

*Revised version of remarks delivered before a Joint Briefing for Members of
the House of Commons and the House of Lords of the Parliament of Great Britain*



on June 24, 2008

“Justice now for Jews from Arab countries”

by David Matas

A. Introduction

Justice for Jews of Arab Countries held a meeting and constituted itself as an independent organization in London England on June 23 to 25, 2008, sixty years after the creation of the State of Israel. Why now?

Arab attacks on the State of Israel generated two refugee populations, Jews and Palestinians. There has been much attention to Palestinian refugees, but little to Jewish refugees from Arab countries. What has changed to justify that attention now?

It is not fair to describe this attention as new. There has been a long history of efforts to advocate justice for Jews from Arab countries. These efforts are set out in the report I wrote with Stan Urman and Irwin Cotler. What we are seeing now is a regeneration of attention, energy and focus. Why is there this regeneration now?

B. The telling of stories

One reason is simply the dynamics of repression. Immediately after their victimization, victims are traumatized; they want to move on with their lives and put their suffering behind them. Only years later can they face up to their bitter memories. Today about 30% of the Jewish refugees from Arab lands are now still alive. Soon there will be none. Unless people tell their stories now, get justice now, it will be too late. The biological imperative and the distance of time have worked together to unlock stories which had been untold for decades.

C. New research

A second reason is new discoveries. Stan Urman, Irwin Cotler and I, as we went about our work, went into archives never before accessible and found documents about this issue which had never before surfaced. We found that the UNHCR had recognized this population as within the mandate of the UNHCR, a true refugee population. The documents setting out these findings were discovered in archives newly opened to researchers. We were the first researchers ever to

see these documents.

A second later discovery was this. Before we began our work, we knew that there had been parallel laws in many Arab states denaturalizing Jews, freezing their bank accounts, seizing their businesses, denying them employment. What we found through our research is an Arab League plan to act in consort to proclaim these laws, an actual draft model law, a criminal conspiracy of the Arab world to enact Nuremberg type laws against its Jewish population.

D. The search for peace

As well, there are larger issues which have required renewed focus on justice for Jews in Arab countries - the search for peace in the Middle East, the combat against anti-Semitism, and the corruption of the UN human rights system. Justice for Jews from Arab countries, large as the issue is in itself, has turned out to be an important component of these larger issues, a key which can help unlock to the door to peace in the Middle East, a weapon in the combat against anti-Semitism, and an antidote to the disease from which the UN human rights system suffers.

After sixty years of efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East without success a new approach is needed. For the parties to go to the negotiating table with minor variations on the same positions they have held for sixty years is unlikely to succeed.

In order to arrive at peace, we have to deconstruct the mythology on which the unending anti-Zionist wars are based. While there are many different ways in which the wars against Israel have been justified, one constant claim that is that the creation of the state of Israel inflicted a disaster (in Arabic "*naqba*") on its Arabic population and generated a Palestinian refugee population which has suffered mightily. Anti-Zionists argue for the destruction of the State of Israel so that Palestinians can return to what they claim is their own country, resume possession of what they assert as their lands and homes and end their suffering.

Peace negotiations have constantly foundered on this Palestinian mythology of disaster. The departure of Palestinians from Israel was a disaster or tragedy was a disaster, not because Israel was created, but because the Arab leadership of the day refused to accept Israel's existence. The wars against Israel have been hard on Israel. But they have been even harder on the Palestinians who have led generations of lives of misery held hostage to anti-Zionist mythology.

The, for the most part, unnecessary departure was bad enough. What followed made matters even worse. Palestinians could have easily been resettled around the world or locally integrated in the countries to which they fled. But anti-Zionist fanaticism, which required their flight, also insisted on their continuing degradation. Palestinians were kept in camps, denied regular employment, brutalized by terrorists, indoctrinated into suicide bombing, all in the pursuit of hatred of the Jewish state.

Palestinians claim a right of return which demographically Israel can not grant without self destruction. Palestinians want an apology from Israel for the wrongs that they have suffered that Israel can not give without apologising for its own existence. And they want financial compensation from Israel for wrongs for which Israel is not responsible.

The tendency of Israel in negotiations has been to avoid the whole issue and talk instead about other matters such as what the boundaries of Israel in a final peace agreement would be. Yet, this avoidance strategy, needless to say, does not satisfy the Palestinians and goes nowhere.

