



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2003/NGO/222

17 March 2003

ENGLISH ONLY

---

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-ninth session

Item 11 and 14 of the provisional agenda

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Written statement\* submitted by World Union for Progressive Judaism,  
a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 February 2003]

---

\*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## Historical background to the forgotten Jewish refugees: A tragic exchange of populations

### Introduction

- a) On 28 November 2002, a new terrorist group calling itself “The Government of Universal Palestine. The Army of Palestine” claimed responsibility for a murderous ‘jihadist/ martyrdom’ attack against Israelis and Kenyans in Kilambala, Kenya. These attacks included a failed attempt to shoot down an Israeli civilian airliner carrying nearly 300 Israeli tourists.
- b) It was announced as a bloody reminder on the eve of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 29 November 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181 that partitioned the truncated League of Nations area of Palestine (without Transjordan after 1922) into two: an Arab State and a Jewish State. This had been adamantly refused by all the Arab League countries, and the then Arab-Palestinian leadership.
- c) Aside from the issue of Jerusalem, the major stumbling block has always been the question of the return of — or compensation for — Arab refugees from Palestine in 1948 and 1967. But the refusal then — and for 40 years and more by Arab Palestinian leaders and the Arab League — of the State of Israel in its ancestral homeland led to a double refugee tragedy. We have to remember also the other victims of this rejection of international legality 55 years ago - the forgotten million Jewish refugees from Arab countries, which have become virtually Judenrein (‘cleansed’ of all Jews).
- d) A recent example of such acts of violence was perpetrated on 11 April 2002 when the jihadist bombing of the ancient al-Ghariba synagogue of Djerba, in Tunisia, killed 17 and badly wounded many others, most of them elderly German tourists. A spokesman for Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the bombing. Tunisia’s remaining Jewish community of about 1,000 -- a remnant of a biblical community with roots in the Phoenician past -- will soon seek security in Israel and elsewhere, like 99 percent of their co-religionists have done.

### Jews in Arab Countries in 1945 and why they had to leave, often as Stateless Refugees

1. In 1945, there lived about 140,000 Jews in Iraq; 60,000 in Yemen and Aden; 35,000 in Syria; 5,000 in Lebanon; 90,000 in Egypt; 60,000 in Libya; 150,000 in Algeria; 120,000 in Tunisia; 300,000 in Morocco, including Tangiers: a total of roughly 960,000 (and a further 200,000 in Iran and Turkey). Of these ancient communities (less than 50,000 Jews remain out of an overall population of 1.2 million), in the Arab world their number is hardly 2,000 remain, under one-half of one percent of the figure at the end of the Second World War.
2. As to why and how these countries became Judenrein from the 1940s, the heading of an article from the New York Times of 16 May 1948 — a day after Israel declared its independence — says it all: *"Jews in Grave Danger in all Moslem Lands. Nine Hundred Thousand in Africa and Asia Face Wrath of Their Foes."*

3. Four months earlier (18 January 1948), the President of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. Stephen Wise, appealed to U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall in very clear terms: *"Between 800'000 and a million Jews in the Middle East and North Africa, exclusive of Palestine, are in 'the greatest danger of destruction' at the hands of Moslems being incited to holy war over the Partition of Palestine (...) Acts of violence already perpetrated, together with those contemplated, being clearly aimed at the total destruction of the Jews, constitute genocide which under the resolutions of the General Assembly is a crime against humanity."*

4. Only two months earlier (24 November 1947), addressing the Political Committee of the UN General Assembly, Egyptian delegate Heykal Pasha, remarked on the Partition Plan for Palestine -- five days before the historic vote : *"The United Nations....should not lose sight of the fact that the proposed solution might endanger a million Jews living in the Muslim countries. (...) If the United Nations decides to partition Palestine, it might be responsible for very grave disorders and for the massacre of a large number of Jews (...) if a Jewish state were established, nobody could prevent disorders. Riots would spread through all the Arab states and might lead to a war between the two races."* (1)

5. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of Jewish men, women, and children, young and old, were brutally massacred in Arab countries -- in the Maghreb, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Aden -- even under French and British colonial rule -- and also in Palestine by lawless gangs soon after the British conquest in 1918 and during the Mandate period (1922-47).

