

The Departure and Expulsion of the Jewish communities from Arab Countries and Iran

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In June 2014, the Knesset enacted the "Day to mark the departure and deportation of the Jews from Arab countries and Iran" law. The purpose of the law as it worded is to raise awareness "regarding the Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran and their rights to compensation". This law follows on from the "Law to Protect the Rights of Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries and Iran to Compensation" enacted in March 2010, according to which "as part of negotiations to achieve peace in the Middle East, the government will include the issue of providing compensation for the loss of property to Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran, including property that was owned by a Jewish community in these countries".

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, extensive and vibrant Jewish communities lived and worked for more than a thousand years, which created cultural and economic ties with the countries of the region and among themselves. During the Middle Ages, these communities constituted the largest, active and significant part of the Jewish people.

With the rise of Islam in the 7th century, the legal status of the Jews changed and they were defined as second-class subjects with the status of dependents (Dhamma). The status of the Dhamma was imposed on the members of the monotheistic religions under the rule of Islam (including Christians and Zoroastrians), being part of the "people of the book" (Ahl al-Khattab). By virtue of their status as proteges, the Jews were allowed to continue to hold to their religion, and to manage their community life independently, in exchange for the payment of the 'Jizya' - skull tax, and a series of restrictive laws regarding their clothing, religion, livelihood and living conditions.

Despite the discriminatory Dhamma laws, the Jews in Islamic countries managed to lead a fruitful religious and community life and even create spiritual works that are still a fundamental heritage assets of the entire Jewish culture. However, despite the patronage granted to them, the Jewish communities in these countries also knew difficult periods of destruction and persecution. The lives of the Jews in the countries under Islamic rule were fragile and subject to the whims of various rulers and regimes, and as a result were subject to a constant tension between belonging and living together with their environment and between alienation and persecution.

In the middle of the 19th century, there were fundamental changes in the organization of the Ottoman Empire, within whose borders most of the Islamic Jews lived. Influenced by the rise of nationalism in Europe, the Ottoman Empire enacted a set of laws known as the Tanzimat . As part of the Tanzimat laws, the Dhamma laws were abolished and

the Jews were granted, at least in law, legal and social equality as citizens of the state and not as members of the Jewish community.

During this period, the golden age of the Jews of the Arab countries began. Along with the improvement in their legal status thanks to the colonial conquests of Great Britain, France and Italy in the Middle East and North Africa, the legal status of the Jews was strengthened and a process of blossoming and prosperity began in the lives of most of the Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East. The situation of the Jews improved in almost every field: in law and business, in culture and art, in the press and in government. Just as at that time there was a Jewish flourishing in Vienna, Berlin and Budapest, so the Jewish communities flourished in Baghdad and Casablanca, Alexandria and Tripoli, and their members made a considerable contribution to the prosperity of the Arab societies in which they lived.

A noticeable turn in the status of the Jews in Islamic countries occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, with the rise of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic national movements that sought to emphasize what unites the various Arab countries. The elite of Arab nationalism, which in some countries was also influenced by Italian fascism and German Nazism, at the same time as the development of the Israeli-Arab conflict in the Land of Israel, led to the undermining of the status of the Jews in these countries. Physical attacks, pogroms and acts of violence became more and more frequent. For example, on the Shavuot holiday of 1941, a two-day pogrom was held among the Jews of Iraq ("Hafarhud") in which at least 180 Jews were murdered and thousands were injured. In Tripoli, Libya, a four-day pogrom took place in November 1945, during which 133 Jews were murdered, thousands were injured, synagogues were vandalized and shops were set on fire.

After the approval of the partition plan by the United Nations on November 29, 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the vulnerability of Jews throughout the Middle East and North Africa increased. Although at various stages, many Jews asked for nothing but to be allowed to be loyal citizens, the Muslim environment, in some countries, saw them as a fifth column, and the enemies of the people. Judaism was identified with Zionism and the Jews were considered enemies. In some countries, Jews were imprisoned and tortured, fired from their jobs, their property confiscated or nationalized, and many were even murdered.

For example, in Damascus, Syria, 13 Jews were murdered in August 1948, and in the city of Aleppo, shops, offices and synagogues were looted. In the port city of Aden in Yemen, about 100 Jews were murdered in riots that lasted for three days in December 1947. In Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt, dozens of Jews were murdered and hundreds were injured in riots and acts of sabotage in the summer of 1948. At the same time, a massacre occurred in the cities of Oujda and Jarada in Morocco, where 42 Jews were murdered. As a result, in all Arab countries the Jews found themselves in a situation where they could no longer stay there. The general Muslim society made it clear to them in different ways that they were no longer welcome and in some cases even expelled them.

This reality of pushing the Jews away from the environment and the social mechanisms in which they lived and worked, together with the possibility of realization the deep

attraction factors to the Land of Israel such as the attachment to the Land, Zionism and Messianic hopes, were the background for the mass exodus of the Jews from Arab countries. The numerical data tell the story: in 1945 about 1,000,000 Jews lived in the Islamic countries, in 1966 about 260,000 Jews lived in these countries, in 1975 about 150,000 Jews, and today only a few thousand Jews live in all these countries.

From these data, the outlines of a unique and unusual phenomenon are drawn: between the end of World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel, and up to the present day, the Arab countries and Iran were almost completely emptied of their Jewish inhabitants. In one of the countries, the presence of Jews was greatly reduced, while in others, it disappeared completely. For example, in Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Iraq, there is no vestige of the magnificent Jewish communities that existed there for hundreds of years.

These Jews left and were deported to different countries, but the fact that now, with the establishment of the State of Israel, had a special role. To distinguish from the past in which the Jews were forced to continue living under the rule of Islam despite their inferior legal status and despite the constant humiliations that were inflicted on them, a new horizon and an opening for hope opened up for them. The State of Israel, for its part, also worked to absorb about 70% of the Jews of Arab countries and Iran.

The large concentration of immigrants from Islamic countries and their descendants in the State of Israel may promote a deep historical reconciliation between Israel and its neighbors. Real recognition by Arab countries and Iran of the historical role played by Jews in Islamic countries throughout the ages may promote understanding between Jews and Muslims and ensure the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, through peace agreements based on mutual respect and recognition.

