

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Cairo cease-fire talks fail

Talks in Cairo aimed at reaching a Palestinian case-fire ended Sunday without an agreement.

The talks, which included 13 Palestinian groups, failed over whether the cease-fire should encompass a halt to attacks against Israelis anywhere or limited to attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel proper.

"We will never agree to a deal that would legitimate continued violence of any sort," an Israeli official said before the talks failed. Egyptian mediators helped facilitate the talks.

On Iraq, U.S. learns from Israel

U.S. forces in Iraq are following Israel's lead when it comes to dealing with a hostile Arab population, *The New York Times* said.

U.S. troops occupying Iraq are erecting barriers, demolishing houses and arresting Iraqis suspected of attacks, much as Israel does with the Palestinians, the paper reported Sunday.

"You have to understand the Arab mind," Capt. Todd Brown told the *Times*. "The only thing they understand is force — force, pride and saving face."

U.S. officials said no Israelis advisers are in Iraq helping the Americans, though Israeli experts briefed U.S. defense leaders before the war.

Racism study released

A European Union center that commissioned but then suppressed a report on anti-Semitism released the study Dec. 4 under pressure.

The E.U. Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia released the report following criticism from politicians and Jewish leaders that it had been squelched to avoid angering Europe's large Arab and Muslim minorities.

However, the center included a disclaimer saying the study is flawed and noting that the center's original preface — which might be seen as an endorsement of the report's findings — has been removed.

The documents can be read at <http://eumc.eu.int>, while the report with its original preface can be read at www.crif.org.

The study found an increase in anti-Semitic crimes committed by youth of Arab and Muslim background. It also highlights the impact of stereotypical anti-Israel media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Powell meets Geneva negotiators, but stresses backing for 'road map'

By Matthew E. Berger and Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Architects of an unofficial peace proposal are trying to convince U.S. officials that their initiative can help push forward the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan.

In a meeting last Friday with drafters of the "Geneva accord" initiative, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said he appreciated their efforts but that "there are no short cuts on the way" to peace.

The Geneva negotiators' main message was that their plan complements the road map, which envisions the formation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

"There's no doubt that the road map is the leading plan," Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, a member of the Israeli delegation, told reporters. "What we are doing serves to breathe new life into the road map."

The road map was presented formally in early June at a summit in Aqaba, Jordan. Implementation quickly stalled, however, as the Palestinians refused to follow up on their commitment to dismantle terrorist groups and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat resisted attempts to empower a Palestinian prime minister.

Israel made initial steps to meet its obligations to remove illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank but soon stopped and allowed many to be rebuilt.

The road map sets out a three-year timetable toward peace but leaves many details for the two sides to negotiate. Nabil Kassis, the P.A. planning minister, said the Geneva plan helps push the road map forward by outlining for Israelis and Palestinians what a final status agreement would look like.

"What we said is we should have some view of what the third phase looks like, and we shouldn't wait until June 2005," Kassis told reporters.

Israeli officials criticized Powell's decision to meet with the Geneva architects. The Israeli government considers the initiative to offer an inordinate number of concessions and stresses that the opposition figures who negotiated it have no right to offer concessions in Israel's name. None are currently Knesset members.

Israeli opposition figure Yossi Beilin and Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo were the primary architects of the unofficial accord.

Powell rebuffed Israel's criticism, saying he had a right to hear out anyone offering new ideas for peace.

Adam Ereli, a U.S. State Department spokesman, said Powell emerged from the meeting convinced that final-status issues should be dealt with only after the parties had achieved interim agreements.

"I think we've stated very clearly that a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians is going to be decided on by the governments," he said. "And there's no question or doubt about that."

Reacting to last Friday's meeting, an Israeli government source said, "The decisions of the future of the peace process will be made by the elected government and not by anyone else, especially not by people who have no political constituency whatsoever in Israel."

For their part, Palestinians demonstrated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the Geneva proposal, *Israel Radio* reported. In Nablus, several thousand Palestinians, mainly Hamas supporters, burned effigies of the negotiators.

In a statement after last Friday's meeting, Powell said he explained that the road map "provides the appropriate pathway for moving to the realization of that vision and that there are no shortcuts along the way." Nonetheless, Powell said he hoped "that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Three Palestinians killed

Three Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip over the weekend. Early Saturday, two Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces as they approached an electric fence near the Nahal Oz roadblock.

Also, a Palestinian teenager was killed as he crawled near an army post, Ha'aretz, who said he was unarmed, reported.

Clinton boosts 'Geneva accord'

President Clinton volunteered to help promote the "Geneva accord" peace proposal.

