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WOJAC

הארגון העולמי של יהודים יוצאי ארצות ערב
المنظمة العالمية لليهود النازحين من البلدان العربية
WORLD ORGANIZATION OF JEWS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DES JUIFS ORIGINAIRES DES PAYS ARABES

December 21, 1977

Dear Sir,

In view of the President's Conference on WOJAC, I take the liberty of sending you a copy of the Statement I made before the United Nations, on December 13, 1977, as member of the Israeli Delegation.

Sincerely yours,

Ben Porat

Mordechai Ben-Porat





המשלחת הקבועה
של ישראל לאומות המאוחדות

PERMANENT MISSION OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

800 SECOND AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

OXFORD 7-5500

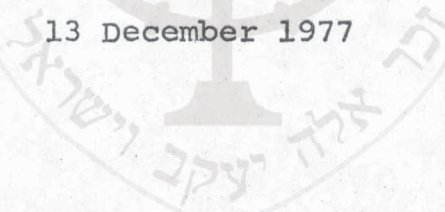
STATEMENT BY MR. MORDECHAI BEN PORAT

TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AMERICAN JEWISH
IN EXPLANATION BEFORE THE VOTE

ON AGENDA ITEM 55

(UNRWA)

13 December 1977



Mr. President,

My delegation's position on what are now draft resolutions A,B,C,D, and F was explained in detail in the Special Political Committee, as recorded in documents A/SPC/32/SR21, paragraph 18, - SR.22, paragraphs 4, and 22 and -/SR 24, paragraph 5.

In explanation of vote, however, I should like to repeat and elaborate our position as set out in A/SPC/32/SR.21, paragraph 22, regarding draft resolution A. We abstained on that resolution in Committee, and we shall do so again today because the interpretation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) contained in the draft resolution does not correspond with Israel's interpretation. Moreover, Israel is unable to accept the figures for Palestinian Arab refugees as shown in UNRWA records, and has strong reservations about the definition employed as to who is a refugee.

Besides that, there have been significant political developments since General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) was adopted in 1948, including the liquidation of the Jewish communities in Arab lands and the massive migration of Jews from those countries to Israel. These developments, covering more than two decades of turbulent history, are taken into account by Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which inter alia call for a negotiated settlement of the refugee problem - Jewish and Arab. It is Israel's position that the problem of Arab and Jewish refugees in the Middle East can only find practical solution within the framework of the de facto population exchange which has already taken place.

The present resolutions restrict our vision to just one of the refugee problems connected with the Arab-Israel conflict. But this blinkered approach is inadequate. Mr. President, today I stand before you as a member of the Israel delegation to this General Assembly. But I was once a Jewish refugee from Iraq, and I have therefore certain personal locus standi in this matter.

From my own first-hand experience, which I must tell you was shared by hundreds of thousands of Jews in Arab countries, I know the trials and tribulations of persecution and humiliation, of deprivation of human rights, property and belongings, and finally of expulsion. During the Farhud, that vicious anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad in 1941, my family was exposed to great danger. My mother was kidnapped. A few years later I myself was imprisoned and brutally tortured. Eventually I was able to flee, crossing the Iraqi border, on foot and without papers. I arrived in Israel penniless, and in the early 1950's directed a transit camp for tens of thousands of Jews from Arab countries. There, my family and I lived with them. I saw those people, housed in make-shift huts, without water, without electricity, exposed to rain, wind and even flood. Professional people were helpless; they didn't have their licenses or any other certificates with them. These had

been torn to shreds by Arab officials in certain Arab countries when they left. Mr. President, as I stand here, and explain my delegation's vote on the draft resolutions, it is important we re-assess some of the events which created the refugee problem.

Thirty years ago, from this very rostrum, my former countryman, Dr. Fadel Al-Jamali, the then Iraqi Foreign Minister, made serious threats against the Iraqi Jews then living in Arab lands and exposing them to violence and massacre.

Jamali's threat was part of a premeditated policy. As testified by Sir Alex Kirkbride, a former British Ambassador to Amman, in his recently published memoirs, Iraq's Prime Minister at that time, Nuri Al-Said, had gone to Amman to seek Jordan's approval for the deportation to Israel, through Jordanian territory, of the "majority of Jewish communities of Iraq." The Iraqi scheme was to bring Jews over "in army lorries, escorted by armoured cars" and to force them to cross the Jordanian-Israeli frontier.