Indeed, one reason, perhaps the main reason, Israel has avoided embracing the issue of justice for Jews from Arab countries is that it would mean abandoning this avoidance strategy. The Government of Israel, when announcing a renewed effort to register claims of Jewish refugees, in February 2003 observed that:

“for years successive Israeli governments preferred to ignore the issue of property claims by immigrant from Arab countries, mostly due to the mistaken assumption that this would prevent claims by Palestinians.”

i) False claims

Does this avoidance strategy make sense? There are different ways of dealing with the claims of Palestinians. But if the last sixty years has taught us anything, it is that these Palestinian claims can not be ignored. Peace in the Middle East will never be realized by side stepping or downplaying or attempting to marginalize these claims. Peace will be achieved only by confronting them directly.

The question is how? The answer is surely neither recognition by Israel of a right of return nor an apology nor compensation from Israel. These putative solutions are just other ways of restating and continuing the problem.

a) Right of return

Palestinians are a people with a right to self determination. However, that does not mean that they have a right to move *en masse* to Israel.

Israel was never the country of Palestinian refugees. The country in which Palestinians had status before they left was British mandate Palestine a country which no longer exists and no one wishes to re-establish, neither Britain nor the Palestinians, nor anyone else. Though that country was called Palestine, it was not the country of Palestinians.

The name of the country did not come from the name of the people. Rather it was the reverse. The name of the people came from the name of the country.

A people is not just a population. It is that and more, a group with a collective consciousness. Palestinians became a people after 1948. The Palestinian collective consciousness was developed subsequent to the creation of the State of Israel; it was forged in the refugee camps after the population left Palestine, not before in the land of Palestine.

Nor was British mandate Palestine even an Arab country. It was one of the many components of the Ottoman empire dismantled after World War I. This component was a country both of Arab

and Jews, not just in fact, demographically, but also in formation, legally.

The mandatory power, Britain, had promised, through the Balfour declaration of November 1917, to divide this territory into two states, one Arab, one Jewish. That promise was eventually realized through the UN partition of 1948.

A right of return, in the sense of real migration potentially overnight of close to five million people who differ from the majority in culture, language and religion to a country of seven million is a fundamental violation of the right to self determination of the people of the receiving country. No country should be asked or expected to tolerate or absorb mass in migration of such a population.

Human rights are general. Either they belong to all human beings or they are not really human rights. There is a Palestinian right of return only if everyone has a right of return to the country which now has sovereignty over the territory in which their ancestors once lived. But there is no such human right¹.

My grandparents on my father's side left a part of what was then Russia and is now Ukraine. I have no right of return to Ukraine. The notion that respect for human rights requires me to have such a right is bizarre. Nor do Palestinian descendants of those who left British mandate Palestine have a right of return to the country which now has sovereignty over that territory, Israel.

b) An apology

There may be some elements of the Israeli political class hypocritical or desperate or myopic enough to apologize to the Palestinians for the faults of the anti-Zionist Arab leadership. But this sort of apology is empty words. It is impossible for meaningless words to lead to a meaningful peace.

An apology requires acknowledgement of fault, an admission that Israel had done something wrong. Yet, the historical record does not support a claim of systematic wrongdoing by Israel against the whole displaced Palestinian population. Some of those who fled British mandate Palestine left because of past persecution or out of fear of future persecution. Others left to avoid the cross fire of the war or to heed the calls of the Arab leadership.

The war was started by Arab invaders attempting to squelch the Jewish state in formation. It was continued by anti-Zionists refusing to acknowledge the existence of the State of Israel. Israel could not possibly apologize for this invasion and anti-Zionism. The apology would have to come from the invading Arab states, the anti-Zionist Arab leadership.

The Economist reported on October 2, 1948:

“Of the 62,000 Arabs who formerly lived in Haifa not more than 5,000 or 6,000 remained. Various factors influenced their decision to seek safety in flight. There is but

¹ See David Matas, *Aftershock: Antizionism and Antisemitism*, Dundurn Press 2005, Chapter Seven.

little doubt that the most potent of the factors were the announcements made over the air by the Higher Arab Executive, urging the Arabs to quit....It was clearly intimated that those Arabs who remained in Haifa and accepted Jewish protection would be regarded as renegades.”²

Time's report of the battle for Haifa (May 3, 1948) was this:

“The mass evacuation, prompted partly by fear, partly by orders of Arab leaders, left the Arab quarter of Haifa a ghost city....By withdrawing Arab workers their leaders hoped to paralyze Haifa.”

