

Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries

Jews have lived in what are now Arab states for over 2,500 years. Jews were forced to flee their Middle Eastern and North African communities, among the oldest in the Jewish Diaspora, as a direct result of government and popular anti-Semitic actions against them. The Palestinian refugee population emerged after war was declared on Israel in 1948 by 5 Arab nations.

In some Arab states the Jewish community no longer exists; in others, only a few hundred Jews remain. Of the 900,000 Jewish refugees from Arab countries, approximately 600,000 were absorbed by Israel. The remainder went to Europe and the Americas. Today, almost half of Israel's Jewish citizens are the original refugees and their descendants.

The Jewish Population in Arab Countries		
Country/Year	1948	2001
Algeria	130,000	0
Egypt	75,000	200
Iraq	90,000	100
Libya	30,000	0
Morocco	286,000	5,800
Syria	20,000	100
Tunisia	70,000	1,500
Yemen	53,000	200
TOTAL	754,000	7,900

Absorption into Israel

Jewish refugees were granted citizenship and went through an absorption process into Israel. The Zionist movement transformed the concept of 'ingathering of the exiles' into a way of life, and the state of Israel translated it into law, granting citizenship to every Jew wishing to settle in the country. Following Israel's independence, the mass immigration arriving from post World War II Europe and Arab countries, doubled Israel's Jewish population from 650,000 to 1.3 million in the first 4 years of statehood (1948-52). Arab refugees were not absorbed or integrated into the Arab lands to which they fled despite the vast Arab territory. Jordan is the only one of the Arab states that granted the Palestinian refugees citizenship. Out of all the 100,000,000 refugees since World War II, the Palestinian refugees are the only refugee group in the world that has never been absorbed or integrated into their own peoples' lands.

Rescue Operations

After the creation of the state, Israel initiated emergency, rescue airlifts of endangered Jewish communities. One of the more legendary rescue operations, dubbed Operation Magic Carpet, was the airlifting to Israel of the Jews of Yemen. By September 1950, nearly 50,000 Yemenite Jews were flown to Israel.

Compensation

When Jews fled the Arab countries, individual and communal properties were confiscated. To this day, the Arab states have refused to pay any compensation to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were forced to abandon their homes, businesses and possessions as they fled those countries. Arabs who lost property in Israel are eligible to file for compensation from Israel's Custodian of Absentee Property.

Resolution 194

The United Nations General Assembly took up the refugee issue and adopted Resolution 194 in December of 1948. The resolution called upon the Arab states and Israel to resolve all outstanding issues through negotiations. The Israelis considered the settlement of the refugee issue a negotiable part of an overall peace settlement. The text of Resolution 194 states that the refugees "should be permitted" to return to their homes at

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the "earliest practicable date" and this recommendation applies only to those "wishing to... live at peace with their neighbors." The Arabs reinterpreted the resolution as granting Palestinian refugees the absolute right of repatriation and have demanded that Israel accept this interpretation.

International Assistance

Jewish refugees from Arab countries never received any international assistance, however, the General Assembly established in 1949 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to dispense aid to the Palestinian refugees. The United States is the organization's largest contributor providing more than one-third of the funds. Moreover, Israel has donated more funds to UNRWA than most Arab states, which have contributed only 2 percent of the UNRWA budget. After transferring responsibility for the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel no longer controlled any refugee camp and ceased contributing to UNRWA. In addition to receiving annual funding from UNRWA for the refugees, the PA has received billions of dollars in international aid; yet, the PA has failed to use any of the foreign aid it has received to build permanent housing for the refugees.

