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"Exodus of Jews from Poland." Passover speech. 29 March 1957.

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March 29, 1957

This is a copy report from Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, Executive Director of the nationwide United Jewish Appeal.
Rabbi Friedman: Something terribly important is going on.

We cannot publicize it.

Yet it is vital that you be aware of it.

Therefore I am sending you this record because it is the only way I know to get this information to you quickly.

I am referring to the mass exodus of Jews from Poland. There have been so far two or three stories in the public press-- and I have begged for permission to make an open publicity campaign for the whole American public to know that Jews are once again being driven by the lash of open anti-semitism, and that the communist government of Poland is actually letting them leave by the tens of thousands.

But the decision has been made in Europe and Israel that we, the UJA, cannot publicize the Polish story. If a reporter for the New York Times writes a story from Warsaw, saying that Jews are fleeing, and this story gets past the censor and actually is printed in New York -- that is one thing. But if the UJA started a full scale publicity campaign -- in every paper -- on every TV, on every radio -- that is another thing. For then there would be a hue and a cry -- attacks made on the Polish government -- which would only have one result -- the Poles would stop the exodus overnight. And so the cruel dilemma is --

do we want to make publicity or rescue Jews. Obviously we prefer to rescue, but in order to have the money to save the Jews of Poland, we must somehow tell you, the Jews of America, the whole story. The only way to overcome the frustration of being full of information on Poland, yet being unable to use it publicly, is to try to get it to you privately. Hence this record, which is for your personal use, your family, your friends -- so that you may know. Please be careful with this information. It is restricted and confidential -- and is not to appear in print.

Before Hitler started burning and gassing, the once great Polish Jewry consisted of $3\frac{1}{2}$ million people. Today we estimate there are 50 - 60 thousand left. For more than a decade this tiny remnant was locked in behind the Iron Curtain and we could not get to them, nor could they come to us. Brothers held asunder -- straining toward each other -- kept apart by the gulf which separates east from west. There is something special, I think about Polish Jewry -- for Poland since the 16th century was the source from which so much Jewish knowledge, culture, religion flowed. Poland was the source from which so many of our fathers and grandfathers flowed to this American continent. Poland with its shtetl and its ghetto, its teeming city masses and tiny village peasants, was a world unto itself, in which Judaism was preserved and practiced with pride and beauty. Our sentimental connections with Polish Jewry are strong -- and our intellectual convictions were

even stronger that here was a group of European Jews ~~xxx~~ whom we wanted to reunite with the rest of the free Jewish world. For years we tried to get at them, to no avail.

Last fall, the Iron Curtain was torn open and for many complicated political and psychological reasons it began to be possible for Polish Jews to escape. The communists are letting them out, not because they love the Jews, but because getting rid of them is the way to solve the rising anti-semitism in Poland. The trickle which began in September and October mounted in volume and crescendo. At first a few, then hundreds, then thousands of exit visas were granted. Jews lined up at the Israel Embassy in Warsaw, the processing went quickly. They were even allowed large quantities of baggage. The trains were loaded every day -- the volume quickly reached 1,000 per week -- whole families left -- professional men and engineers and teachers and factory workers -- scientists and a naval architect -- a general and a Supreme Court judge -- thousands of children -- the entire Jewish population saw its chance to get out. Every day we feared that some change in the political climate would disrupt this miracle. Instead it continued to expand.

Today it has reached flood proportions. There are tens of thousands of Polish Jews who have their visas and are waiting impatiently to be rescued. They are afraid of being cut off, even with the precious papers in their hands,

and it is a desperate race with time. Therefore, some tremendously significant decisions were reached last week. Arrangements have been made for an airlift from Poland direct to Israel by El Al planes. Do you realize the full meaning of this? It represents a revolutionary step -- Israeli planes actually touching down on Polish soil, flying Jews out directly to Tel Aviv. I am not certain of this -- but would guess it represents the first time anything like this has ever happened behind the Iron Curtain.

And as though this were not startling enough, there is the additional arrangement of Polish planes ferrying out Jewish emigrants via Zurich, Switzerland. Polish planes -- Polish pilots -- carrying Jews out to freedom and safety in Israel.

This airlift is really a miracle.

But even this is not enough. For not only is the air being used, but the sea also. A ship flying the British flag is arriving in the Polish harbor of Stettin on April 4 to take on 1,000 Jews, bring them to France, where they will be transhipped to Israel via Marseilles. And this liner of mercy will not sail only once, but will make three trips in April carrying a full load each time.

Here then is an open policy of emigration -- with three escape hatches -- by train to Vienna, by plane direct to Israel, by boat to France -- which will get out ~~xx~~ 8,000 Jews from Poland alone in the month of April alone --

and more in May and more in June -- until this whole population is rescued -- and we can sing for joy.

Our joy is tempered by one thing. Rescue costs money -- enormous quantities. There isn't enough -- or anywhere near enough. The campaigns are going well -- but the costs keep mounting as more people come out. It is tragic but true that thousands are kept waiting in camps and staging areas in Europe because of a shortage of money. The escape from Poland takes place, and this cannot be delayed, because we are afraid that the door might close. But then the next step of transportation to Israel is must sometimes delayed because there is no money to charter an extra vessel. In Israel, they are going on a night shift in a desperate effort to rush the building of the one-room housing units. But even so they will be thousands of units short. It is clear to me that before the end of April is reached, there will once again be tent encampments dotting the countryside. In our happiness at being able to rescue Polish Jewry, we should soberly evaluate the role we must play. The people in Israel are willing to do everything -- share their food, share their jobs, share their schools -- we also must be willing to do everything -- so that we can have an honest part in the rescue operation. How proud we and our children will be if we do this right. How ignoble we will feel if we do not measure up.

Let me appeal to you directly. Have you given enough? Can you give

more? It costs 1,000 to save one life. Can you save 1 or 2 or 10 more lives? Is there something more you can do in your community or your business group or your social circles to make your campaign more successful? Can you ask others to give more?

I said at the beginning that we were frustrated as to how to get this story to you, and decided to make this recording. Will you please pay this for others -- and let me know, via the enclosed postcard -- that you have done so? I have great faith and confidence in the Jews of America -- you have always understood and responded. Now that you know the Polish story -- in all its great drama -- please do everything humanly possible, by gifts of your money and your time, to the campaign, to keep the rescue planes and ships constantly moving. In Israel they will do more than is humanly possible to keep the doors open. They will not be deterred by Masser or war, by indecision of the UN or threats, of any government, from the holy mission of giving haven and refuge. Let us not be deterred by any lack of understanding or by any awkward hesitation in the monies we make available.

We are coming to Passover, when we think of the Exodus of Jews from slavery into freedom. Today this exodus is occurring for more than 100,000 of our brothers. I have been talking about Polish Jews, because that is the part we haven't been able to publish -- and I repeat my warning.

But don't forget the others -- the Egyptians, Hungarians, North Africans
who are also fleeing by the thousands each month. In the years to come, the
Jews whom we rescue, whether Polish or Egyptian or Hungarian, will thank us
in the only way they can -- by building an ever stronger Israel of which we
and our children shall be immeasurably proud.

