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# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 7, 2013**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Good morning. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the situation of Jewish refugees from the Middle Eastern nations.

I want to welcome Shimon Fogel, who is the chief executive officer for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. Welcome, sir. I'm glad to have you here today.

By video conference from Budapest, Hungary, we have Gina Waldman, who is the chair of Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa. I understand, Gina, that you also set up the video conference on your own. You've made it easier for us. Thank you for doing that.

We'll get started.

We'll start with you, Shimon, and then we'll go to Gina. We'll do the opening testimony and we'll spend the next hour following up with some questions.

Shimon.

**Mr. Shimon Fogel (Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking the government for taking the unprecedented and essential step of raising this important issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries here in the foreign affairs committee.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs applauds this committee's efforts. We encourage all of its members to carefully consider the testimony before them and join together in recommending official recognition of the persecution and displacement of over 850,000 Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. Previous witnesses set out the historical facts surrounding this issue. Our focus today will be on the Canadian dimension.

Two refugee populations were created as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, one Palestinian and the other Jewish. Unfortunately the plight of Jewish refugees has been completely omitted from Canada's Middle East policy, while that of the Palestinians features prominently. It's essential that policy-makers correct this imbalance. Equitable consideration of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is a necessary component for any just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. It's important to note that achieving peace in the Middle East is not a zero-sum game. The rights and claims of one group need not come at the expense of or displace those of the other.

Much of the peace process is about validation, of the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state and the recognition of the Palestinians as a people. Redress for Jews displaced from Arab countries is another example of this and needs to be included for true and lasting peace to be achieved.

To be clear, the purpose of incorporating the historic claims of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is not to diminish or compete with the claims of Palestinian refugees. The inclusion of the issue of Jewish refugees is meant to complete, not revise, the historical record. The omission of the experience of Jewish refugees from Arab countries from Canadian foreign policy is all the more baffling given how much was known by the Government of Canada throughout the evolution of their plight.

By March 1949, Canadian diplomats were reporting that many thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing North Africa were pouring into Palestine. Just parenthetically, Canadian archives have all of the cables and documents, which we would be happy to share with any committee members afterwards as the primary text that serves the basis of this presentation.

By March 1952, the Government of Canada received reports that Israel had absorbed over 300,000 Jews from Arab countries, including 120,000 from Iraq and another 50,000 from Yemen.

Following months of requests from one of our predecessor organizations, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Canadian government decided in August 1956, "in view of the urgent humanitarian considerations involved", to recommend waiving the normal security procedures and to facilitate the movement of North African Jews to Canada. That resulted in approximately 25,000 Jews coming to Canada from Morocco as part of the mass migration of over 200,000 Jewish Moroccans between 1948 and 1967.

In December 1956, the Department of External Affairs received diplomatic cables describing the expulsion of Egyptian Jewry. Those Jewish Egyptians who did not have a second citizenship and had been rendered stateless by the discriminatory 1926 nationality code, which impacted on approximately 50% of the 75,000 Jews living in Egypt, were faced with a horrific dilemma. The cables to External Affairs reported that Jews without nationality were given a choice between leaving Egypt or being sent to a concentration camp.

Jews would receive a visit by some official who would intimidate them into signing a declaration of intention to leave Egypt, which would then result in a cancellation of residence permits and then force them to leave the country.

•(1110)

In response to these reports, a memorandum to the Minister of External Affairs, sent in December 1956, stated:

What we have in mind is that a sensible principle to accept would be that Jewish refugees wishing to go to Israel should do so and that those not wishing to go to Israel should be accommodated elsewhere in the free world, including Canada.

Six days later, External Affairs received another cable detailing a new emergency concerning the movement of 10,000 Jews from Egypt. The cable notes that Greece had offered asylum to an indefinite number, and that the only international agency involved at the time was the International Red Cross. In February 1957 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees deemed the Egyptian refugees eligible for UN protection.

Canadian cables from elsewhere in the region continued to tell a similar story into the following decade. On May 4, 1964, a memorandum from the Canadian Embassy in Switzerland to the Undersecretary of State of External Affairs spoke of apartheid conditions facing the Jews in Tunisia.

Even as late as March 1973, diplomats were expecting an increase in Jewish immigration to Canada from Morocco, "possibly more rapidly and dramatically than we would wish, as new Moroccan measures are being implemented in the months ahead that will force all those unwanted people to seek a new home".

Yet despite all of this accumulated evidence, despite the tens of thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab countries who found asylum in Canada, the official policy of successive governments has only recognized the displaced Palestinians. This remains the status quo today.

A quick review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's website shows absolutely no reference whatsoever to Jewish refugees from Arab countries. In the section that defines our official policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, consideration of Palestinian refugees features prominently, while Jewish refugees are ignored.

The current imbalance in Canadian policy stands in sharp contrast to the leadership role Canada has played on the refugee file since the inception of the Middle East peace process as gavel holder of the multilateral refugee working group. A product of the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the working group has served as a complement to bilateral negotiations and a forum for discussing longer term issues and possible contributions from the international community to an effective resolution of the refugee issue. As gavel holder, Canada is uniquely placed to raise the profile of the Jewish refugee issue and to ensure that it is given the fair consideration it merits among all parties engaged in the pursuit of a durable peace.

