



JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL
of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Resolution on Advocacy for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries

December 9, 2003

Approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Background

Jews have been part of Middle Eastern culture and life for nearly 4,000 years, since the beginnings of Judaism. Indigenous Jewish communities have lived continuously in this region both inside and outside the Land of Israel. These Jewish communities existed in relatively stable and substantial numbers until the middle of the twentieth century. In 1948 an estimated 940,000 Jews called the Arab world home; today only an estimated eight to twelve thousand Jews remain in the entire Arab world in ever dwindling numbers.

After the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE, Jewish communities that fell under Muslim governance were granted the status of “dhimmi.” Jews and Christians under this status were officially “protected” from death and forced conversion so long as they adhered to a strict set of laws known as the Code of Umar. At times this protection was withdrawn and Jewish communities faced severe persecution. Overall, however, Jews were permitted limited religious, educational, professional, and business opportunities under Islamic rule.

With the rise of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century, the status of Jews in Arab countries changed, often for the worse. This change became acute immediately before and after the Arab states’ attack on the new State of Israel in 1948. By way of example, in Syria, as a result of anti-Jewish pogroms that erupted in Aleppo in 1947, 7,000 of the town’s 10,000 Jews fled in terror. In Iraq, Jews were systematically deprived of their livelihoods, and ‘Zionism’ became a capital crime. More than 70 Jews were killed by bombs in the Jewish Quarter of Cairo. After the UN General Assembly resolution on the Partition Plan, Muslim rioters engaged in a bloody pogrom in Aden and Yemen, which killed 82 Jews. Later, after the French left Algeria, the authorities issued a variety of anti-Jewish decrees prompting nearly all of the 160,000 Jews to flee the country.

Fully 99% of the Arab world's Jewish inhabitants, fled or were expelled from ten Arab countries as a result of active policies pursued by these governments to achieve these ends. In virtually all cases, as Jews left their country of origin, individual and communal properties were confiscated without compensation. Those who remained were made into virtual political hostages by some Arab governments.

About two-thirds of the over 900,000 Jews displaced from Arab countries resettled in Israel where they were granted full citizenship, and where today they and their descendants comprise just over fifty percent of the total Israeli Jewish population and increasingly occupy positions of power in Israeli society. The other one-third of these refugees resettled in other countries.

The United Nations estimated the number of Palestinian refugees from this time to be approximately 750,000. In contrast to Israel's acceptance of Jewish refugees, Arab countries—with the exception of Jordan—denied citizenship to Palestinian Arabs and forced them to live in refugee camps.

Overwhelmingly most of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries do not seek to return to their former homelands where they were persecuted. As with most other displaced populations in modern times they have moved on with their lives, integrating fully in their new homes.

Since 1947, over 681 UN General Assembly resolutions have been passed on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Of these, 101 exclusively deal with Palestinian refugees. Not one UN resolution has been passed that deals exclusively with the Jewish refugees from Arab states, and their just rights.

It is a matter of law and equity for the international community to recognize, once and for all time, the right to redress for former Jewish refugees from Arab countries. The legal case of displaced Jews to redress is as strong as, if not stronger than, the case of Palestinian refugees. The international community must recognize that two refugee populations arose from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A recognition of the past is essential to the integrity of the Middle East peace process. Rejection of memory is a rejection of peace. Justice in the Middle East requires acknowledgement of the historical narrative and rights of Jews uprooted from Arab countries.

Goals

1. **To Tell The Story of Jewish Refugees from Arab States**

The world must know about the plight of Jews from Arab states as former refugees. The Jews from Arab states were victims of mass violations of human rights, and justice calls for their story to be told, and their rights addressed.

2. **To Reestablish Historical Context**

The story of Jewish refugees from Arab states must be returned to the narrative of the modern Middle East from which it has been erased.

3. **To Help Bring About a Just Solution to the Middle East Crisis**

In the absence of truth and justice, there can be no reconciliation, without which there can be no just, lasting peace between and among all peoples of the region.

4. **To Seek International Recognition**

Demand that the United Nations addresses the grievances and injustice to the displaced Jewish refugees from Arab countries, and acknowledge the debt that Arab countries have to their former citizens.

The community relations field should:

- Mobilize Jewish communal support and action in support of the rights of Jews from Arab countries.
- Undertake a public education and information campaign in support of the international efforts to secure rights and redress for Jews displaced from Arab lands.
- Develop an effective media strategy focusing on a long-term ongoing dialogue with newspapers, television, and radio stations and advocating for the media to include stories, features and background on Jewish refugees from Arab lands.
- Complete the compilation of records in order to preserve the historical narrative as well as to document the claims for physical and material losses suffered by Jews displaced from Arab countries.
- Document the legal bases, in international law and jurisprudence, for potential claims to redress for the loss of individual and communal property.
- Encourage relevant governments and international bodies, in any and all Middle East peace process discussions, and pursuant to principles of international law, to support the cause of rights and redress for Jews displaced from Arab lands.
- Encourage elected officials to support the Jewish community on this issue.

Furthermore, local CRCs should build a local grassroots base of support by:

- Engaging in an outreach campaign to the Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in their communities toward building a grassroots base of support for this endeavor, and

- Establishing a relationship with those organizations—national and local—already working on this issue, such as Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, American Sefardi Federation, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, World Jewish Congress.