

## HONORING THE JEWS FROM ARAB LANDS

*On December 1, 2016 NGOs Lucy Becker and Florence Wolpoff attended a meeting at the UN to remember and honor the 850,000 Jews who were persecuted and forced to flee their homes in Arab countries after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.*

In his introduction, Danny Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, explained that in 1948 there were approximately one million Jews living in Arab countries. They had lived in the region for more than 2500 years and had made tremendous contributions to the communities in fields ranging from philosophy and art to medicine and literature. In cities such as Baghdad, Beirut and Aleppo the ancient Jewish civilizations were destroyed and land confiscated from Jews was approximately 40,000 square miles, about five times the size of Israel today. Arab countries declared Jews to be enemies of the state, they were forbidden to worship and to hold jobs. Their lives were in danger and they had no option but to flee their homes. Yet, there is not one UN resolution dealing with Jewish refugees. There have been between 1100 and 1200 resolutions concerning Arab refugees. Not one dollar has been spent by the UN on Jewish refugees, billions have been spent on Arab refugees.

Danon believes that it is time for the Arabs to take responsibility for their actions and compensate their former Jewish citizens for the billions of dollars they have lost. Unlike the Arab countries, Israel welcomed the Jewish refugees and made them citizens. Many of them are now leaders of the country. The Arab countries, as everyone knows, refused to accept Arab refugees and continue to this day to use them as weapons against Israel.

Malcolm Hoenlein, President of the Conference of Major Jewish Organizations, and Evelyn Sommer, Chair of the World Jewish Congress, reiterated many of the same basic points.

Hoenlein pointed out additionally that UNESCO recently negated not only 3500 years of Jewish history but 2000 years of Christian history. They are denying the past, present and future. It is imperative that the United Nations stand up for the one million Jews, rectify the great injustice that was done and thereby restore the UNs credibility.

Evelyn Sommer strongly argued that the Jewish refugees must be recognized as such and reparations should be assessed and collected from the Arab states. She also stated that Jewish institutions that remain behind such as cemeteries, synagogues and artifacts must be preserved. Only when these people are recognized and honored will we be on the side of justice.

Joseph Douek, the son of Egyptian immigrants and Commissioner of City Planning NYC told his family's story. 25,000 Jews were expelled from Egypt after suffering from mob violence, beatings,

prejudice in schools and imprisonment. In spite of this, the United Nations only talks about the Arab refugees.

Vivienne Roumani, former head of the American Sephardi Federation, has written a fascinating book entitled *The Last Jews of Libya*. She also produced a film based on a manuscript written by her mother and augmented by interviews conducted with many family members and friends. This is a fascinating story from her birth in Benghazi when Jews and Arabs got along well, until the final expulsion of the Jews in 1967. Jews had lived in Libya for over 2000 years but after the creation of the state of Israel demonstrations and riots against them caused 90% to make aliyah between 1948 and 1951. Life for those who remained continually deteriorated as a new generation of Libyans turned against the Jews. The fact that they could no longer depend on their Arab neighbors ultimately caused them to leave.

This was an important meeting. The State of Israel and concerned Jews will continue to advocate for the nearly one million Jews who were expelled from Arab lands. Though the vast majority of these people are now successful, fully integrated citizens of Israel or, in some cases, the United States, their financial losses and suffering must be recognized by the United Nations and the world.

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