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Board of Directors of the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New  
York speech. 28 September 1955.

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Address by Rabbi Herbert Friedman at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York, Inc., held at the offices of Mr. Samuel Leidesdorf, 100 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., on Wednesday afternoon, September 28, 1955.

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This is the first opportunity I have had to meet with you who are, in a very real sense, the most important constituency the UJA possesses. You are the leaders of the largest Jewish community in the world, and a very heavy sense of responsibility must always weigh on your shoulders.

I therefore take seriously the invitation to come here today, just as I know you extended it seriously -- and, in that serious and statesmanlike framework, I should like to try to tell you some of the things I saw, some of the things I heard, some of the opinions I gathered, from a very intensive recent trip through North Africa and Israel.

There have been almost no visitors from the United States to North Africa since Bastille Day, which, as you know, is on July 14. On the day of the 15th, the first rioting broke out and, from that time until this, Morocco has been under martial law, maintained by French troops, by French Foreign Legionnaires, by native goumiers, all seeking to maintain law and order in a territory which is rapidly losing all semblance of law and order.

The thing which I would like to say in one sentence -- and to say it, I think, without exaggeration -- is that the Jewish world is faced for the first time since 1950-1951 with a genuine emergency situation involving the necessary transmigration of scores of thousands of people.

In 1950-1951, we saw the Iraq expulsion. Some 115,000 Jews were expelled from Iraq and taken to Israel in fifteen months during that period. Since that time, there has been nothing comparable to what is now imminently on the horizon.

Thank God, we have had no international Jewish crises of this magnitude, because these few intervening years have given Israel a chance to catch her breath. In that much desired and very necessary period of stabilization, Israel has done wonders, in the short time at her disposal, to consolidate the economy, to stabilize the inflation, to absorb the earlier groups. Had that breathing spell not been available to her, I have no idea how she would have handled that which is now looming immediately before us. Having had that, however, she had not what I would call a second wind, but a breathing spell in the first wind, to handle what I would like to try to describe to you now.

I have no desire to enter into any polemics with any other national Jewish organizations or leaders whose statements or opinions might conflict with mine. I simply desire to present, factually and objectively, what I saw and believed, and I think it is up to you, in your statesmanlike capacity, to make your judgements as to what is happening with this North African population.

There is a deep and authentic feeling of panic going from the very highest quarters down to the lowest Jew in the most far-flung village -- a panic which results from the critical and unfolding crisis between the Moslems and the French, particularly in Morocco.

I am not talking about Tunisia, which is quiet -- and yet from which 700 Jews a month are now emigrating, with all of its quietness. Nor am I talking about Algeria, which is quiet, and from which almost no Jews are emigrating. I am talking now largely about Morocco -- French and Spanish -- which is in flames.

From the morning of the 15th of July until today, the 28th of September, there has been almost no single day in which there have not been incidents involving death, bloodshed, burning, looting, and the flight of larger or smaller numbers of people. Almost no day has passed without some episode.

On the front pages of the Vigile the French paper there, there is a box score kept every day, giving the number of killed, the number of wounded, the number of displaced, in categories called "European", "Moslem" and "Jew". If you want to know what is happening, take the paper, as I do, and read the front page every day, and look at the box score.

Much of the information which I have at my disposal was garnered from sources which I consider to be absolutely authentic and irreproachable, namely, the Joint Distribution Committee. Their men on the spot, their American and European personnel plus the indigenous personnel upon whom they rely

for information, have been -- in my experience, at least -- the most reliable and sober judges of any local problem.

I have here a letter, a few paragraphs of which, describing a specific incident in microcosm, will give you the whole picture in macrocosm.

This letter is dated September 6 and it comes from Mr. El Kaim one of the leading Jews of Marrakech. He is the man in that city who is entrusted with the responsibility of sending reports to the JDC. He writes:

"On my way from Demnat, I was stopped at Tamlelt by the Police. I came out of my car and saw ten wounded Jews, seven seriously. They were lying on the ground since 10 in the morning, and it was 12 when I arrived there. No first aid had been given them. The canteen keeper of Tamlelt, an ex-policeman in retirement, exkeeper of the Marrakech brothel, witnessed the riot from the roof of his house. He was armed with rifle and gun, he saw the Jews being hit with bludgeons and hooks, but did not make a gesture to scare the demonstrators, who were just below his wall. Ten minutes later, nearly all the gendarmes were drinking in his canteen and telling funny stories."