Who were the Jews exposed to the brutal Iraqi and other Arab schemes of expulsion, and where are they now? Who has absorbed them, and what about their legal rights and claims? What mention if made of them in the draft resolutions ?

For three thousand years there was a permanent presence of large Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa. Their history is richly inscribed through their cultural achievements and creative contributions to all avenues of human endeavour. Through their long and active involvement, a thousand years before the Arab conquest and 25 centuries before the birth of the modern Arab States, the Jewish people acquired no small share in the intellectual and material substance of the area. The Jews extended help and friendship to the Arabs at the birth of Islam, and helped them achieve political independence in modern times.

By way of gratitude, these Jews, so deeply rooted in the area, were brutally expelled. Where should they have gone? Like Nuri Al-Said, the heads of other Arab Governments recognized that the Jews had a right to go to Israel, their ancestral home and reborn State.

To this very day, that period of suffering has left deep

scars on the Jewish refugees from Arab lands. The major difference between them and the Arab refugees from "Palestine" is the extent of the financial aid and other assistance they received from their respective brethren. Draft resolution A deals with "Assistance to Palestinian Arab Refugees. But, out of the billion and a third U.S. dollars contributed by the international community **from** May 1950 to date for the Arab refugees, less than 6% or \$77,386,000 (seventy-seven million, three-hundred and eighty-six thousand dollars) was contributed by Arab governments. On the other hand, the Jewish refugees from Arab countries never relied on international charity. Israel, with the help of Jews from all over the world, gave shelter to these victims of Arab persecution. It opened its gates for every Jew, young or old. fit or ailing. It gave them shelter, new lives and dignity. We and our children have now tasted real freedom. Our human rights are protected, and we enjoy civil liberties. We vote and are elected. We shall never let ourselves be hostages to fortune again.

Draft resolution C calls on Israel to return to the camps in Gaza refugees who have been enabled by Israel to work and buy new homes outside the camps. These refugees will never agree to go back to the dreadful conditions they experienced in the camps. But, I must add, the same applies to Jewish refugees from Arab lands. The memories of the humiliations and dispossessions, and of the prisons and hangings in public squares, together with the plight of the remnants of Syrian Jewry today make a mockery of so called invitations from some Arab governments to Jews to return.

Arab Governments should realize that the rights of the Jews from Arab Lands, their material interests, and legal claims, now form a central element of the conflict, and parallel the Palestinian Arab refugee problem. This has been understood by certain Palestinian Arab spokesmen: Speaking about the cruel trial the Jews have undergone in Arab countries, Sabri Jiryis wrote in the Lebanese daily Al Nahar on May 15, 1975:

لا حاجة الآن الى الحديث عن الطريقة التي تم بها ذلك ،
التي أسفرت عملياً عن اقتلاع يهود الدول العربية من بلداتهم
التي عاشوا فيها مئات السنين ، ثم طردهم بشرطية الى
إسرائيل ، بعد مضاررة اطلاقهم اذ الاستيلاء عليها بايدي الاخوان ...
ولا يمكن تبرير الأمر بالقول انه الانظمة النازية هي العالم العربي ،
لمساعدة القوى الاستعمارية ، التي عملت في تسويق مع الصهيونية ،
هي التي قامت بذلك ... اذ ان النتائج التاريخية المترتبة على مثل
هذا العمل لا يمكن ان يمحى مثل هذه الادعاءات المسطحة ... ولا
حاجة الى القول انه مشكلة اليهود العرب هذه وانتمالهم الى
إسرائيل ، بالنسبة الى الفلسطينيين على الدول ، ليست نظرية
مطلقة اذ سيحدثون لها ايضاً تأثير عملي للغاية على مستقبل
القضية الفلسطينية .

"No need to relate now the way by which they accomplished the dislodgment of the Jews from Arab States from their countries, where they lived for centuries, expelling them in the most ugly manner, after confiscating their property or seizing control of it at the cheapest price. It is impossible to justify the matter by saying that it was the past régimes in the Arab world, aided by the imperialist power which worked in coordination with Zionism who did it ... The historical results ensuing from such an operation cannot be wiped out by such simple pretexts... There is no need to say that the problem of those Arab Jews and their transfer to Israel is not merely theoretical, as least as far as the Palestinians are concerned. It has a very practical repercussion on the future of the Palestinian problem."

Draft resolution 6 concerns the return of persons displaced during and in the wake of the Six Day War of 1967. But again the problem is more complex.