Official incorporation of the Jewish refugee issue into Canadian foreign policy will signal to the world at this important juncture that Canada is ready to take the lead on this central issue and to foster a comprehensive resolution of all refugee claims.

Again, it's important for me to be absolutely unambiguous: We are not advocating for Palestinian refugee issues to feature less prominently. It is a central issue to resolving the conflict, and of that there's no doubt. However, as things currently stand, Canada's

policy regarding Middle East refugees is not equitable and needs to be addressed.

It does not detract from the Palestinian refugee issue one iota to also account for the Jewish refugees and reflect their experience. Quite the opposite is true. By being inclusive, Canada's policy more accurately reflects the full reality of the refugee issue and is better oriented toward the comprehensive, final status peace it is supposed to encourage.

Prime Minister Paul Martin was the first world leader outside of the United States to raise this important issue. In a June 3, 2005 media interview, Martin stated:

A refugee is a refugee, and the situation of Jewish refugees from Arab lands must be recognized. All refugees deserve our consideration as they have lost both physical property and historical connections.

Ladies and gentlemen, the study you're undertaking is a groundbreaking initiative that, while worthy of applause, will only represent a meaningful initiative if it leads to a formal recognition of Jewish refugees in Canada's foreign policy. If we're serious about resolving the refugee issue in the Middle East, we must be true to our own values and enshrine in our official policy that a refugee is a refugee, regardless of ethnic or religious background.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

•(1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to Ms. Waldman, for 10 minutes.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman (President, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa):** I'd like to express my gratitude to the Canadian committee on foreign affairs and international development for calling this hearing. It is my hope that the current Canadian government will advance the rights of Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa.

I am a Jewish refugee from Libya and the co-founder of JIMENA, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, an organization seeking to educate and advocate on behalf of over 850,000 Jewish refugees from the region. Today I would like to share my story, just as I told it to the United States congressional human rights caucus.

I am here to break the silence surrounding the expulsion of nearly one million Jews indigenous to the Middle East. Jews had lived in my native Libya and the rest of the region for over 2,000 years. When I was born in 1948, there were about 36,000 living in Libya; by 1967 there were only 6,000; and today, ladies and gentlemen, my whole community is extinct.

I grew up in a middle-class Jewish community. My father, Rahmin Bublil, imported oil equipment for companies. My father often spoke of the 1945 Mora'ot, a pogrom that took place in Tripoli, when anti-Jewish mobs took to the streets and murdered over 145 Libyan Jews. He buried the severed bodies of his own friends. During the pogrom, my mother escaped the mobs by running from one rooftop to another until a Christian woman saved her life.

When I was born, the Jewish community of Tripoli constituted almost 30% of the total population of the city. My family had lived in Libya for over two millennia, but we were denied citizenship. We were denied basic rights. We were denied the right to travel and to have passports. All of these rights were given to all Libyan Muslims.

The first time I experienced hate and intolerance was in 1954 when I was six years old. I witnessed an arithmetic lesson at the local madrasa school. The teacher turned to the blackboard and said to the little six-year-old Muslim girls, "If you have 10 Jews and you kill five of them, how many Jews do you have left to kill?" I was six years old and completely traumatized. That was a very painful experience for me as a child: my first taste of anti-Jewish hatred.

Our Jewish community was forbidden to leave the country. We were denied citizenship. We were denied passports. We were denied the right to travel, yet we had to live in this very anti-Jewish environment. In order to cope, we lived in denial and pretended that everything was going to be okay.

On June 6, 1967, the Six Day War broke out between Israel and its five Arab neighbours. I was 19 years old. In Tripoli and Benghazi, mobs took to the streets and shouted, "*Edbah el Yehud, Edbah el Yehud*", "slaughter the Jews". Armed with bottles of gasoline, the mob took to the streets, surrounded Jewish homes and businesses, and burned many of them. Many Jews were killed.

At the time of the riots, I was at work, unable to go home. My British employer hid me in his garage. I was temporarily safe but consumed by fear. While I was in hiding, mobs burned my father's warehouse and were about to burn my own home when a Muslim neighbour stopped the mob outside, which had already poured gasoline all around the building. This righteous Muslim saved my family's lives. I will be eternally grateful to the honourable and kind Muslim who stood up against evil.

● (1120)

One month after the Six-Day War broke out, I rejoined my family from my hiding place. We were entirely devastated by the relentless rioting, the destruction that befell our ancient and helpless community.

Immediately after I was reunited with my family, the Libyan government ordered the expulsion of all the Jews and the confiscation of all of our property. We were being expelled from the country we had lived in for over 2,000 years. At first, of course, we were delighted to escape from the violence, but then our delight turned into anguish, which grew into fear, anger, and despair. We were being stripped of our property, all of our assets, our homes, and personal belongings. We had no money and no place to go. For days my family and I sat motionless around the kitchen table pondering our future. Where were we going to go? How would we live? We didn't have any money. Which country was going to take us?