6. Already, in Iraq (1936 and 1941), Syria (1944, 1945), Egypt and Libya (1945), and Aden (1947) -- all before the modern State of Israel's independence -- murderous attacks had killed and wounded thousands. Here is a description from the official report in 1945 by Tripoli's Jewish community president Zachino Habib, describing what happened to Libyan Jews in Tripoli, Zanzur, Zawiya, Casabat, and Zitlin on 4-5 November 1945: *"The Arabs attacked Jews in obedience to mysterious orders. Their outburst of bestial violence had no plausible motive. For fifty hours they hunted men down, attacked houses and shops, killed men, women, old and young, horribly tortured and dismembered Jews isolated in the interior.... In order to carry out the slaughter, the attackers used various weapons: knives, daggers, sticks, clubs, iron bars, revolvers, and even hand grenades."* (2)

7. Pogroms and persecutions -- and grave fears for their future -- regularly preceded the mass expulsions and exoduses of the Jews, whose ancestors had inhabited these regions from time immemorial, and over a millenium before successive waves of the Arab conquest and occupation from the seventh century on. Beginning in 1948, more than 650,000 of these Oriental Jewish refugees were integrated into Israel's small area of 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> -- even as the country was being threatened with annihilation by its neighbouring Arab League States. (Approximately 300,000 more were exiled and found refuge in Europe and the Americas.)

8. About half of Israel's 5 million Jews -- from a population of about 6.5 million, of whom roughly 20% are Arab, Druze, and Bedouin Israelis -- is now composed of

these same refugees and their descendants, who received no humanitarian aid from the United Nations, and who did not ask for it. It was Israel alone, with the help of Jewish communities just emerging from the Hitlerian genocide, which achieved their human survival and integration.

9. A parallel political commitment on behalf of the less numerous Arab refugees of Palestine (about 550,000 in 1948, although a figure of 750,000 is often given) for their integration into some of the 21 countries of the Arab League, covering 15 million km<sup>2</sup> (10% of the world's land surface) was considered too great a sacrifice by their Arab brethren.

10. George Orwell's remark about everyone being equal, but some being more equal than others, could also be applied to refugees in general since the 1940s. Some refugees *are*, indeed, considered more equal than others. The forgotten million Jewish refugees from Arab lands were not helped by the United Nations, nor were they kept for over half a century in 'refugee camps' breeding hopelessness, frustration, and a culture of hate and death, in which jihadist bombers thrive today. Orwell's remark might also be applied to the scores of millions of refugees on all continents who were displaced during numerous tragic conflicts on many continents throughout the 20th century.

11. The transfer of populations on a large scale, a consequence of war or for political reasons, has been a characteristic of human history, particularly in the Islamic Orient. Deportations, expropriations and expulsions of dhimmis — Jews, Christians, and other indigenous peoples — were recurrent throughout the long history of 'dhimmitude', including in Palestine. One should question today the real motivation of a selective, historically-flawed memory which systematically spotlights the Arab-Palestinian refugees.

12. UN Security Council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 was also refused by the Khartoum Arab League Summit Conference – with the formula: “No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiation with Israel, no concessions on the questions of Palestinian national rights.” Resolution 242 refers to “a just solution to the refugee problem,” a term that was considered as including the Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

13. The dire hardships endured by the great majority of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries have never been examined, nor has the loss of their vast and inestimable properties and heritage dating back over three thousand years. The time has now surely come for this great injustice to be addressed seriously, within the context of a just and equitable global solution to the ongoing Middle East tragedy.

14. The question of this forgotten million (now over three million) Jewish refugees from Arab countries was raised by a representative of the World Union for Progressive Judaism at the 58<sup>th</sup> of the Commission on Human Rights (24 April 2002). Speaking in a 'right of reply,' the representative of Iraq, Saad Hussain, declared: *“The Arab history, the Arab and Islamic history for fourteen centuries, has not witnessed any harm to the Jews – quite the contrary. The Jews have lived, and continue to live in peace, and their sacred places and their property have been protected until today. (...) They live in Arab*

*countries today in perfect safety, despite the events – the horrible events in Palestine.”*  
(3)

15. The truth is very different. Jews have always been forbidden to reside in Saudi Arabia, and in Jordan since 1922; there are, reportedly, no Jews in Libya; under 100 in Egypt and Syria; only 38 remain in Iraq. The whole Arab world will soon be virtually Judenrein.

16. The World Union for Progressive Judaism calls on the Commission on Human Rights to highlight in a resolution the fundamental human rights of these ancient Jewish minorities: the forgotten million Jewish refugees from Arab countries. All refugees are equal!

---

(1) UN Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question. SR., from the French, 25 Sept to 25 November 1947, p. 185.

(2) In Renzo di Felici, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970*. (Trans. from Italian by Judith Roumani, (1978), Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, pp. 193-94, p. 365, n. 19; )

(3) UN English interpretation as recorded verbatim from statement delivered in Arabic  
(E/CN.4/2002/SR.54)

With the author's permission, this written statement -- with some cuts and additional material provided by him -- is based on *The Forgotten Refugees. An Exchange of populations* by David G. Littman (a representative of the WUPJ to the UNO in Geneva), published in The National Review Online, New York, 3 December 2002, here available:

[www.nationalreview.com/script/asp?ref=/comment/comment-littman120302.asp](http://www.nationalreview.com/script/asp?ref=/comment/comment-littman120302.asp)

See also, Malka Hillel Shulewitz, *The Forgotten Millions. The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands* (1999/ 2000)

-----