Clinton told Israeli opposition figure Yossi Beilin and Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo, the architects of the unofficial accord, that he would like to help them promote the plan, which was launched last week.

"I have never seen a non-governmental program that had such a chance to succeed," Clinton said.

Israel helps Olympics security

Israel's advice is "key" to security for next summer's Olympic Games in Athens, a Greek official said. Israel is one of seven countries helping Greece plan security for the games.

A team led by Israeli police chief Shlomo Aharonishky visited Greece last month to help train Greek forces, Israeli police spokesman Gil Kleiman told The Associated Press last Friday.

Killer of Kahane's son jailed

An Israeli military court sentenced a man to life in prison for the shooting of Meir Kahane's son and daughter-in-law.

On Sunday, Mustafa Musrani received two life sentences plus 25 years for shooting to death Rabbi Binyamin Kahane and his wife, Talyah, in the West Bank in December 2000. The younger Kahane was a proponent of his father's far-right ideology.



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private citizens' activities will improve cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians."

The Bush administration's focus on rebuilding Iraq and on next year's presidential election has overshadowed the administration's attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Members of the Geneva contingent said they believed their plan, and the interest it has received in the United States and elsewhere, renews interest in the peace process and pressures Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to be more active in pursuing peaceful avenues of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the initiative was unveiled, Sharon has spoken of his potential willingness to uproot Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"All this together creates a new movement, a new atmosphere in this area that Sharon's listening to," said Lipkin-Shahak, a former Israeli army chief of staff and Cabinet minister in Ehud Barak's former government. "U.S. backing can have influence in Israel. We're not naive enough to not know that."

Lipkin-Shahak said he didn't believe that the group's meetings with American officials undermined Sharon.

"The American administration has enough more effective ways to pressure Sharon if they want to, and it's not clear they want to," he said.

The Palestinian members of the Geneva contingent said the proposal, and its reception in Washington, sent Sharon a strong message.

"We found it necessary and useful to tell our people, to tell the world that Sharon is wrong," said Zuheir Manasra, governor of Bethlehem. "There is a possibility for peace."

However, Lipkin-Shahak said the plan's main audience is Israeli and Palestinian people.

"It's not just a curiosity; there's a hunger to know about the plan," he said. "For the first time, Palestinians are arguing about refugees."

He said the plan implicitly states that the millions of Palestinian refugees and their descendants from Israel's 1948 War of Independence will have no "right of return" to Israel, and that Palestinians understand that.

He likened discussions Palestinians now are having about refugees to Israeli debates several years ago about dividing Jerusalem — another controversial element of the plan.

The clause on the key Palestinian demand for a right of return — which most Israelis consider a call to destroy the Jewish state by an Arab demographic assault — has been among the most controversial aspects of the plan.

The proposal's Israeli backers originally claimed that the Palestinians had clearly renounced the right of return. Palestinian negotiators denied that, noting that while the plan does not use the word "return," the text incorporates a U.N. resolution and a Saudi Arabian peace plan that the Palestinians believe uphold their demand.

The proposal states that refugees would have the option of returning to Israel. Israel would have a veto but would be expected to take the average number of refugees taken in by other countries — an indeterminate figure.

At a speech Dec. 4 to the Israel Policy Forum in New York, JTA several times asked Abed Rabbo, the main Palestinian negotiator of the Geneva proposal, whether the Palestinians had renounced the right of return.

Abed Rabbo did not answer the question directly.

"I don't deal in slogans, I deal in real solutions," he said. "You translate it the way you like." The plan offers a "collection of solutions" for refugees, he said, including the possibility of return to Israel.

"I believe this is the best we can afford our people," Abed Rabbo said.

Last Friday, Kassis said that the agreement means "no unlimited return of refugees."

Despite their meeting with Powell, the Geneva group has met some resistance in Washington. Most notably, President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, refused to meet with them, though Elliott Abrams, director of the National Security Council's Middle East bureau, attended the Powell meeting.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz also cancelled a meeting with the Geneva architects, though the delegation said it was due to a scheduling problem.

Kassis welcomed Bush's description last week of the proposal as "productive."

"He could have said it was counterproductive," Kassis said. □

(JTA Managing Editor Michael S. Arnold contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Peres pleads for JAFI

Shimon Peres urged North American Jewish federations to increase funding to the Jewish Agency for Israel. As the United Jewish Communities prepares to vote Monday on allocations to its overseas partners, the leader of Israel's Labor Party asked the UJC to allocate more money to the Jewish Agency, which runs immigration, absorption and Zionist education.

An Overseas Needs and Distribution subcommittee recently recommended shifting an extra \$13 million to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which runs relief and welfare programs for Jews around the world and competes with the Jewish Agency for funds.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also recently asked ONAD to increase funds to the Jewish Agency.

