

MIDDLE EAST

Syria hints at Brunner cooperation

THE world's most-wanted war criminal, Alois Brunner, who sent more than 125,000 Greek, Slovak, Austrian and French Jews to Auschwitz, may be tracked down in Syria if a French investigative team wins permission to look for him in Damascus.

In a historic development, Syrian President Hafez Assad promised his august French counterpart, Jacques Chirac, that he will conduct a thorough investigation of this case.

Assad's intentions already are being tested. French Judge Herve Stephan is set to fly from Paris to Damascus and hopes to receive official permission to conduct an on-the-spot probe there within the next two weeks.

Until President Chirac's intervention last month, Syria continued to deny that Brunner, who is 84, had been given sanctuary within its borders and that he was alive and well in Damascus. However, in a letter to Paris-based Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld dated November 29, Chirac writes:

"During my recent visit to Damascus, I mentioned to President Assad in the course of

our one-on-one conversation the case of Alois Brunner, spelling out in great detail the crimes for which he has been found guilty in France.

Assad replied to me, and I have made this public, that he would investigate this subject very thoroughly."

Stephan, who has been pressing France's demand for Brunner's immediate extradition to stand trial as the wartime commandant of the Drancy concentration camp from which tens of thousands of Jews were deported to Auschwitz, outlined the scope of his projected inquiry in a letter to the Syrian Justice Ministry dated September

Some of the details were elicited from another Nazi fugitive, Otto Ernst Remer, who apparently found refuge in Spain where the judge interrogated him and Frau Remer. The Remers said they had visited Brunner several times in

Stephan also notes that although two international commissions raised the matter of Brunner's presence in Syria with the Syrian authorities, all that they received was a message indicating that he

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was "unknown in this country." He dismissed the rumor circulated two years ago that Brunner had died and was buried in a Damascus cemetery, "that this has not been confirmed."

The judge, who notified the Syrians that he will be accompanied by French gendarmes, said he wants to verify that Brunner lived at 7 Rue Georges Haddad, Damascus, where he used the alias Georg Fischer, and that he was linked to such commercial firms as Otraco, Thameco and the Khatar Office in which he was associated with Remer.

He also intends to establish the nature of these firms and identify their directors.

It is difficult to imagine that the Syrians would permit French investigators to conduct an inquiry of the scope envisaged by Stephan, but he evidently is undaunted.

He wants to identify the owners of the building in which Brunner lived, interview his neighbors, find out about the foreign delegations that visited Brunner, check the nearby laundry on Rue



Alois Brunner in 1940.

Georges Haddad with whose proprietors Brunner was on friendly terms, and find the woman "of Christian origin" who lived with Brunner alias Fischer. Photographs of these individuals apparently are in the judge's file.

Stephan wants to ascertain how Brunner was able to obtain a telephone (number 332090 or 332690) by means of which he has

maintained contact with Europe, and to find out who owned P.O. Box 635 to which he had access at Damascus's central post office.

Bearing in mind the parcel bomb that blew off several of Brunner's fingers and blinded him in one eye, Stephan intends to check the Damascus hospital where he was treated in 1980.

And he expects to consult the Christian clergy in Damascus to learn whether they conducted funeral services for him and whether a tombstone was set up in his name or that of his alias in the capital's only Christian cemetery.

Klarsfeld, who heads the Association of Sons and Daughters of the Jewish Deportees from France, has a personal interest in Stephan's mission.

His late father was deported by Brunner from Nice, the French Riviera city which became a major refuge, for Jews fleeing the Nazis while it was under Italian occupation. The elder Klarsfeld saved his

family by concealing their hideout which actually was on the apartment's premises and saying that he was the only one at home - that the others had gone to the country.