Historian Benny Morris wrote that the Arab National Committee in Jerusalem, following the March 8, 1948, instructions of the Arab Higher Committee, ordered women, children and the elderly in various parts of Jerusalem to leave their homes:

“Any opposition to this order...is an obstacle to the holy war...and will hamper the operations of the fighters in these districts”³ .

Morris further wrote that in early May units of the Arab Legion reportedly ordered the evacuation of all women and children from the town of Beisan. The Arab Liberation Army was also reported to have ordered the evacuation of another village south of Haifa. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said declared: “The Arabs should conduct their wives and children to safe areas until the fighting has died down.”⁴

The departure of the women and children, Morris says,

“tended to sap the morale of the menfolk who were left behind to guard the homes and fields, contributing ultimately to the final evacuation of villages. Such two-tier evacuation - women and children first, the men following weeks later - occurred in Qumiya in the Jezreel Valley, among the Awarna bedouin in Haifa Bay and in various other places.”

In his memoirs, Haled al Azm, the Syrian Prime Minister in 1948-49, wrote:

“Since 1948 we have been demanding the return of the refugees to their homes. But we ourselves are the ones who encouraged them to leave. Only a few months separated our call to them to leave and our appeal to the United Nations to resolve on their return.”⁵

While there are individual stories of harm and risk, the risk was not systematic. One can see that Palestinians were not at systematic risk of persecution from what lay in store for those who remained - more or less nothing. If those who left had legitimately feared persecution at the time of departure, then those who stayed and were similarly situated should have been persecuted. Yet, that is not what has happened.

² See Myths & Facts Online *The Refugees* by Mitchell G. Bard
(Middle Eastern Studies, January 1986)

⁴ Myron Kaufman, *The Coming Destruction of Israel*, (NY: The American Library Inc., 1970), pp. 26-27

⁵ *The Memoirs of Haled al Azm*, (Beirut, 1973), Part 1, pp. 386-387.

The Arab population who remained, about 156,000, were safe. 46,000 were internally displaced within Israel. The rest remained where they were at the outbreak of the war. All became citizens of Israel. That population now numbers over 1,400,000.

Israel can not apologise for the calls of the Arab leadership to their brethren to leave Israel. Only those who called on Palestinians to leave can apologise for that.

c) Compensation

Money alone is not the answer. Palestinians have already received billions of dollars from the international community. The money spent on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) alone, which is money spent exclusively on Palestinians, totals about half a billion of dollars a year (541.8 million US budget for 2008). Moreover, Israel has been a significant contributor to UNRWA, more significant than most Arab countries. From 1950 to 1984, Israeli contributions totalled \$11 million, double that of Egypt, three times that of Syria⁶. In 1994, for instance, Israel gave more to UNRWA than all Arab countries except Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Morocco⁷. So, through UNRWA, Israel has already contributed generously to Palestinians.

All that the billions of dollars poured into UNRWA has done is aggravate the problem by keeping Palestinians in a never ending unsettled situation. Throwing more money at the Palestinians as long as other elements of the equation remain the same is just throwing good money after bad.

Moreover, compensation from Israel would be an admission of wrongdoing. That sort of admission would suffer from all the defaults of an apology. It would be untenable for Israel to compensate Palestinians for the Arab invasions, for continuing anti-Zionism, for the calls to Palestinians from the Arab leadership to evacuate Israel.

ii) A proposed strategy

The fact that the claims of Palestinians to a right to a return, an apology or unilateral compensation are ill founded does not justify ignoring the Palestinian refugee issue altogether. The plight of Palestinian refugees has to be addressed.

There is a simple, obvious practical solution to the problems of the Middle East, one that has existed since 1948, the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel. Solving the peace puzzle is not figuring out the solution. The solution has always been sitting there waiting to be adopted. Rather getting to peace means getting the Palestinians to accept this solution.

Getting to acceptance of the peace solution ready at hand means getting Palestinians to abandon their anti-Zionist mythology. How does one do that? I suggest one way we can do it by bringing to the negotiating table the issue of justice for Jews from Arab countries.

⁶ <www.heritage.org>

⁷ <christianactionforisrael.org>

a) Refugee realities

Confronting the issue of justice for Jews from Arab countries means confronting these facts:

a) There was not just one refugee population consequent on the creation of the State of Israel, but two.

b) Both refugee populations were created by the same anti-Zionist ideology, the refusal to accept the existence of the state of Israel.

c) The Jewish refugee population was larger than the Palestinian refugee population. The Jewish refugee population was 856,000 from Arab countries and 57,000. The Palestinian refugee population was 725,000 (UN estimate).

d) The Jewish population at time of flight were treated worse than the Palestinian population.

