

Editorial

In memoriam: Issam Sartawi

EIR wishes to express the editors' sorrow and anger over the cold-blooded murder April 11 in Lisbon, Portugal, of Dr. Issam Sartawi, the most outspoken advocate within the leading circles of the Palestine Liberation Organization of Arab-Israeli coexistence.

Sartawi was killed by gunmen while attending meetings of the Socialist International in the Portuguese capital to explore the possibilities for a negotiated Arab-Israeli peace.

Dr. Sartawi, a heart surgeon by profession, had throughout the past troubled decade emerged as the most courageous and eloquent spokesman for a cross-national Arab-Israeli peace camp. His work in the Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, an organization set up in the mid-1970s, was directed to this purpose.

Two days before Dr. Sartawi's murder, Israeli General Matti Peled, a co-chairman with Sartawi of the Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, had issued a statement from Washington calling on President Reagan to officially invite the PLO to participate in peace talks between Jordan and Israel.

Throughout 1982-83, Dr. Sartawi had issued particularly poignant attacks against the terrorist circles of Abu Nidal, the Nazi International asset based in Damascus and Baghdad who has cooperated with Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran in assassinations of pro-peace elements within the PLO leadership. Dr. Sartawi had revealed that Abu Nidal was being cultivated as a special operative of a faction in Israel's Mossad intelligence service interested in sabotaging potentials for Arab-Israeli coexistence. Sartawi had warned of this collusion on the eve of the assassination attempt in London by the Abu Nidal group against Israeli ambassador Shlomo Argov, the attempt that was used by Ariel Sharon as the trigger to launch the June 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

While Palestinian extremists had succeeded in isolating Sartawi from public discussions, he had until the last moments of his life acted as an important envoy for PLO Chairman Arafat in probing the possibilities of regional peace talks.

Preliminary indications are that Sartawi was gunned

down by the Abu Nidal group, working with agents of Iran's Savama secret service.

One "signal" for the Sartawi murder may have been a recent article in *Die Welt* claiming that PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat had "a contract" out for Sartawi, in reaction against Sartawi's efforts for peace. "The story was a fraud, since Arafat supports Sartawi's work," a source stated. "It could only have been a signal that something would occur such as happened today."

Another "signal" was a recent article in the *Washington Post* reporting that Henry Kissinger, while on a trip to Morocco last November, had opened up contacts with a PLO representative, Ahmed Dajani. That report was regarded by intelligence experts as highly unusual, since Kissinger in 1975 banned all contacts with the PLO by American officials. The *Post* article, which preceded Kissinger's private visit to Israel, was meant to undercut President Reagan's Mideast peace efforts.

In a 1982 discussion with *EIR*, Dr. Sartawi revealed that in 1975 he had been dispatched by the Executive Council of the PLO to the United States to establish liaison between the PLO and Washington. After one day of meetings with policymakers in Washington, Sartawi was told suddenly by the State Department that the U.S. government would "never permit" such a liaison: Sartawi and ambassadors of the Arab world convened a meeting in Washington to protest this American action. The next day, Dr. Sartawi returned to New York and was systematically harassed and seriously beaten in his hotel room. He was told by an Arab nation's ambassador: "I have received a call from Henry Kissinger. He says you must get out of the country within 24 hours." Dr. Sartawi refused this ultimatum. He next received a call from an ambassador from a second Arab country, who told him, "Kissinger insists you leave. He personally threatened me that if you didn't leave, our country would receive no more exports of American wheat. 'Your people will starve,' Kissinger told me."

Following Sartawi's murder, moderate spokesmen in Israel expressed the fear that "Sartawi is one of a kind, his death is a real blow to the chances for peace."