

Rights Council hears from Jewish refugee

By PAUL LUNGEN, Staff Reporter

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A United Nations body with a history of passing anti-Israel resolutions heard about a different side of the Arab-Israeli conflict last week when a Jewish refugee described her family's eviction from the home they had occupied in Libya for hundreds of years.



Regina Bublil-Waldman, right, told the *UN Human Rights Council* (UNHRC) in Geneva that her family was expelled from Tripoli by the Libyan government after the 1967 Six Day War.

During that conflict, mobs turned out in the streets shouting "Slaughter the Jews." They burned her family's warehouse and it was only thanks to a neighbour's intervention were they able to flee. One month later, the Libyan government ordered all the country's Jews – there were 36,000 in 1948 – to leave. Their homes and other property were confiscated, she said.

Speaking under the auspices of *Justice for Jews from Arab Countries* (JJAC), Bublil-Waldman, who lives in San Francisco, said her family's fate mirrored that of many other Jews.

"I appear before you today not alone, but representing the nearly one million Jews resident in North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf region at the turn of the century," she said. "Today, less than 5,000 Jews remain. Their plight and flight from 10 Arab countries has been ignored by the international community."

Bublil-Waldman – a co-founder of the San Francisco-based group JIMENA, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa – appeared before the UNHRC in her great grandmother's wedding dress "to celebrate my heritage and mourn its loss."

She was only six years old when she first experienced hatred. During an arithmetic class in the local school, her teacher posed an arithmetic question: "If you have 10 Jews and you kill five of them, how many Jews do you have left to kill?"

"That was a traumatic and painful experience. I came home crying," she said.

Bublil-Waldman told the rights council that “after having to rebuild my life, I do not appear here with a bomb in my hand nor with hatred in my heart, but armed with these truths:

“That Jews are an indigenous people of the Middle East;” that Jew were victimized by the state policy of various Arab regimes; and that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has ruled Jews from Arab lands were bona fide refugees and “victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

She added: “The exclusion and denial of these truths will prejudice authentic negotiations and undermine the justice and legitimacy of any Middle East peace negotiations.”

Bublil-Waldman’s presentation was received respectfully, said Sylvain Abitbol, co-president of Canadian Jewish Congress and a member of JJAC’s executive.

Her presentation was important in ensuring the UN body recognized that “Jews from Arab lands are refugees and should be considered as such,” he said.

It also corrects the international record on behalf of the children of Jewish refugees, who have lost “a whole culture of Jews from Arab lands,” he added.

Abitbol, himself a refugee from Morocco, said the speech was part of a broader campaign to bring attention to the plight of Jewish refugees. The day before Bublil-Waldman’s presentation to the council, the same speech was given to a gathering of non-governmental organizations, he noted.

Stan Urman, executive-director of JJAC, said the organization is dedicated to raising the issue of Jewish refugees to all members of the so-called “quartet,” which is supervising Mideast peace efforts. The “quartet” consists of the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

The UNHRC has been notorious for its “assault on Israel,” Urman continued. “We thought it necessary to make a statement that, thanks to Israel, there was a home for the one million Jewish refugees.”

The United Nations and the UNHRC continue to focus on alleged Israeli misdeeds, but “not one UN resolution has ever dealt with the issues of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. JJAC seeks to restore the plight and the truth of the Jews from Arab countries to the Middle East narrative from which they have been expunged and eclipsed,” Urman said.

Late last year, JJAC researchers uncovered a 1947 Arab League document that outlined a policy of expulsion and robbery of longtime Jewish citizens.

The Arab League’s proposed law was approved by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq and implemented by other nations. It provided that Jews would be considered “members of the Jewish minority of the state of Palestine” and have their bank accounts frozen and used to finance “resistance to Zionist ambitions in Palestine...” Jews believed to be active Zionists would be interned as political prisoners and their assets confiscated.