

Cotler briefs UK parliament on Jewish refugees

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LONDON — Former Canadian justice minister Irwin Cotler, last week told a joint session of the United Kingdom's House of Commons and House of Lords that the plight of Jews from Arab countries must be addressed for there to be lasting peace in the Middle East.

“The pain and plight of 850,000 Jews uprooted and displaced from Arab countries – not only a forgotten, but a forced exodus – has been expunged and eclipsed from both the Middle East peace and justice narratives these past 60 years,” he stated. “This is a story that has not been heard. It is a story that has not yet even been told. It is a truth that must now be acknowledged.”



Cotler's address was convened by Labour MP John Mann and Lord Anderson of Swansea, in co-operation with Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC) and the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Speaking to an overflow crowd, Cotler said Arab countries and the League of Arab States must acknowledge their role in launching an aggressive war against Israel in 1948 and the perpetration of human rights violations against their respective Jewish nationals.

Cotler cited evidence from a report titled Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: The Case for Rights And Redress which documented for the first time a pattern of state-sanctioned repression and persecution in Arab countries – including Nuremberg-like laws – that targeted Jewish populations. The results were denationalization, forced expulsions, illegal sequestration of property, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and murder.

Cotler called on the U.K. government to use its influence to ensure that any reference to Palestinian refugees is accompanied by a similarly explicit reference to Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

“Simply put,” Cotler concluded “the exclusion and denial of rights and redress to Jewish refugees from Arab countries will prejudice authentic negotiations between the parties and undermine the justice and legitimacy of any agreement. Let there be no mistake about it. Where there is no remembrance, there is no truth; where there is no truth, there

will be no justice; where there is no justice, there will be no reconciliation; and where there is no reconciliation, there will be no peace, which we all seek.”