"The two policemen on duty in Tamlelt, who had provoked the riot by trying to arrest two Moslem demonstrators, were armed only with a small gun each, and, not being able to arrest the demonstrators, they saved themselves only by running for their lives to the post office and hiding there.

"It was then that one of the demonstrators cried: 'Let us attack the Jews'. They rushed at them, pillaged their goods, clubbed them, stole their money and their mules. They cut a telephone pole on the Marrakech road and made off."

These are facts. What comes now is Mr. El Kaim's opinion:

"But the most revolting thing was that the authorities lacked efficiency, and there was indifference, and the brutality with which they treated the wounded people, and their inability to protect the Jews in that center. It will be the same in other centers, as those Jews have no other means of living than their trade on Souk days." (Souk is the Arabic word for "market".)

In other words, the Jews went to the Souk, to the market. That is their normal pursuit of trade. A riot started against the French. Two policemen, inadequately armed, were unable to contain the rioters. They tried to arrest two of them. They failed to do so. The policemen then ran for cover. Once the policemen had run for cover, the mob said: "Let's attack the Jews." The man on the roof, armed, saw the mob attacking the Jews but did nothing about it or was able to do nothing about it.

An important incident? Two rioters -- ten Jews wounded. Nobody killed, thank God. A matter of grave international concern? A matter for people in New York to get excited about?

Some would say: "No, because this is a minor thing." Some would also say: "Let us keep our heads, because this is not a question of the Arabs making a pogrom against the Jews. They were out for the French first; they went to the Jews only second."

Yes, that is true -- perfectly true. If, however, even though it is a case of going for the Jews only second, you wind up after three months with a large number of dead, wounded, and people who are homeless because their shops and houses have been burned, I think you have the background for the feeling which pervades the entire community -- the feeling that they have no security there.

What I have read to you is from Marrakech, dated September 6. I could read to you accounts in this same folder from Casablanca, Mazagan, Oued Zem, Safi, Meknes and other places.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the face of my own tendency to be over-protective of Jewish blood when it is spilled, I have tried to be as restrained as I can be about this. And yet I have the feeling that we are up against a very substantial crisis here, which I think we are entitled to call an emergency.

It is really not so much a matter of what I think; it is really a matter of what the people there think. And the people in North Africa, whether they choose to use the word "emergency" or not, are trying to leave for Israel in very large numbers. There are at the moment 60,000 to 70,000 people who have registered at the office of the Jewish Agency in Casablanca, registered to leave.

There are 4,000 people bottled up in a camp in Marseille, on the southern coast of France, which is being run by the JDC. There are 1,200 to 1,300 people in a camp 40 miles outside of Casablanca which is under the control of the Jewish Agency. The camp is not adequately protected.

There are several thousand people in the various cities I have named who are literally homeless at the moment. Some are housed in school buildings, some are housed in municipal sports stadiums, some are housed in any kind of temporary housing that is available to those who have no place to go back to.

I think the American Jewish community must be made aware of the fact that we are faced with a very large transmigration of people who want out -- and I don't think it is for us to say that they should stay.

I told you that Tunisia is quiet. There isn't a riot, there isn't an episode, there isn't a head cracked. On the contrary Habib Bourgiba, the head of the Arab nationalist party in Tunisia, is



friendly to the Jews. But 600 to 700 people a month are going out of Tunisia, month after month. There is a treaty in existence between the Government of Tunisia and the Government of France according to which Tunisia has home rule, and it has just appointed a Jew -- Mr. Albert Bessis, whom I have had the privilege of meeting several times -- to the Cabinet. He is a Jew who is a member of a Tunisian Arab government.

The same Mr. Bessis has told me that the rate of migration from Morocco should by no means be lessened, that the rate of migration from Tunisia should by no means be diminished; that, on the contrary, if it is within the power of the Jewish Agency in Israel and the world Jewish community to increase the rate of emigration, it should be done. This is from the same Mr. Bessis who has assumed a responsible position in the Tunisian Government.