Palestinian were not brought to court in mock trials and then executed because of their ethnic, religious identity. Jews were.

Palestinian girls were not kidnapped, forced to convert to Judaism, and then made mistresses of wealthy Jews. Jewish girls were kidnapped, forced to convert to Islam and conscripted into harems.

Palestinians were not subject to Nuremberg type laws which denied them work, took their possessions, seized their businesses, and stripped their nationalities simply because of their religion and ethnic origins. Jews were.

Palestinians were not beaten and killed by angry mobs without any semblance of state protection. Jews were.

e) Reintegration and resettlement meant that Jewish refugees, despite their trauma, could get on with their lives. There is no reason why Palestinian refugees could not do the same.

f) Though anti-Zionists often throw the epithet of ethnic cleansing at Israel, it is an insult without foundation, since Israel hosts an Arab population of 1.4 million. Arab countries and Iran in contrast have truly and literally ethnically cleansed their countries of Jews. The figures speak for themselves. A population of 856,000 at the time of the creation of the state of Israel in ten Arab countries is now only 5,000 souls.

g) Jews had a much longer history in the countries from which they were expelled than did Moslem Arabs, since they lived in those countries for centuries before the birth of Mohammed.

h) Anti-Zionist propaganda asserts that Israel is an outpost of Western European Holocaust survivors. A focus on Jews from Arab countries means staring in the face the fact that about half the Jews in Israel are either these Jews or their descendants.

i) The dispossession of Jewish property was so massive that Jewish refugees from Arab countries lost title to land five times the size of Israel.

b) The refugee definition

Justice means treating like cases in like manner. In context, that includes using the same refugee definition for both populations. But that is not what has happened.

Palestinians are not under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Rather they have their own separate international organization which bears responsibility for them, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Though both organizations use the term “refugee”, they define the term quite differently. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines a refugee as a person with a well founded fear of persecution by reason of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a social group who is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return because of the fear.

The *United Nations Relief and Works Agency* (UNRWA) definition of Palestinian refugee, for the purpose of registration and aid, encompasses:

- a) a person who resided in British mandate Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948 and who lost a home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict and any descendant of a father who met this description, and
- b) a person in serious need of continuing assistance who was displaced as a result of June 1967 and subsequent hostilities and any descendant of a father who met this description.

For the purpose of claims to compensation or asserting the claimed right of return, the definition of Palestinian refugee is even broader. The means component is dropped. There is no need to establish loss of a home and means of livelihood. There is no need to show the need for continuing assistance. For the purpose claims to compensation or asserting the claimed right of return, a Palestinian refugee is any Palestinian who was displaced as a result of the 1948 and subsequent Arab Israeli wars, including the internally displaced, and their descendants.

A UNRWA refugee need not have had a well founded fear of persecution to fit within the UNRWA Palestinian refugee definition. There is evidence to show that some of the displaced Palestinian population would, if UNRWA did not exist, fit squarely within the UNHCR refugee definition. But that was not the profile of the typical displaced Palestinian. If UNRWA did not exist, most Palestinians would not qualify as refugees under the UNHCR definition.

Because UNRWA has responsibility not only for the original displaced population, but as well, for their descendants, the original 726,000 have ballooned to close to five million. The overwhelming majority have never been in Israel nor in British mandate Palestine before Israel existed.

Moreover, even if some the original displaced Palestinian population would have, without the existence of UNRWA, fit within the UNHCR refugee definition in 1948, they would be unlikely to do so now. A person ceases to be a UNHCR refugee if the person:

“has acquired a new nationality, and enjoys the protection of the country of his new nationality”⁸.

Many Palestinians now under the aegis of UNRWA have acquired nationality of other states. Once a refugee acquires nationality of another state, legally the UNHCR has and can have no responsibility for the person. UNRWA is different. UNRWA responsibility for Palestinians continues even after the Palestinian acquires the nationality of another state.

UNRWA status is hereditary, but UNHCR status is not. Under UNHCR refugee law, each person, even each child, has to establish that he or she fits within the refugee definition. It is farfetched to suggest that the millions of Palestinians who never even caught sight of the land from which they claim to be refugees could meet the UNHCR refugee definition.

However, the converse does not hold. An equivalent to the UNRWA definition of refugee would apply, virtually without exception, to Jews from Arab countries. Virtually every single Jew who resided in an Arab country or Iran and who left since the creation of the State of Israel was displaced by virtue of the Arab Israeli conflict.