Tikkun supports Geneva

A left-wing Jewish group placed a full-page ad in The New York Times in support of the "Geneva accord" peace proposal. Last Friday's ad from the Tikkun Community seeks support for an international campaign to support the initiative, which was negotiated by Israeli opposition figures and Palestinian officials and launched Monday in the Swiss capital.

The editor of Tikkun magazine, Rabbi Michael Lerner, met last week with architects of the Geneva plan in Washington.

Viet-Jewish inmate sues

A Vietnamese-American prisoner in California who says he's Jewish filed a lawsuit that could change the way states classify Jewish inmates.

Viet Mike Ngo sued San Quentin prison, claiming the penitentiary primarily uses race to assign cell mates and endangers Jews by classifying them as "white" rather than "other," according to J., the Jewish news weekly of Northern California.

Ngo, who says he underwent an informal conversion to Judaism two years ago, says Jews could get paired with anti-Semitic white supremacists. State officials say most prisoners prefer to live with people of the same race. A ruling is expected in several months.

UNESCO condemns 'Protocols'

A U.N. body condemned the display of a notorious anti-Semitic forgery at an Egyptian library.

UNESCO said Dec. 4 that the presence of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" at a display at the Alexandria library would leave the institution "open to accusations of racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular."

The book, described by library director Yousef Ziedan as "as one of the sacred tenets of the Jews" and "more important than the Torah," had been placed next to an exhibit of Torah scrolls.

Judge in trial of AMIA bombing dismissed amid bribery charges

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — In Argentina, the wheels of justice often turn so slowly that people feel they need to grease them a little to get things going.

That can be a problem, especially when it's a judge who might be doing the greasing.

On Dec. 3, the judge presiding over the investigation into the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center was dismissed for allegedly bribing a witness in the case.

A federal court dismissed Judge Juan Jose Galeano because officials believe he may have paid about \$400 to bribe car mechanic Carlos Telleldin to compel him to testify against some former police officers accused of carrying out the bombing.

Telleldin is accused of providing the van used in the Buenos Aires bombing, which killed 85 people and wounded more than 300 on July 18, 1994. The former police officers are accused of carrying out the terrorist attack.

For two years, the court has been trying locals accused of involvement in the attack, and the process was expected to be completed within three months.

At the same time, Galeano presided over the investigation of the local and international links to the attack.

The investigation is now in its 10th year, with few convictions to show.

Galeano's dismissal came after a group of victims' relatives made a request through their lawyer, Pablo Jacoby. Jewish leaders have been critical of Galeano's handling of the case.

The Jewish community also frequently has decried the alleged lack of seriousness of government efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. The complaints have been tempered somewhat by the attention paid to the case by Argentina's new president, Nestor Kirchner.

If nothing else, Galeano's dismissal means that trials of suspects in the attack will take even longer.

"It's a sad day because we lost nine years, but we hope that the new judge will be far from political and communal influences," Jacoby said.

The case now falls into the hands of Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral. He said he expects to put the investigation back on track, but it might take him months merely to get through the 100,000 papers in the case.

"It's a brave verdict," said Adriana Reifel, president of Memoria Activa, a group of victims' relatives.

Abraham Kaul, AMIA's president, said he was happy with the dismissal, but that more needed to be done.

"As the decision of leaving the judge out of the case was right, we hope now that justice will act over the political sectors that protected him" and that threw off the probe, Kaul said. □

Olmert irks settlers

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli settlers called for Ehud Olmert's ouster after he suggested a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the territories.

Touted as a successor to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Deputy Prime Minister Olmert raised eyebrows last week by telling the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot that Israel should withdraw from much of the West Bank and Gaza Strip — including areas around Jerusalem — in the absence of peace talks with the Palestinians.

The Yesha settlers council demanded that Sharon fire Olmert.

National Religious Party leader Effi Eitam said Sunday that Olmert's remarks amounted to a capitulation in the face of Palestinian terrorism.

In a related development, Israeli police said they are investigating posters that depicted Olmert stamping products with a Nazi-era Star of David, a reference to Israel's recent agreement to label products sent to Europe from the West Bank. □

In Berlin, Sharansky blasts European attitudes on Jews

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — The bridge hasn't changed much since the last time Natan Sharansky crossed it — but the world certainly has.

For the first time since his release from a Soviet prison nearly 18 years ago, Sharansky, now an Israeli Cabinet minister, returned last Friday to the Glienicker Bridge in Berlin where KGB agents turned him over to West German authorities in an exchange of prisoners.

