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# R' Ovadia Yosef Asks Egypt to Return Stolen Torah Scrolls

Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has written a letter to the Foreign Minister of Egypt.

Contact Editor , 20/04/05 14:20 | updated: 17:13



Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has written a letter to the Foreign Minister of Egypt requesting that Egypt return Torah scrolls and Jewish court records it stole from Egyptian Jewry.

The existence of the letter was conveyed by Rabbi Yosef to Rabbi Shimon Hai Alouf of Brooklyn, New York, who heads the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt (HSJE).

After the creation of Israel, Egyptian authorities began persecuting the Jews of Egypt through harassment, denial of equal opportunity and citizenship, and eventually confiscated their property and expelled them from the country. "They stole from the Jewish community as a whole and from individuals of the Jewish faith in particular, assets amounting to billions of dollars, for no reason whatsoever. Our only crime was being Jewish. Not a penny has ever been returned to us," reads an HSJE statement.

The HSJE has been leading the campaign to recover the Jewish religious items and historic records of Egyptian Jewry for some time. The first request filed with the Egyptian government was submitted through Egypt's Ambassador Nabil Fahmy in March 2000, for delivery to Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's President.

Ambassador Fahmy wrote back to the HSJE, explaining that Egypt has no intention of returning the Torah scrolls or any of the other artifacts. "These artifacts have already been registered with the Egyptian Antiquity Authority and...cannot be sent abroad," Fahmy wrote in his response.

The HSJE then wrote a letter to US President George W. Bush, asking him to intervene on their behalf. "We cannot accept [the ambassador's] response," read the letter. "How can religious objects and records that were in use less than a generation ago be classified as "antiquities", on a par with the Pyramids or the Sphinx? How can a country that persecuted its Jewish community solely because they were Jews help safeguard their heritage?"

The urgency of the need to rescue the Torah scrolls was highlighted by the looting of many Jewish artifacts belonging to the Iraqi Jewish community from Iraqi museums following the ousting of Saddam Hussein.

Rabbi Yosef's letter states that there are 128 Torah scrolls remaining in Egypt, most of which

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V'Achva, as well as the heads of the HSJE... that you continue in your persistent efforts, for this *mitzvah* is an actual redemption of captives...." Rabbi Yosef wrote.

"Our objective is very simple," read a recent petition circulated by the HSJE. "We want to salvage our heritage before it's too late. We want our children and grandchildren to know us better. We want to get back our life-cycle records, our genealogical records, our holy and secular books, our artifacts [and] our Torah scrolls--all the bits and pieces of our lost world that are still accessible."

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