

United States Department of State

*Assistant Secretary of State for
Near Eastern Affairs*

Washington, D.C. 20520-6258

May 23, 2001

Ms. Desiré L. Sakkal
Mr. Joseph E. Mosseri
The Historical Society of Jews from Egypt
P.O. Box 230445
Brooklyn, New York 11223

Dear Ms. Sakkal and Mr. Mosseri,

I have been asked to respond to your March 20, 2001 letter to President George W. Bush regarding Jewish religious articles and documents in Egypt.

First, permit me to assure you that the U.S. Embassy in Cairo is aware of the issue and has addressed it with Egyptian Government officials and members of the Cairo Jewish community. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer is in frequent contact with the leadership of the Jewish community, particularly Mrs. Carmen Weinstein. Mrs. Weinstein has an ongoing dialogue with senior Egyptian officials regarding the artifacts in question. She and Egyptian officials advise us that the designation of these artifacts as antiquities (which may not be removed from Egypt) accords fully with the wishes of the local Jewish community.

We understand there may be approximately 100 Torah scrolls in Egypt, of which approximately half are stored in less-than-ideal conditions. The Embassy has raised with leaders of the local Jewish community the possibility of sending at least some of the scrolls to be archived properly in the U.S. for the good of the material. Local community leaders do not favor this idea and have expressed the strong preference that the artifacts not leave Egypt.

We greatly appreciate your interest and understand your concern, but do not believe the U.S. Government can intervene in this matter, given the expressed sentiments of the local Jewish community.