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HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF JEWS FROM EGYPT

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February 21, 2001

Ambassador Nabil Fahmy
Embassy of Egypt
2310 Decatur Place
Washington D.C 2008

Fax 202-244-5131

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your June 26, 2000, reply to our Honorary Chairman, Rabbi Shimon Hai Alouf. We consider it the first positive step towards resolving the issues we raised in our petition to President Hosni Mubarak.

In that petition, we asked for permission to transfer our Jewish religious articles and copies of our community records to an institution in the United States. They belong to us, they are our heritage and our history, and we want them to be available for use, consultation and research at a location closer to where most of us Jews from Egypt live today.

Your response raised two points:
· 1. These artifacts belong to the Egyptian Jewish community, and
· 2. They are registered with the Egyptian Antiquities authority, are subject to Egyptian law protecting the Egyptian national heritage, and therefore cannot be sent abroad.

Regarding your first point, you stated specifically that "The Jewish artifacts are in the possession of the Jewish Temples in Egypt, while the remaining are in the possession of the Egyptian Jewish community". Why did you mention two entities, "the Jewish Temples" and "the Egyptian Jewish community"? Aren't the "Temples" managed by the "Jewish Community"? If not, then who manages them? Our understanding is that the synagogues in Egypt are closed, except for one or two that are opened only for rare special events. They are generally in poor condition, and what they contain is generally not available for use, inspection, or even inventory.

As we mentioned before, we tried many times to contact the President of the Jewish Community in Egypt, Mrs. Esther Weinstein, and her daughter Miss Carmen Weinstein, but we never received a reply. People requesting official documents they

Next Page

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Previous Page

need (for examples, certificates of marriage) are generally ignored. It appears to us they are unable to run the affairs of a rapidly dwindling community, let alone fulfill requests from abroad.

Regarding your second point, you stated that "these artifacts have already been registered with the Egyptian Antiquities authority and are subject to Egyptian Laws protecting our national heritage and can not be sent abroad."

We CATEGORICALLY reject the notion that our religious articles, which only a generation ago were used in daily rites and religious services, should now be labeled "antiquities", on par with the Sphinx or the Pyramids. These religious articles were donated by individual families to the community for specific religious purposes, not as "antiquities". They were to be used during synagogue prayers at certain times. They are meaningful only to people of the Jewish faith. They must be restored to their original purpose.

We have asked in the past for a detailed inventory of the synagogues and the Jewish community in general, but have not been successful. We ask you now to supply such a list. It appears you have it, since you state all
these items have already been catalogued by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities. We also ask for the confiscated Torah scrolls still at the airport.

The world is well aware of the uprooting and dispossession of the vibrant community of Jews from Egypt. Do you expect international public opinion to accept the final pilfering of what little is left of their cultural
heritage? Do you believe the world will acquiesce to the word game of calling religious articles by the name "antiquities" for the purpose of expropriating them? Do you expect the world to believe that a country that
expelled its Jews solely because they were Jews has the genuine desire to safeguard the heritage and culture of these same Jews for posterity? We do not.

We don't need to remind you how much we Jews from Egypt have suffered since 1948. We did not leave Egypt because we wanted to. The regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser ran a vicious propaganda campaign against us, harassed us, made us live in fear, denied us equal opportunity, denied us citizenship even though we were born in Egypt, confiscated our property, threw many of us in jail even though we committed no crimes, and finally forced us to leave the country, frequently by simply expelling us. Before leaving, we were forced to pledge that we would NEVER RETURN and that we were voluntarily forfeiting all our assets.

To call actions by their proper name, the Egyptian government 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. We all had to rebuild our lives from scratch in foreign lands.

And now, close to fifty years later,
· 1. Egypt still has not made any restitution to its Jews for confiscated assets, as the free world has done with other Jewish communities;
· 2. Egypt still has not apologized for its past evil treatment of its Jews, as the free world has done with other Jewish communities;
· 3. Egypt still has not officially recognized the great contribution Jews have made to their country of

Next Page

Previous Page

birth, as the free world has done with other Jewish communities; and, incredibly,
· 4. Egypt is currently trying to pilfer what little is left of the Jewish heritage in Egypt.

Mr. Ambassador, we strongly believe it is time for reconciliation and for taking bold action that benefits everyone, as President Sadat did in 1977. We respect Egypt, but we can no longer remain silent while our heritage is
placed in dusty rooms alongside ancient Egyptian mummies. As the last generation of Jews that lived in Egypt , we sincerely propose to find a way to link again Egyptian Jews and their descendants with Egypt.
Our proposal of moving the religious articles and copies of the documentation of the Jewish Community in Egypt to an institution in the United States will benefit Egypt as well. Millions of people, Americans and non-Americans, Jews and non-Jews, will visit it, providing an excellent foothold for Egypt in the United States. It could become a sort of "embassy" of which Egypt can be proud. Many of its visitors may decide to extend their knowledge by visiting Egypt itself and developing the Egyptian Tourism Industry. By contrast, no benefit will come to Egypt from leaving these religious articles in dusty cases or shelves in the Antiquities Authorities, or in closed synagogues containing religious articles that can't be used. It is a win-win proposition for all concerned.

We ask Egypt to return what little is left of our heritage before it's lost.

We delayed our response until we were able to compile our constituents' reactions to your letter. As you know, the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt (HSJE) acts on behalf of its members, the Jews from Egypt around the world and their descendants. We believe that, to avoid any further deterioration in the relationship between Egypt and the Jews from Egypt, a meeting between you and members of the HSJE ought to be held as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

The HSJE committee and its Regional Officers

Joseph E. Mosseri
Secretary

Desire L. Sakkal
President

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