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Sheerit's plan Photo:
Dudi Vaknin

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Minister to oriental Jews: Claim your reparations

Minister Sheerit preparing for D-day: Planning to counter Palestinian claims of refugees by placing counter-claims of Jews from Arab countries. '600,000 Jewish refugees left Arab countries and were absorbed in Israel. On the other hand, 200,000 Palestinian refugees did not assimilate in rich Arab countries where they live' he adds

Aviram Zino

Could the Jews who left countries such as Morocco, Iraq, Egypt and other Arab and Muslim states get reparations for the lost property they left behind? Justice Minister Meir Sheerit, himself a former refugee from Morocco, has announced the renewal of a campaign to document the legacies of those who came from Arab countries and record their claims.

The claims refer to property and other belongings that were left behind at the country of origin. Sheerit explains that "we are talking about hundreds of thousands of claims that could be used as a balance to the claims of Palestinian refugees asking to return to Israel."

During his first stint as justice minister, Sheerit established a special committee within the ministry designed to build a database for the documentation of the public and private legacies and properties of Jews who left Arab countries and to record the culture and heritage of Jews in those countries.

'They still live in refugee camps'

Upon his return to the post as the acting justice minister, Sheerit reintroduced the committee and was even able to raise the necessary budget for its operation. Sheerit emphasized the importance of these actions at this time saying that "If the State of Israel will not work on this project, it will never happen. If we wait for years, Israel may find itself in a position where the task cannot be completed."

Sheerit explained that "the Palestinians are using the refugees as ammunition against Israel. When the time will ripen for peace talks, Israel could present this data as a balancing factor to the claims of the Palestinians."

According to him, "about 600,000 Jews left Arab countries, where the vast majority of them arrived in Israel, a country which absorbed them and led them to full integration in the Israeli society. On the other hand, about 200,000 Palestinians left Israel and have not assimilated into the rich Arab countries where they live. In addition, the hundreds of millions of dollars which were given to them by the UNRWA did not bring to an improvement in their position. They still live in refugee camps in Israel and in the Arab countries including the West Bank and Gaza."

Minister Sheerit appointed Jean-Claude Nidam to head the effort of documenting the properties of Jews who left Arab countries who live in Israel and abroad. The effort will be assisted by more than 60 Jewish communities around the world which have already announced their participation in the campaign.

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