



عدالة لليهود النازحين من البلاد العربية JUSTICE POUR LES JUIFS DES PAYS ARABES צדק ליהודים יוצאי מדינות ערב

BACKGROUND ON MIDDLE EAST REFUGEES

- When the issue of ‘refugees’ is raised within the context of the Middle East, people invariably refer to ‘Palestinian refugees’, not Jews displaced from Arab countries. Neither the mass violations of human rights nor the displacement of Jews from Arab countries has ever been adequately addressed by the international community.
- Jews and Jewish communities have existed in the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region for many centuries. Following the Moslem conquest of the region, under Islamic rule, Jews were considered second-class citizens but were, for a period of time, permitted limited religious, educational, professional and business opportunities.
- This changed in the 20th century, as witnessed by a consistent, wide-spread pattern of persecution and the mass violations of the human rights of Jewish minorities in Arab countries. Official decrees and legislation enacted by Arab regimes denied human and civil rights to Jews and other minorities; expropriated their property; stripped them of their citizenship; and other means of livelihood. Jews were often victims of murder; arbitrary arrest and detention; torture; and expulsions.
- Upon the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, the status of Jews in Arab countries worsened dramatically as many Arab countries declared war, or backed the war against Israel. Jews were either uprooted from their countries of longtime residence or became subjugated, political hostages of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- The result – from over 1,000,000 Jews resident in North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf region at the turn of the century, it is estimated that less than 5,000 Jews remain to-day in Arab countries.
- As a matter of law and equity, history reveals that there were two refugee populations created as a result of the longstanding dispute in the Middle East.
- It would constitute an injustice, were the international community to recognize rights for one victim population - Palestinian refugees - without recognizing equal rights for other victims of that very same Middle East conflict - former Jewish, Christian and other refugees from Arab countries.

FACTS ON MIDDLE EAST REFUGEES

- For over 2,500 years, Jews in substantial numbers resided in areas that are today Arab countries (e.g. Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, etc.) – fully 1,000 years before the advent of Islam.
- The exodus of Jewish refugees from Arab countries occurred mainly between 1940s and the 1970s. In fact, there were more Jews displaced from Arab countries (856,000)¹ than there were Palestinians who became refugees as a result of the 1948 Arab Israeli war (726,000)².
- On two separate occasions the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ruled that Jews fleeing from Arab countries were indeed ‘*bona fide*’ refugees who “fall under the mandate of my (*UNHCR*) office”.³
- Since 1947, the United Nations General Assembly’s predominant focus has been on Palestinian refugees:
 - a) 681 resolutions on the Middle East conflict, including 101 resolutions on Palestinian refugees;
 - b) Numerous UN agencies and organizations mandated or newly created to provide protection and relief to Palestinian refugees; and
 - c) Over the last 58 years, tens of billions of dollars have been disbursed by the international community to provide services and assistance to Palestinian refugees.
- During that same period, there were no UN resolutions; no support provided by UN agencies; nor any financial assistance forthcoming from the international community to ameliorate the plight of Jewish and other refugees from Arab countries.
- In all relevant international bilateral or multilateral agreements, (i.e. UN Resolution 242, *The Road Map*, *The Madrid Conference*, etc.), the reference to ‘refugees’ is generic, allowing for the recognition and inclusion of *all* Middle East refugees – Jews, Christians and other minorities.

¹ Estimates based on UN document “Trends and Characteristics of International Migration since 1950 – Refugee Movements and Population Transfers” (UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, Demographic Study No. 64 ST/ESA/Ser. A/64).

² United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, P. 18; United Nations. *Annual Report of the Director General of UNWRA*, Doc. 5224/5223. 25 November 1952

³ Mr. Auguste Lindt, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report of the UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session – Geneva 29 January to 4 February, 1957; and Dr. E. Jahn, Office of the UN High Commissioner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Document No. 7/2/3/Libya, July 6, 1967.