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March 31, 2008

Congress to vote on Jewish refugees today

Peggy Shapiro

It has been sixty years since 850,000 Jews were victims of "ethnic cleansing" in 10 Arab lands, where some Jewish communities had existed for 2,500 years. The number of Jewish refugees expelled from Arab lands exceeds Arab refugees from Israel by more than 100,000 ([United Nations Conciliation Commission, October 23, 1950](#)). Yet, the claims of these forgotten refugees, who were never compensated for their loss of land, homes, businesses and personal property, are rarely part of the narrative.

The issue of refugees is the centerpiece to most discussions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with the sole focus being on Arab refugees, who have the unique honor of being the longest standing refugee population in modern history. The Jewish refugees were absorbed into Israel while the Arab refugees, who were denied entry to Arab countries, are dependent on UNRWA welfare, which allocates over \$300 million annually to house, educate and provide social services to 4 million Palestinian refugees, with over one million still living in refugee camps. In political discourse, Palestinians exploit their refugee status by claiming a "Right to Return" to Israel and thereby demographically destroying the Jewish state of Israel. The argument, which is based on a spurious international right, is further diminished if there are other refugees to consider in a final settlement.

The U.S. Congress is poised to expand the issue of refugees to acknowledge, "Jews living in Arab countries suffered human rights violations and were made refugees." On February 27, 2008, in a unanimous bi-partisan decision, the House Foreign Affairs Committee approved [H.Res 185](#), recognizing the plight and flight of over 850,000 Jews from Arab countries. The legislation, co-sponsored by House of Representatives by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Rep. Michael Ferguson (R-NJ), and Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-NY), states in part that "any resolutions relating to the issue of Middle East refugees, and which include a reference to the required resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue, must also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish, Christian, and other refugees from Arab countries."

On March 31, 2008, the House Resolution 185 is going for a full and final vote in the House of Representatives. The resolution urges the international community to treat all refugees in the Middle East, North Africa and the Persian Gulf equally and opens the public dialogue to include Jewish refugees who until now have been forgotten.

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