they have worked too slowly on returning Jewish real estate to their rightful owners.

They note that there are 33,249 petitions with the German government claiming Berlin property that was confiscated during the Third Reich.

By the end of July, authorities had completed work on 6,460 of the petitions, they said. Of those, 1,000 property owners or their heirs had their real estate returned.

Alexander Schnurbusch, director of the office that is handling the property-return claims, said that typically, there are five claims for every piece of property in Berlin’s Jewish district, the most disputed part of town. □