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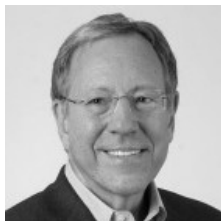
It's time to remember the Jewish refugees

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Israel is observing the first annual National Day of Commemoration to mark the “exile and expulsion of Jews from Arab states and Iran.” The law establishing this commemorative day – adopted by the Knesset on June 23, 2014 – in part requires the Minister of Foreign Affairs to instruct Israel’s embassies abroad to “increase international awareness and recognition of the Jewish refugees from Arab states and Iran and their right to compensation...”

This commemorative day could not have been more timely and more necessary. For while it is a long-standing need – indeed imperative – to serve as reminder and remembrance of the pain and plight of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran – it also dovetails with – and must serve as a reminder for – the UN and the international community.

It is sometimes forgotten – and often not even known – that the UN partition resolution was the first-ever blueprint for a “two states for two peoples” solution. Regrettably, while Jewish leaders accepted the

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resolution, Arab and Palestinian leaders did not, and by their own acknowledgment, launched a war of aggression against the nascent Jewish state as well as a war against the Jewish nationals living in their respective countries.

Indeed, the documentary evidence demonstrates a series of repressive measures against Jews, including denationalization, dispossession, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and murder, and forced expulsion.

This double aggression resulted in two sets of refugees: Palestinian refugees resulting from the Arab war against the Jewish State, and Jewish refugees resulting from the Arab war against their own Jewish nationals.

Yet the false Middle East narrative – prejudicial to authentic reconciliation and peace between peoples as well as between states – continues to hold that there was only one victim population, Palestinian refugees; that Israel was responsible for the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) of 1947-8; and that, as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has put it, as long as the crime of dispossession and refugeehood that was committed against the Palestinian people in 1947-48 is not redressed...there can be no peace.

Yet, this revisionist view of history ignores the fundamental fact that had the UN Partition Resolution been accepted, there would have been no 1948 Arab- Israeli war, no refugees, and none of the pain and suffering of these past 67 years. Indeed, the annual November 29 UN-organized International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People might well have been a day commemorating the 67th anniversary of the establishment of both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine.

Regrettably, as a result of this false narrative, the pain and plight of 850,000 Jews uprooted and displaced from Arab countries – the forced yet “forgotten exodus” as it has been called – has been expunged and eclipsed from both the Middle East peace and justice agenda for 67 years. It is a truth that must now be affirmed, acknowledged, and acted upon in the interests of peace, justice and history.

The United Nations also bears express and continuing responsibility for this distorted Middle East narrative. In a word, since 1948, there have been more than 180 UN General Assembly resolutions that have specifically dealt with the Palestinian refugee plight. Yet not one of these resolutions makes any reference to the plight of Jewish refugees.

There are ten major UN agencies expending billions of dollars on behalf of Palestinian refugees. But, there is not one UN agency – nor any money expended – on behalf of Jewish refugees. The entire year 2014 has been established as an International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People – but not one day for the Jewish People. So much for equal justice.

Thus the question: How do we rectify this historical – and ongoing – injustice?



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First, the time has come – indeed it is long past – to restore the plight and truth of this forgotten, forced exodus of Jewish refugees to the Middle East peace and justice narrative. Indeed, the UN should take the lead in establishing a center of documentation and research to tell the 850,000 untold stories of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

Second, remedies for victim refugee groups – including rights of remembrance, truth, justice and redress, as mandated under human rights and humanitarian law – and referenced in UN World Refugee Day and especially for Palestinian refugees – must now be invoked for Jews displaced from Arab countries.

Third, in the manner of duties and responsibilities, each of the Arab countries – and the Arab League – must acknowledge their role and responsibility in their double aggression of launching a war against Israel and their human rights violations against their respective Jewish nationals. The culture of impunity must end.

Fourth, on the international level, the UN General Assembly – in the interests of peace, justice and equality before the law – should include reference to Jewish refugees as well as Palestinian refugees in its annual resolutions; the UN Human Rights Council should address, as it has yet to do, the issue of Jewish as well as Palestinian refugees; UN agencies dealing with compensatory efforts for Palestinian refugees should also address compensation for Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

Fifth, the annual November 29 commemoration by the United Nations of the international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people should be transformed into an international day of solidarity for a “two states for two peoples day” – as the initial 1947 UN partition resolution intended – and including solidarity with all refugees created by the Israeli conflict.

Sixth, jurisdiction over Palestinian refugees should be transferred from UNRWA to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. There was no justification then – and still less today – for the establishment of a separate body to deal only with Palestinian refugees, particularly when UNRWA has been itself compromised by its revisionist teaching of the Middle East peace and justice narrative.

Seventh, any bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations – and any and all discussions on the Middle East by the European Union, the Quartet, or any US proposed framework for peace agreements – which one hopes will presage a just and lasting peace – must include Jewish refugees as well as Palestinian refugees in an inclusive joinder of discussion.

Significantly, some Governments and Parliaments have made welcome progress on this question, such as the U.S. Congress in adopting legislation recognizing the plight of Jewish refugees and requiring that the issue be raised in any and all talks on Middle East peace. Recently, the Canadian government affirmed the Canadian Parliament's recommendation for the recognition of the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. Democratic parliaments should hold hearings on the issue to ensure public awareness and action, to allow for victims' testimony, and to right the historical record.

The exclusion and denial of rights and redress to Jewish refugees











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from Arab countries continues to prejudice authentic negotiations between the parties and a just and lasting peace between them. 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.

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