



Congressional Vote Seen As Victory For Jewish Refugees

By: Elliot Resnick, *Jewish Press Staff Reporter* Wednesday, April 9, 2008

“Congress has restored truth to the middle East narrative,” said Steve Urman, executive director of Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC).

Responding to lobbying efforts over the past several years, the U.S. Congress last Tuesday passed House Resolution 185, which declares that any enduring Middle East agreement must address the issue of the 850,000 Jewish refugees who fled Arab lands since Israel’s founding in 1948. It further states that any U.S. resolution referring to the Palestinian refugee problem “must also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.”

“It’s a matter of history,” said Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), the resolution’s lead sponsor, “that the Jews were expelled from most of these [Arab] countries systematically under an official regime policy, which included anti-Jewish decrees, pogroms, murders, hangings, anti-Semitic incitement, and actual ethnic cleansing.... To ignore that in any peace negotiation or peace settlement would be highly unjust.”

The resolution’s other sponsors were Reps. Ilena Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.), and Mike Ferguson (R-N.J.).



Stanley Urman

The resolution’s passage comes just one month after JJAC’s Urman appeared before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva together with Libya-born Regina Bublil-Waldman, the first Jewish refugee from an Arab country to do so.

“Since 1948,” Urman said, “there have been 126 UN resolutions on the issue of Palestinian refugees, but not one on Jewish refugees from Arab countries.”

In the fall, he said, a Western country will introduce a resolution regarding Jewish refugees in the General Assembly.

For Urman – an Ashkenazic Jew who rallied for Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry in his younger years – the Jewish refugee issue is more than a matter of compensation for the enormous wealth left behind in Arab lands. “It’s to make sure that 2,600 years of Jewish

history in the Middle East is not expunged.” Furthermore, this history refutes “people like Ahmadinejad who claim that we’re illegitimate white Europeans who parachuted into the Middle East.”

Finally, recognition of Jewish refugees “will level the playing field” and break the “exclusive monopoly that Palestinians have on the term ‘Middle East refugees.’ ”