

Hope, concern greet peace pact locally

BY GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

A collective sense of amazement was voiced Monday as Yasser Arafat reached over to shake the hand of Yitzhak Rabin. The amazing scene took place at the White House in Washington, D.C., but the reaction was voiced at the Max M. Fisher Building in Bloomfield Township, where the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit invited area Jewish leaders to watch via television the signing of a pact between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

About 100 persons watched as Arafat, chairman of the PLO, signed the agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Rabin shortly before noon.

"Oh, my God," one man said as Rabin, Arafat and President Bill Clinton walked out of the White House together.

It was a sight that many Jews said they never expected to see. "We're hopeful, optimistic, apprehensive," said Jeannie Weiner, president of the council.

The council consists of about 270 organizations involving many of the metro Detroit area's 96,000 Jews.

"We will sit back and watch

and hope for the best," said Weiner. "People adjust rather rapidly, and it takes a lot of adjusting in trusting Arafat."

After the signing ceremony, Weiner added, "My heart was in my throat."

"I hope it will start the new year with promise and peace," said Carol Kazander, director of Jewish Information Services.

Today is Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year.

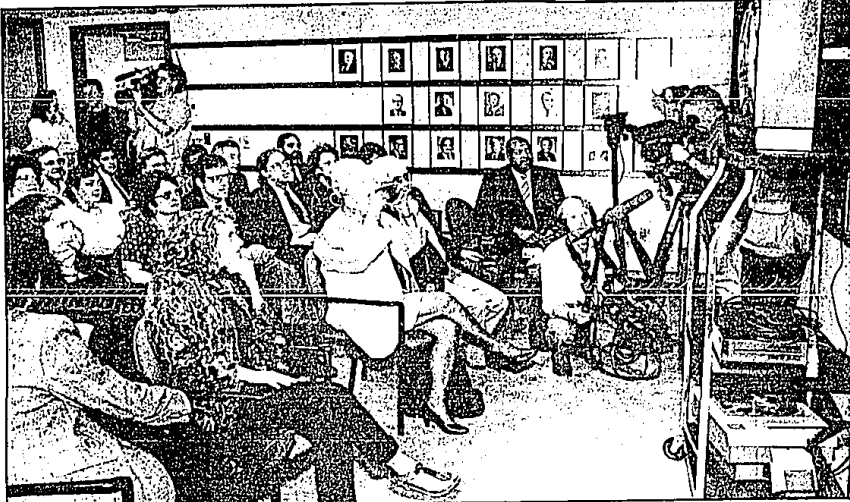
"It's a great beginning," said Kazander.

"I'm overwhelmed," said Miriam Imerman of Bloomfield Township. "Words can't convey the significance of this." She said she did not think peace between Israel and the PLO would come in her lifetime.

As she spoke, she held her 4-month-old daughter, Susan. The agreement, she said, "will be a legacy for her and children like her in Israel."

The audience listened intently and applauded occasionally as Clinton, Rabin and Arafat delivered short speeches congratulating everyone involved in negotiating the pact and calling for lasting peace.

Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Foundation, led a short prayer for peace



At the end of the ceremony at the Max M. Fisher Building.

The historic agreement recognizes the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It also grants Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho on the West Bank.

In return, the PLO affirmed Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism. All parties said the signing was just the first step of what will be a long process to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

As the group watched the signing in Bloomfield Township, another group of Arab and Jewish Americans did the same at the Majestic Cafe in Detroit.

"It was beautiful," said Kamal Shouhayib, co-chairman of the Arab-American Jewish Friends organization.

"We don't want war. We hope for something better to come," said Shouhayib. About 35 persons attended the gathering, which was not sponsored by any specific organization.

Shouhayib said Arab-Americans in the area were surprised by the rapid developments leading to the pact.

"It was a surprise. Many surprises aren't good, but this was a good surprise. We definitely applaud this movement of peace," Shouhayib said.



STAFF PHOTOS BY STEPHEN CASTRELL

Historic moment: Above, more than 100 area Jewish leaders gathered at the Max M. Fisher Building in Bloomfield Township to watch the signing of the pact on TV. At left, Michi Grossman wept with joy as the pact between Israel and the PLO was signed.

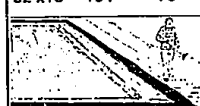
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