



## Shas to seek payout for Jews deported from Arab countries

By [Barak Ravid](#)

(November 25, 2008) - Shas is launching a campaign to seek compensation for Jewish refugees who came to Israel from Arab states. The campaign, part of the ultra-Orthodox party's election platform, counters Palestinian demands for the right of return of their refugees.

"Israel must state that no peace agreement would be implemented without solving the problem of the Jews from Middle Eastern states, with an emphasis on restituting their property, which is estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars," Religious Affairs Minister Yitzhak Cohen, of Shas, said Monday at Bar-Ilan University.

Part of Shas' plan consists of tracking down and registering Jewish property in Arab states, as a basis for future negotiations or agreements regarding the compensation for the Jewish refugees. Cohen told Haaretz Monday that there are some 850,000 Jewish refugees from Arab states, most of whom are living in Israel.

"It must be proclaimed that any system of compensating Palestinian refugees as part of a peace agreement will include a parallel one to compensate the Jewish refugees," he said.

The issue was raised in Israel's negotiations with the Palestinian Authority during Prime Minister Ehud Barak's term, including at the Camp David conference in July 2000. Today Pensioners Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan (Pensioners Party) is in charge of the issue.

Cohen's move is meant to appeal to Shas' voters, most of whom have their origins or ancestry in Muslim lands, ahead of the elections. He outlined the party's plan in his address yesterday, beginning with the need to define the refugee problem as a multi-national issue, one that affected hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from North Africa and the Persian Gulf.

"The uprooted Jews' problem is equal to, if not greater than, the Palestinian refugees' problem," Cohen said.

Israel will make it clear in negotiations with the Palestinians and in international forums that "a just solution to the refugee problem," as defined in UN Security Council Resolution 194, includes the Jewish refugees as well, he said.

Cohen suggests that the Foreign Ministry start a public campaign in the UN and European countries.

"Since 1947, the Security Council has adopted 126 resolutions regarding the Palestinian refugees, but passed no resolution about the Jews from Arab states, although their numbers are similar," he said.

"The international community assisted the Palestinian refugees with billions of dollars, while the Jews from Arab states received no help or compensation."

In April of this year, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution conditioning any help or compensation for Palestinian refugees on similar help or compensation to Jews from Arab states.