The UNHCR refugee definition is individualized. In order to determine whether a person is a Refugee Convention refugee, an individual determination has to be made whether that person has a well founded fear of persecution for one or other of the listed reasons. The UNRWA definition, in contrast, is generalized, applying to a whole group. As long as person fits within a few simple criteria, the person is a Palestinian refugee.

To respect justice and equity, one has to apply either an individualized or a group determination for both populations. It would be unjust to treat all displaced Palestinians as refugees using the broad brush UNRWA definition and to insist that each Jewish person displaced from Arab countries or Iran establish, on a case by case basis, that he or she fits within the UNHCR refugee definition.

Using the UNHCR definition for Palestinian refugees would not so much address the Palestinian refugee problem as define it out of existence, since most Palestinian refugees would unlikely fit today within the UNHCR definition. It is impossible to resolve the Palestinian refugee problem this way, through a legal definition which says that most displaced Palestinians are not refugees. That sort of legal argument may give the proponent some intellectual satisfaction. But it will not satisfy Palestinian refugees.

So, for the purpose of the peace process, the better definition is the broader one, the group one, which, in justice, must be applied to both populations. Refugees, for the purpose of the peace process, should be considered to be people formerly resident in British mandate Palestine, Israel,

⁸ Article 1C(3).

Arab countries and Iran who were displaced by reason of the Arab-Israeli conflict and any descendants of such persons.

c) A common understanding

Peace means having both sides sign a common treaty, agree to what they sign, mean what they sign. Peace means more than agreeing on borders; it means agreeing on vocabulary.

No Israeli government can ever, in a peace treaty, agree to a Palestinian right of return, to an apology, to compensation from Israel for displaced Palestinians unless the government does not mean what it says or does not say what it means. A peace agreement based on a hypocrisy is a recipe for continuing war.

Justice for Jews from Arab countries provides a way out of this impasse; it provides a common vocabulary which both sides can speak and mean. Both sides can say and mean that they suffered a tragedy, that they were treated unjustly, that they had to seek refuge in the hundreds of thousands, that they suffered dispossession and displacement, that they are entitled to justice and redress. Both sides could legitimately claim reparations from an internationally financed fund which would dispense compensation according to the same criteria, whether the refugees came from British mandate Palestine, Arab countries or Iran. Here the words, the principles, the meaning are the same.

Palestinians and Jews from Arab countries shared the refugee experience. A peace agreement which reflects that reality is an agreement both sides can embrace.

Palestinian negotiators have indicated informally that they have no objection to the principle of justice for Jews from Arab countries but that the issue does not concern them since they were not the perpetrators of the injustice. Historically, the drag on this issue in peace negotiations has come, surprisingly, from the Israeli side, not the Palestinian side.

The Israeli side has taken the position that it would be better not to raise the issue of justice for Jews in Arab countries during peace negotiations because it would require the Israeli side to take positions about Palestinian refugees they would rather avoid. Just as justice for Palestinian refugees, in principle, requires justice also for Jewish refugees, so too, justice for Jewish refugees requires justice for Palestinian refugees. Once Israeli negotiators even so much as raise the issue of justice for Jewish refugees from Arab countries, they have to concede there has to be justice for Palestinian refugees.

The notion that the issue of Palestinian refugees could be avoided has always been an illusion. Some Israeli political leaders have taken the position that Jewish refugees have been resettled by Israel; Palestinian refugees could be equally resettled by Arab countries without the need for the peace treaty to confront the issue of Palestinian refugees.

Other Israeli political leaders have taken the position that the very notion of a Palestinian people is false, since Palestinians share the religion, language and cultural heritage of their neighbours in the Arab world. This reasoning ignores the Palestinian consciousness of self, the right of

every individual, group and people to self identify.

These evasions have dragged down the peace process for decades. The issue for peace is not whether it must address the issue of Palestinian refugees but how. The principle of justice for Jews from Arab countries tells us how - through a just solution for all those displaced by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Palestinian leadership, by shifting the issue of justice for Jews from Arab countries and Iran off to other interlocuteurs, is minimizing its own hand in this Jewish tragedy. Jews were ethnically cleansed from the West Bank and Gaza as part and parcel of the same purge that swept through Arab countries and Iran. The numbers were small, about 5,000, but significant.

As well, the predecessor of the current Palestinian leadership was the Arab Higher Committee. The Arab Higher Committee, though not formally a member, was recognized by Arab League states except Jordan as the representative of the Palestinian Arabs at a time when the League endorsed a coordinated plan to enact anti-Jewish laws throughout the Arab world⁹. According to the Charter of the League of 1945, the representative of Palestine the League chose would "take part in its work"¹⁰. So, Arab Higher Committee, that is to say, the predecessor of today's Palestinian leadership, were accordingly part and parcel of the criminal conspiracy to expel Jews from Arab countries.