Traffic on both sides of the bridge was blocked briefly as Sharansky — making his first visit to Germany since his release from a Soviet prison on Feb. 11, 1986 — walked, surrounded by aides, security officials and reporters, across the span that had meant the difference for him between prison and liberty.

"Then it was a much longer journey, from communism to freedom," said the former Soviet dissident, standing at the eastern end of the bridge near its elaborate, Greek-style gate. The structure spans the Havel and Glienicker lakes, and marks the border of Berlin and Potsdam.

Sharansky asked to return to this spot during a three-day trip to Berlin, which included meetings with local Jewish community leaders, politicians and academics.

On Saturday, he addressed the fifth annual European-Israel Dialogue of the Axel Springer Foundation, before heading to the United States for an Israel Bonds speaking tour.

The scene on the bridge was very different from the day of Sharansky's release. The gray wintry skies may have been similar, but gone were signs of division between East and West.

Instead, the span was filled with the rush-hour traffic of Germans heading home from work for the weekend.

One driver honked at the crowd of journalists surrounding Sharansky and peered, frowning, to see what the fuss was about.

Sharansky made his way to the center of the bridge and recalled how, in 1986, he had to cross a low divider to freedom.

"The KGB had given me a pair of pants that were too loose, and no belt," he said, laughing. "I was afraid I would lose my pants as I stepped over."

Sharansky used his visit to Germany to criticize the European Union for not heeding growing anti-Semitism among Muslims in Europe and in Arab countries.

Earlier last Friday, he met with the authors of a controversial report on the topic, which was commissioned but then withheld by the Vienna-based European Union Monitoring Center for Racism and Xenophobia.

Calling the report's authors at the Berlin Center for Research on Anti-Semitism "some of the best professionals in the field," Sharansky said he wanted to know why the E.U. center should attempt to hide it.

"It is a very serious, professional work. It more or less coincides with our studies," he said. "There is a clear correlation between the size of the Muslim community in one or other country and the number of physical incidents of anti-Semitism, a kind of feeling of fear by Jews in the streets."

The center said it had killed the report because it feared the data was faulty, but critics charged that the real reason was to avoid angering Europe's large Muslim minorities with the findings that

Arab and Muslim youth were responsible for much of the surge in anti-Semitic attacks in Europe since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000.

Responding to pressure from European and American Jewish groups, the EUMC finally released the report on its Web site Dec. 4, with a disclaimer.

Sharansky said it was urgent that the European Union act to prohibit the spread of anti-Semitic propaganda in Europe, such as a harshly anti-Semitic, Syrian-produced TV series that was picked up by European satellites in November.

At a news conference last Friday, Sharansky showed two excerpts of the 29-part series, including a scene in which what is meant to be a Jewish tribunal passes a death sentence on a man who had an affair with a non-Jewish woman.

The sentencing is followed by a gruesome scene of men dressed as rabbis pouring lead into the victim's mouth, cutting off his ears and slitting his throat.

In another scene, the age-old blood-libel canard is enacted with a young, non-Jewish boy sacrificed so his blood can be used to make matzah.

Several journalists watching the scenes did not know they were seeing modern versions of medieval European anti-Semitic libels, said Joel Lion, public relations director for the Israeli Embassy here. Lion added that it might be a good sign that many Europeans have forgotten such stories, which often led to violent anti-Semitic pogroms.

But Lion said the repetition of such canards in the Arabic-speaking world may require education to inoculate against the spread of hatred.

Sharansky said that if Europe can ban hard-core pornography on the grounds that it incites violence against women, it also can ban films that bring age-old Christian anti-Jewish canards into the living rooms of Muslims.

But Sharansky also expressed optimism.

"Communism is behind us," Sharansky said, "and hopefully anti-Semitism will also be behind us."

Standing on the Glienicker Bridge, Sharansky recalled how he had recently visited his former Siberian prison cell, where guards had told him, "This is the end of the Zionist movement and you will never get out alive."

Sharansky served nine years of a 13-year sentence for so-called subversive behavior related to his Zionist activism, much of the time in solitary confinement.

Today, said Sharansky, "There is no KGB, there is no communism and more than a million former Soviet Jews are free and in Israel. It is a very triumphant feeling." □

Report: Fewer French Muslims

PARIS (JTA) — The number of Muslims in France has been widely exaggerated, according to a new report.

According to figures extrapolated from government statistics on the numbers of French citizens with at least one parent born outside France, there probably are less than 3.7 million Muslims in France, the L'Express weekly reported last Friday.

The figures are considerably lower than various estimates by politicians who have said the Muslim population is as high as 6 million. Slightly more than 1 million Muslims in France are of voting age, the report said. □