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## Briefing Memo For Government Representations

*In support of House Resolution 185 & Senate Resolution 85 on Middle Eastern Refugees*

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### **I) The Issue**

- When the issue of 'refugees' is raised within the context of the Middle East, people invariably refer to Palestinian refugees, not Jewish and other refugees forced to flee from Arab countries.
- Neither the mass violations of human rights, nor the displacement of Jews from Arab countries, have ever been adequately addressed by the international community. In fact, UN documents reveal there were more Jews uprooted from Arab countries (over 850,000) than there were Palestinians who became refugees in 1948 (726,000).<sup>1</sup>

### **II) The Facts**

- For over 2,500 years, Jews in substantial numbers resided in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region – fully 1,000 years before the advent of Islam.
- Following the Muslim 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 20<sup>th</sup> century, as witnessed by a wide-spread pattern of persecution and the mass violations of the human rights of Jewish minorities in many 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's independence in 1948, the status of Jews in Arab countries worsened as many Arab states declared war or backed the war to destroy Israel. These events triggered a dramatic surge in a longstanding pattern of discrimination and abuse that made the lives of Jews in Arab countries simply untenable. Jews were either uprooted from their countries of birth or became subjugated political hostages in the Arab world's struggle against Israel. In virtually all cases, as Jews fled, individual and communal properties were seized and/or confiscated without any compensation provided by the Arab governments involved.
- The result – from an estimated 1,000,000 Jews resident in North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf region at the turn of the century, today less than 5,000 Jews remain in Arab countries.
- 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".<sup>2</sup>
- In reality, two major population movements occurred during the years of turmoil in the Middle East. Both must be addressed within the context of any Middle East peace.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, P. 18; United Nations. *Annual Report of the Director General of UNWRA*, Doc. 5224/5223. 25 November 1952

<sup>2</sup> 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.

### ***III) Action Required***

1. Familiarize yourself with the issue. The Resolutions, information, news and updates can be obtained by visiting [www.justiceforjews.com/resolution.html](http://www.justiceforjews.com/resolution.html) .
2. Communicate with President George Bush urging his support for the rights of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. The White House has a comment line where you will be connected to a live person (10am-4pm EST) at 1-202-456-1111. Letters can also be faxed to the office of the Public Liaison in the White House (fax - 202-456-6218).
3. Contact your Members of Congress (meet, call or write) urging them to support the bi-partisan resolutions on 'Middle East Refugees' now before the Congress that call for equal rights for Jewish refugees from Arab countries. (**House Resolution 185**) & (**Senate Resolution 85**) Representatives names and numbers can be found here: [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) .

*Please remember to be brief and limit any letters to 350 words. Be factual-quotes and statistics strengthen the credibility of your letter-and encourage your Congressmen and Senators to consider supporting the resolution(s) on the rights of Jewish refugees.*

### ***IV) Talking Points***

**While encouraging government support, you may want to emphasize the following points:**

- No just, comprehensive Middle East peace can be reached without recognition of, and redress for, the uprooting of centuries-old Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa by Islamic regimes hostile to the State of Israel.
- Similarly, Christian minorities in the Arab world suffered dramatically – Maronites in Lebanon; Copts in Egypt; Assyrians in Iraq; etc. From historical majorities in countries like Egypt and Syria, their numbers have dwindled to less than 15 percent today.
- The international response to Middle East refugees has been marked by a distinct double-standard. Since 1948, over 101 resolutions have been adopted by the United Nations on Palestinian refugees. Not one of these 101 UN resolutions specifically mention the plight of Jews, Christians, and other minority populations displaced 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.
- The call to secure rights and redress for Jews who were forced to flee Arab countries is not a campaign against Palestinian refugees; nor is it about initiating legal proceedings to seek compensation. It is a legitimate effort to ensure that the plight of all Middle East refugees be placed on the international political agenda as a quest for truth and justice and that their rights be secured as a matter of law and equity.
- 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.