What this history means is that, when Israelis talk with Palestinians about justice for Jews from Arab countries, they have come to the right place; they are talking to the right people. They can not reasonably be told to go elsewhere. There would have to be a real substantive discussion once the issue is raised. If that discussion can be settled with Palestinians, it can also be settled elsewhere, throughout the Arab world. And settling that issue means also settling the issue of Palestinian refugees.

Those searching for peace in the Middle East have tried to open many closed, locked doors, without success. Justice for Jews from Arab countries is another door, another means of access to peace. It looks to be sitting there open. We should try to walk through.

E. Combating anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism has taken a new, virulent form. It is no longer just the old Nazi myth of Jewish world conspiracy, or even the neo-Nazi myth of Holocaust denial. Attempts to delegitimize Israel by accusing it of the worst crimes known to humanity have led to demonization of Jews world wide for their actual or presumed support for this allegedly criminal state.

A focus on justice for Jews from Arab countries deconstructs this delegitimization and demonization. Anti-Zionist mythology says that Israel is the perpetrator, that Palestinians are the victims. Jews from Arab countries and Iran, a second victim population of the same events - the Arab Israeli wars - a population which constitutes half the Jewish numbers in Israel, disrupts and contradicts this anti-Zionist picture. The spotlight on this other victim population shows person

⁹ John Quigley *Palestine and Israel: A Challenge to Justice* Duke University Press, 1990 pages 80 and 81.

¹⁰ Annex 1.

by person, story by story that the perpetrators are those who reject the existence of Israel, not those who assert it.

The charges laid against Israel are pure fantasy. But the suffering of Palestinians is real. It is true that it did not have to be that way, that this population could easily have been resettled. But it was not and it remains as a displaced population.

It is true that the continuing Israeli attempts to defend itself could have long ago ended if only Palestinians and the Arab world had accepted the existence of the State of Israel. But they did not and danger continues.

By supporting justice for Jews from Arab countries, we both acknowledge the need for justice for Palestinian refugees and shift the blame for the injustice inflicted upon them to where it truly belongs, to those who have rejected the existence of the State of Israel. We accept that Palestinians are victims; we acknowledge their suffering. Through the lens of justice of Jews from Arab countries we can see who the true perpetrators are - the anti-Zionists.

F. Making the UN Work

The UN has been obsessed with Israel. Israel is the target; the misery of Palestinian refugees is the weapon. In resolution after resolution, report after report, the suffering of Palestinians has been a club with which to beat Israel.

The UN anti-Israel monomania is bad for Israel, bad for peace and not much good for Palestinians. And it is a disaster for the UN itself.

The UN human rights system has been overwhelmed by anti-Zionism. Violating human rights regimes bargain immunity for themselves in exchange for anti-Zionism. The General Assembly dismantled one of the original elements of the UN, the Human Rights Commission because of its double standards, politicization and selectivity, its treatment of Israel as the world's worst human rights violator. Yet, the institution which has replaced it, the Human Rights Council is even worse, treating Israel as the world's only human rights violator.

The UN does not have to abandon the attention it gives to Palestinians in order to correct course. There all too many General Assembly resolutions every year dealing with displaced Palestinians and their descendants, about 130 over the years. Not one resolution has mentioned Jewish refugees from Arab countries. If the annual litany of resolutions about Palestinian refugees also mentioned Jewish refugees from Arab countries, the UN would, in one gesture, correct course, and re-establish credibility. Nothing would so quickly and so simply make the UN respectable again.

G. Conclusion

Rabbi Hillel asked, if not now, when? A confluence of events - the outpouring of refugee stories, the availability of new research, the continuing inability to achieve a peace agreement, the spread of a new virulent form of the old virus of anti-Semitism, the degradation of the UN -

has given the issue of justice of Jews for Arab countries a new relevance, a new urgency.

One way of arriving at a sensible solution is trying everything else first. That is what it seems we have done with the Middle East. Now that everything else we have tried has failed, it is time to turn to the option which makes the most sense of all, the pursuit of justice for Jews from Arab countries.

David Matas is a lawyer in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and senior honorary counsel to B'nai Brith Canada. At the London meeting, he was chosen Honourary Legal Counsel to *Justice for Jews from Arab Countries*.