I have no idea of how the current negotiations between the French and the Moroccans will come out. I have a feeling that if the French Cabinet, under Premier Faure, does not solve this before next Tuesday, when the National Assembly reconvenes, there is a very substantial chance that the Government of France may fall on this matter, as the government of Mendes-France fell.

If the Cabinet of Mr. Faure falls on this matter, and the matter is on the floor of the National Assembly, there may be no treaty between France and Morocco giving Morocco her independence. If the Moroccan nationalists fail to achieve their independence, let me predict today that we shall see Jewish blood shed on a scale which will make the episodes of the previous three months look infantile.

If the Government of France can settle this with the

Moroccan nationalists, there will be a period of quietude, the rioting will diminish, the sporadic violent episodes will decrease. I think this will have no relationship whatsoever to the desire on the part of the Jews to get out.

Well, if we are talking about a real emergency and talking about a desire on the part of the people to get out, where do they get out to (if you will pardon the bad grammar)? How is Israel situated today, and what is her attitude toward taking in this potentially large influx?

There has been made a bookkeeping figure of 45,000 North African Jews to be admitted to Israel till next Rosh Hashonah. I call it a bookkeeping figure because it seems to me that it is not related to reality. If it is quiet in Morocco, the figure may be 45,000 or perhaps even less. If it is not quiet in Morocco, it won't be 45,000, and it won't be 50,000, and it won't be 55,000; it will be much more than that.

Israel has made perfectly fabulous progress, as I have said, during these few years of her breathing spell. It is a delight to see what has been accomplished in the country — not just in concrete physical terms, but in terms of the evolution of human development. For instance, the social planning and engineering going on in the country are far superior to what was taking place a few years ago. It is a delight to see the care with which Malben has developed its institutions — and, again, this is that same wonderful JDC — and the manner in which they are taking care of aged and chronically ill and hard-core cases. Social progress has kept pace with technical progress, and all of this is to Israel's credit and something in which we should all take great joy.

I want to tell you very frankly that, faced with this new influx, the people in Israel are very frightened. There is a magnificent courage and heroism on their part, which they have always displayed and which is no less gorgeous now than it always was. But heroism and courage and magnanimity of spirit may still leave people fearful when they look at the cost of this, and they are very frightened as to their capacity to handle a large emigration without a larger response from us.

When I say that they are frightened, that does not mean that they won't do it. They will make every sacrifice under the sun to do it. Already, new taxes have been prepared, and some have been levied, to shift part of the burden of North African absorption on to the shoulders of the Israeli Jews themselves.

Overburdened as they already are with taxes, they are going to pay higher taxes on alcohol, tobacco, building materials and income. In those four categories, the Treasury has prepared and presented to the Parliament bills which will produce an additional revenue of \$17,000,000 -- and this additional burden, directly attributable to the North African problem, will be passed on to the shoulders of the Israeli people.

It therefore seems to me that a principle in equity should be that a ratio ought to be maintained between what they are willing to absorb and take on their shoulders and what we are willing to take on ours.

It is exactly this kind of principle in equity which makes the partnership between them and us so beautiful, so substantial and so continuous. They have never failed to answer an emergency call of Jews anywhere in the world for a home. We, so far, have not failed to answer the call for the money.

The partnership is in terms of those who are willing to share space with those of us who are willing to share wealth. This partnership is an ongoing thing which must be maintained in the face of the new situation.

I would simply like to say that I think it would be the height of folly, having lived through the liquidation of the DP camps, having lived through the transplantation from Iraq and Yemen, having lived through that period when, altogether too briefly, we had an opportunity to take Jews out of Rumania and did so to the tune of 100,000 in 1950 (and then lost the chance -- I hope not forever) -- it would be the height of folly, having lived through several episodes of that sort, for us now to fail when we stand confronted by another Jewish population that needs transplanting.

It would be the height of folly because what we would do, by failing to meet this situation, would be to leave Israel extremely vulnerable, so that all of the stability that we have tried to create there over the course of the years might run down the drain very quickly.

We want desperately to keep Israel stable, and to save the Jews of Morocco. It seems to me that, if we want this desperately enough, there is only one way to do it -- and that is for us to raise those sums of money, inevitably larger than they have been, which will discharge this responsibility.

Thank you very much.