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Group seeks justice for 'forgotten' Jews

By Warren Hoge

UNITED NATIONS, New York: With assertions of Palestinians' rights to reclaim land in Israel expected to arise at an upcoming Middle East peace conference in the United States, a Jewish advocacy group has scheduled a meeting Monday in New York to call attention to people it terms "forgotten refugees."

The organizing group, Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, said it was referring to the more than 850,000 Jews who left their homes in Arab lands after the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948.

"This did not occur by happenstance, as is sometimes said," said Stanley Urman, executive director of the five-year-old New York-based organization. "In fact, we have found evidence that there was collusion among the Arab nations to persecute and exploit their Jewish populations."

To back the claim, the group had reproduced copies of a draft law composed by the Arab League in 1947 that called for measures to be taken against Jews living in Arab countries. The proposals ranged from imprisonment, confiscation of assets and forced induction into Arab armies to beatings, officially incited acts of violence and pogroms.

Subsequent legislation and discrim-

the opening of the campaign on behalf of the Jewish refugees.

For that reason, he said, the main goal of the campaign was to raise public awareness rather than to seek compensation. "It's not about the money, it's about the other components of redress recognition, remembrance and acknowledgment of the wrongs committed," he said.

He said that a particular focus of the campaign would be the United Nations, where Palestinian concerns got regular attention and Israel was frequently the object of condemnatory resolutions. "The UN has participated in expunging this experience from the Mideast narrative and from the UN narrative," he said.

The campaign was aimed at assuring that mention of Jewish refugees was included in future General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions and commemorations.

The next occasion was Nov. 29, the date of the partition vote, officially recognized as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This year marked its 60th anniversary.

The United Nations said that 711,000 Palestinians left Israel-controlled territory in 1948 and 1949 and that today, along with their descendants, the number of Palestinian refugees was at least 4 million.

inatory decrees enacted by Arab governments against Jews were "strikingly similar" to the actions laid out in the draft law, Urman said.

In January, 1948, the World Jewish Congress submitted a memo with the text of the draft to the UN's Economic and Social Council. It accompanied the submission with a warning that "all Jews residing in the Near and Middle East face extreme and imminent danger."

At a meeting two months later, however, Charles Malik, the Lebanese ambassador and president of the council, succeeded in a parliamentary maneuver that ended consideration of the memo. Though the event drew news coverage at the time, it had gone unnoticed since.

The Arab League draft law had been drawn up in response to the Nov. 29, 1947, vote in the General Assembly to partition Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish.

With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the status of Jews in Arab countries changed dramatically as most of those countries either declared war on Israel or backed the war to destroy the new state.

The group cites UN figures showing that 856,000 Jewish residents left Arab countries in 1948.

"This was not just a forced exodus, it was a forgotten exodus," said Irwin Cotler, a former Canadian minister of justice scheduled to speak Monday at

"There is mention, as there should be, of Palestinian refugees, but no mention of Jewish refugees," Cotler said of the annual commemoration.

Another objective was pushing for early passage of resolutions introduced in the U.S. Senate and House that say that any explicit reference to Palestinian refugees must be matched by a similar explicit reference to Jewish and other refugees.

A U.S.-sponsored peace conference was scheduled to take place in Annapolis, Maryland, before the end of the year to address core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict like borders, the status of Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugee problem.

"We want to have this meeting now, in advance of the Annapolis conference, to insure that this issue is front and center in the international awareness as it should be," Urman said.

Daniel Carmon, an ambassador at the Israeli mission, said that while there ought to be a change in attitude at the United Nations, no one expected it to occur soon. "This has not been forgotten because it does not exist, it is a reflection of the dynamic at the UN," he said.

Cotler said a change in perception would help bring the region's antagonists together. "I believe that if we allow people to understand the truth of what occurred, then they will be able to recognize the other," he said.
