

Arabs plotted to persecute Jews after Israel created: study

Researchers focus on conspiracy to kick out unwelcome nationals

By Steven Edwards / Monday, November 05, 2007

UNITED NATIONS - New research shows there was Arab inter-state "collusion" to persecute Jews in Arab countries following Israel's creation, former justice minister Irwin Cotler and Jewish rights scholars will announce today in New York.

While it is known up to 850,000 Jews left Arab countries after the postwar division of the Palestine mandate, the group is holding a news conference to highlight a long-forgotten Arab League "draft law" that suggests a pan-Arab conspiracy was at play.

The new assessment comes just ahead of a major Israeli-Palestinian peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland, where the rights of millions of descendants of up to 600,000 Palestinian refugees of the Arab-Israeli conflict will be discussed -- but not the rights of Jews squeezed from Arab countries.

Without the inter-Arab draft, the measures individual Arab states took against their Jewish citizens may not have been so widespread, the researchers will say. Only 8,000 Jews remain in 10 Arab countries today that once hosted many more.

"We will show that the various state sanctions in Arab countries did not occur haphazardly, but were the result of an international collusion organized by the League of Arab States at the time to set in place a blueprint for the denationalization of their Jewish nationals, the sequestrations of their property, and the declaration of Jews as enemies of the state," Mr. Cotler said in an interview. He said he and his research colleagues will also present evidence showing the United Nations failed to investigate the matter, in part because an Arab League representative ran the agenda at one of its key debating chambers. "It is now clear the United Nations has played a singular role in expunging the whole question of Jewish refugees from Arab countries on the Middle East agenda for the last 60 years," Mr. Cotler said.

Fellow Canadians David Matas, a Winnipeg refugee lawyer, and Stan Urman, executive director of New York-based Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, will join Mr. Cotler. They co-authored a landmark 2003 study highlighting separate Arab government decrees that sanctioned repression of Jews to varying degrees, resulting in confiscation of more than \$1 billion in property belonging to those who left.

"The existence of the Arab League draft law makes the story of what happened all the more heinous because it represented the acting out of a master plan," said Mr. Matas. "It enhances the case for redress which should at least include recognition of the Jewish refugees given the peace process speaks of redress for the Palestinian refugees."

The researchers hope their work will influence U.S. lawmakers currently considering two bills that call for the rights of all refugees -- Muslims, Jews, Christians and any others displaced in the region -- to be recognized in the peace talks.

The bills are significant because the United States is a central broker of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The researchers will also call on the Canadian government -- as chair of the Refugee Working Group under a peace track launched in Madrid in 1991 -- to include displaced Jews as refugees.

Today comprising 22 countries, the Arab League had seven members in 1947 -- Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. After the UN created Jewish and Arab areas in the Palestine mandate, laws reflecting what had appeared in the Arab League draft began to appear in Arab countries.

The draft law calls for registering all Jewish citizens of Arab countries, and freezing their bank accounts to use the money to help fund "resistance to Zionist ambitions in Palestine." This would happen even to those Jews prepared to join an Arab army. A Jew considered an "active Zionist" would be interned as a political prisoner. Such Jews would see their money confiscated. Brackets written into the draft law suggest it was intended as a template: "Beginning with (date), all Jewish citizens of (name of country) will be considered as members of the Jewish minority State of Palestine," it begins. The researchers located the document in UN and World Jewish Congress archives after spotting a May 16, 1948, New York Times reference to it. In the Times article, Congress officials cited the document as evidence Jews faced grave danger in Arab lands -- something the researchers say turned out to be prophetic.

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