

Open Letter to the Jewish Community

By Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich,
Israel Ambassador to the U.S.



Rabinovich

On September 13 and during the days immediately preceding and following the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement, many of us shared a solemn feeling. We sensed that something very important and positive had happened, that the process of reconciliation with a bitter enemy was taking its emotional toll, that we were facing the prospect of a transition to a new, better, phase in Israel's life as a state but that nothing should be taken for granted; the potential was created but it has yet to be realized through persistence and creativity.

Two weeks later some of the initial elation dissipated, but the substantive achievements remain unchanged. This is a good time to share with you some thoughts on that which has taken place and on that which can be expected in the coming weeks and months.

The signing ceremony which took place on September 13 on the White House lawn and the whole series of events which preceded and surrounded it can be seen from a number of vantage points. For one thing, they represent the first breakthrough in the current peace process begun by the Bush Administration and the Shamir Government almost two years ago. In a more focused fashion, they can be seen as the first products of the more recent partnership between the Rabin Government and Clinton Administration in pushing this process forward.

Viewed from a greater distance, the new Israeli-Palestinian agreement is Israel's second success in converting its great victory in 1967 into acceptance by its Arab adversaries. The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979 marked the end of the bilateral conflict between Israel and the leading Arab state. In September 1993, the representatives of Palestinian nationalism, the core of the Arab rejection of Israel and Israel's legitimacy, extended their recognition to the Jewish State.

For more than a century until now, The Palestinian Arabs refused to recognize Jewish rights and Zionist-Israeli aspirations or to make a single agreement with us. The September accords are the first act of acceptance, agreement and compromise taken by a Palestinian leadership since the beginning of the Zionist enterprise in Ottoman Palestine.

This turning point is the result of a Palestinian coming to terms with the reality of the present international and Middle Eastern arenas: the collapse of the Soviet Union, Saddam's defeat in the Gulf War, America's unprecedented position as the sole remaining superpower, the unusual closeness between Washington and Jerusalem, Israel's military and technological assets, the demographic importance of the Russian immigration and the prospect of other Arabs preceding Palestinians in the coming to an agreement with Israel.

There are those who argue that for precisely the same reasons Israel should have stayed put and savored its advantage. The government of Israel thought that this would be a fateful mistake. It thought that an advantageous position should be used in order to obtain for Israel an agreement on the Palestinian issue that was not possible earlier, that has many merits from an Israeli point of view, an agreement that could mark the turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

The agreement signed on September 13 offers Israel several important advantages. As an interim agreement for Palestinian self-government, it enables Israel to keep its most significant assets and commitments — the IDF's presence, Greater Jerusalem, the Israeli settlements, overall responsibility for security and the specific responsibility for security on the road and for the personal security of all Israelis — while reducing if not eliminating the daily friction with the bulk of the Palestinian population. An important distinction was introduced between the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian claim to a right of return has been significantly weakened by the absence of any mention of the 1948 (as distinct from the 1967) refugees. All options remain open for the permanent status negotiations. When they begin in the third year, the Palestinians will probably raise a variety of demands that Israel will probably reject.

Extending recognition to the PLO was not an easy act for the Israeli Government. But a year of frustrating negotiations with the Palestinian delegation in Washington revealed that there was no other relevant address. Furthermore, recognition by the PLO offers the key to reconciliation and recognition with the larger Arab and Muslim worlds. For years we have been told by several Arab and Muslim states that they have no quarrel with us but that they were constrained by solidarity with the Palestinians. The PLO's recognition of Israel has already made a difference as demonstrated by the handshakes between Israeli leaders and the Arab Ambassadors to Washington and the subsequent visit, aboard an Israeli air force plane, to Morocco. The Prime Minister's visit to Egypt, less than a week later, was not the first of its kind, but it had an entirely different resonance in the new environment of the Israeli-Arab relations.

Much work and many challenges lie ahead. First and foremost is the need to implement the agreement. Many important details need to be worked out and good faith must be built as Israeli-Palestinian negotiations continue. Israel has built several safety mechanisms into the agreement. The IDF's presence and our ability to veto and interdict any undesirable developments are two of them. Still more significant may be the fact that the Palestinians must obtain our agreement to all aspects of the final status arrangements

See OPEN next page

From The Director's Desk

Daniel Z. Lepow



Partners in Peace

Although I am only two years older than the State of Israel, I remember throughout my life the times when Israel was in trouble and our need to rally for support. When the 1967 war broke out I left college to travel to Israel to help in the war effort. Israel needed volunteers to fill in for the people who went to serve in the Army. In 1973 I wrote my check and got on the phones to help raise the funds needed to help overcome the devastating losses caused by the Yom Kippur War. As the Refusniks plight in the Soviet Union came to our attention, I bought a bracelet twinning me with a fellow Jew who longed to celebrate his freedom as a Jew in Israel. In December 1987 I joined 250,000 other Jews to insist that the Soviet Union "Let Our People Go."

I am proud to have been a part of a generation that answered the call that witnessed the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry during Operation Moses. The leadership of the American Jewish community deserves the credit for leading us to do the right thing. From their pulpits on Friday night and Saturday mornings our Rabbinic leaders taught us about the responsibilities we have for all

our Jews. Our Jewish organizations from Hadassah to ORT to B'nai B'rith continued to work, not only to raise money, but to teach us the meaning of Jews helping one another. The Federations and the UJA never stopped getting the message out about the needs of Jews around the world. I remember so well the inspiring sermons and speeches that made me feel so good about what I was doing. My role always seemed so insignificant in context of world needs until I was able to see that my individual effort, joined with so many others, did so much. I have felt and continue to feel connected and a part of the world's Jewish community.

Now our world leaders are issuing a new call. **Partners in Peace!** With a handshake we are at the dawn of a new era. If there are no Arab armies attacking or people physically being kept back from immigrating to Israel, how can we have that same emotional response? Obviously our response is going to be based on different issues but hopefully with equal emotion. I have read many papers and articles about our needs here in the United States and concerns for our Jewish continuity. These are concerns that cannot be minim-

ized and must be addressed. However, there are those remaining in the former Soviet Union whose Jewish continuity is also threatened. There are social services provided to Jews around the world by the Joint Distribution Committee that continue to be their lifeline.

It is time for our current and future leaders to start teaching about this new partnership based on peace. They must use their pulpits and organizations to help us explore the ways to look beyond this community. Together we must research the mechanisms to use the cultural and educational resources from Israel and other parts of the world to help us as we move ahead. This must truly be a partnership, not only at Shalom Park but with Jews around the world.

Let us give the resources to enable the Jews to resettle in Israel and allow the ingathering to continue. It is a partnership we made with Israel in 1948 and one that we must continue to honor. In addition, let us reach out to Israel as partners for their resources to help our community grow.

Partners in Peace is a wonderful thought... Its time has come. Let's become a partner!

Changes Occur On CJN Board

In the past two-three months there have been some new additions to the CJN Board. We welcome Susan Kramer, Linda Levy and Bob Davis. Bob has been appointed to replace Steve Menaker, who did an outstanding job as cochair and financial consultant. He resigned because of other commitments. We will miss Steve.

Bob Davis is also a CPA and we are looking forward to his input on the board.

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten, double-spaced and signed. Please include address and phone number. Names withheld upon request. We reserve the right to edit.

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Deadline for CJN January Issue Sunday, Dec. 5

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