The implications resulting from the dislodgment of Jews from Arab countries also extend to Israel's right to live within recognized and secure boundaries. Only a few weeks ago, President Hafez-Al-Asad of Syria expressed his opinion that "the total area of the West Bank is 5000 square kilometers, which cannot populate three million (Palestinian) people. But the area of Israel is 20,000 square kilometers, and it can." Let me respond that the territory in the Arab countries, which we, a million Jews from Arab lands, were forced to evacuate, is much wider than the "20,000 square kilometers of the State of Israel. Charity begins at home, and if the Syrian President and other Arab leaders think that Arab refugees need some territory, let the Arab countries with their vast expanses extending from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, over twice as large as Europe, avail themselves of the space evacuated by Jews in these countries.

The Arab world can no longer avoid its responsibilities toward the million Jewish refugees who fled their various countries and their offspring, who number another million. In order to present their claims, the Jews concerned have founded the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC), whose co-chairman it is my privilege to be. It is their rights and their claims—natural, historical and legal which it is our duty to reserve for redress within the framework of a final peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states.

As other members of my delegation have pointed out, this debate has become largely irrelevant in the light of the historical process begun at Jerusalem and continuing in Cairo tomorrow with the opening of the preparatory conference for Geneva. The American-Israel working paper of 5 October 1977 has laid down that "the solution of the problem of the Arab refugees and the Jewish refugees will be discussed in accordance with terms to be agreed upon."

Israel has contributed its part by absorbing the Jewish refugees from Arab countries. Let the Arabs do the same for their brethren refugees. Each wave of refugees, Jewish or Arab should dwell peacefully among its own nation, and thus help form the bridge of peace and understanding between Israel and the Arab countries. With that vision before us, let us work for a negotiated peace in the Middle East, the source of so many civilizations, and the potential cradle of so much more.

My delegation will accordingly abstain on draft resolution A, and vote against draft resolutions C and E. We also request recorded votes on draft resolutions A and C.

Thank you, Mr. President.

January 9, 1978

Ms. R. Schwarz, Secretary
World Organization of Jews
from Arab Countries
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022

Dear Ms. Schwarz:

In response to your letter of January 3rd, please be advised that Rabbi Schindler is out-of-the-country at this time. I am not certain that he will be back at his office by the 17th but will, of course, let you know in the event it is possible for him to attend the meeting on January 17th.

Please also thank Mr. Ben-Porat for the copy of his statement to the United Nations on December 13, 1977. This will be held for Rabbi Schindler's attention on his return to New York.

With kindest greetings, I am

Sincerely,

Edith J. Miller
Assistant to the President

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المنظمة العالمية لليهود النازحين من البلدان العربية
WORLD ORGANIZATION OF JEWS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DES JUIFS ORIGINAIRES DES PAYS ARABES

January 3rd, 1978

Rabbi A.Schindler
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10021


Dear Sir,

Being on a speaking tour on the West Coast, Mr. Mordechai Ben-Porat has asked me to invite you on his behalf, to the first meeting of the National Committee for the Rights of Jews from Arab Countries.

This meeting will be held under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee on January 17, 1978 at 3.00 P.M.
Please find herewith enclosed a detailed program.

Hoping that you will be able to attend,

Sincerely yours,


R. Schwarz,
Secretary

Copy: Mr.M.Ben-Porat

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RIGHTS OF

JEWS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES

First meeting: January 17, 1978

Place: American Jewish Committee
165 East 56 Street, New York
Second Floor, Room 200-C

Time: 3.00 P.M. Introductions and
Convening of the meeting.

On the Agenda:

-1- Goals:

- Promotion of WOJAC's message amongst the American people, Jewish and non-Jewish.
- Information and Education aiming at the release of Torah scrolls and religious material left in Arab countries;
 - U.S. Government
 - Ambassadors for Arab countries
 - Humanitarian and Cultural Institutions
- Preparation of an Academic Seminar on WOJAC with the collaboration of Universities in the U.S.
- Preparation of 20 to 30 cases of claims for property, humiliation, jailing or murdering, for appeal in U.S. Courts.

.../.

-2- Procedures:

- Registration of the National Committee in the U.S. as a corporation, for tax exemptions.
- Nomination of a Steering Committee.
- Authorized signatures.
- Representation of the National Committee at the "Presidents' Conference."
- Survey of Jewish professionals from Arab countries living presently in the United States.

7.00 P.M. Adjourning of the first meeting.

