



BBC World Service Radio

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TRANSCRIPT

(FILED IN CAIRO, EGYPT)

CUE: An American-based group which calls itself Justice for Jews is holding a conference in London (on Monday) for the first time. The group campaigns for compensations for what it says are nearly one million Jews who were forced to abandon their properties and flee Arab societies after Israel was created. The subject is highly controversial, both the numbers of the Jews who left and the conditions under which they left are disputed. But as our Arab Affairs Analyst, Magdi Abdelhadi, reports from Cairo, the one undisputed fact is that Jews were part of Arab societies for centuries up until Israel was created sixty years ago

Nothing provokes more anger in Arab countries than the subject of Jews and Israel. Ever since Israel was established in 1948, it has become very difficult for most Arabs to separate one from the other. The vast majority of Arabs have never met a Jew. Few if any know that there were many vibrant Jewish communities in countries like Egypt, Iraq and Morocco. Many of them were fully integrated in their societies and made significant contributions to the culture and the economy of the countries they lived in. In Egypt for example, the much loved singer and actress, Laila Mourad, was a Jew who became an icon of the Egyptian art scene during the nineteen forties and fifties. In Iraq too many of the country's talented musicians and writers were Jewish. There were many successful businessmen too. Today the average response to any question about the Jews who left Arab societies is that they were Zionist traitors. But in reality the picture is far more complex. Some left because they were Zionists while others left because of growing hostility towards them after the Arab-Israeli wars in 1948 and 1967, and there were also those who were encouraged to leave by the new Israeli state. Not all of them went to Israel, though. Many went to France and America. And some of them still feel very passionately about the Arab cultures they grew up in.

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