A few days later, with one suitcase per person and the equivalent of \$25 per person, we boarded a bus to the airport. We were the only passengers. There were seven of us. Halfway to the airport, the driver and the conductor of the bus pulled over to the side of the road, told us there was something wrong with the bus, and one of them left to allegedly get some help.

I followed the conductor to a gas station, where he was using the telephone, and he refused to let me use the phone until I struggled with him physically, and with my hands shaking I was able to call Brian, my guardian angel. I spoke to him in English so that nobody could understand what I was saying. Eventually I said, "Come quickly, we are in mortal danger", and then I quickly hung up.

When I tried to leave the small office, I found there were three men blocking my way. Again, I struggled with them physically and ran back to the bus. When I arrived at the scene of the bus, I found the driver was standing by a pool of gasoline under the bus. He had siphoned off all the gas from the bus and he was holding a box of matches in his hand. The life of my entire family, seven of us, was locked in that one box of matches.

Eventually, Brian, my British rescuer, and a friend, came to the rescue. They helped us quickly to get in their jeeps and they drove us to the airport, and our lives were spared. I'm standing here today because two brave British Christians saved our lives.

The baggage handlers, when we arrived at the airport, started shouting at us, "*Al Yahud Kelabna Arab*", "Jews are the dogs of the Arabs". They refused to load our bags.

We eventually went to Italy, where we lived penniless and destitute. Seven of us lived in one room, a very small room. Because there was no place to sleep on the floor anymore for the seven of us, my sister and I for two years shared sleeping inside a bathtub. Please don't try it. It's not very comfortable.

We had endured the hardships of discrimination, intolerance, the loss of a 2,000-year community, our culture. We endured human rights abuses only because we were Jewish. The only thing we had left was our dignity. We mourned the loss of our own selves. We felt we had been lost to civilization, lost to the world, lost to history forever.

Despite our oppression, despite our suffering and humiliation, we rose above victimhood. We were victimized, but we never felt as victims. We rose above revenge. We focused on rebuilding our shattered life.

I have personally forgiven the perpetrators who tried to kill my family and me. I believe that hate is a weapon of mass destruction.

● (1125)

My story is not unique. It is the story of nearly one million Jews who were made refugees from nine Arab countries. Six hundred thousand fled to Israel, which became the largest and most successful refugee camp in the Middle East, because it integrated us and gave us dignity and hope. The remaining 300,000 were absorbed in host countries around the world. In all, fully 99% of the Arab world's Jewish inhabitants fled or were expelled from nine Arab countries.

Two years after my expulsion, I came to the United States as a refugee. My Jewish community in San Francisco integrated me. I devoted my life to advocating for human rights all over the world. I never felt like the victim. But you know what is the most painful thing to endure for me? The realization that the United Nations international community inoculated itself with apathy and indifference when it came to our plight. Our losses were ignored by the western world. The expulsion of nearly one million Jews from nine Arab countries had no political consequences.

The fact that these Jewish refugees were forgotten is not just a matter of history. Forgetting nearly one million Jewish refugees from nine Arab countries means that we have a grossly distorted view of the Middle Eastern refugee problem today. It creates political distortions with real relevance to the future of the Middle Eastern peace process. If we want to understand the refugee problem of the Middle East, including the Palestinian refugee problem, and we want to find a fair and just solution, we must take into consideration the plight of nearly one million Jewish refugees. Today, I appeal to you to restore our narrative to its rightful place in history, and to speak forcefully on the discriminatory treatment and the expulsion of the Jews from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region.

I would like to offer three recommendations to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Recommendation one is that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development forward a resolution for the consideration of the Canadian House of Commons, similar to the United States House Resolution 185, which resolved the following:

That—

for any comprehensive Middle East peace agreement to be credible and enduring, the agreement must address and resolve all outstanding issues relating to the legitimate rights of all refugees, including Jews...

...to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States to ensure that [in Middle Eastern discussion, any explicit] reference to the required resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue...must also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

A full text of House Resolution 185 can be found online.

Recommendation two is that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development issue a public statement that hearings were held on the plight and injustices of Jewish, Christian, and other displaced refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. The committee should indicate that it is examining ways to ensure that all Middle Eastern refugees are recognized and dealt with in a fair and balanced manner.

Recommendation three is that I urge Prime Minister Harper to issue a public statement on the need to recognize the plight and legitimate right of all Middle Eastern refugees, including Jewish, Christian, and other populations. I urge Prime Minister Harper to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Prime Minister Paul Martin, who publicly recognized the plight of Jews who were displaced from the Middle East.

• (1130)

In closing, may I say how much all of us former Jewish refugees from North Africa, and my organization, JIMENA, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, appreciate the way in which

Canada is pursuing this issue to ensure equity for all, and that rights and redress should be sought for all Middle Eastern refugees.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your testimony.

We're going to start with the opposition.

Mr. Dewar, sir, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for their testimony today.

I want to start with you, Ms. Waldman. You gave us some shocking testimony as to your own experience, particularly the two stories you told us about the mob attacking the residence where you were staying, as well as the math lesson you were subjected to.

I think these stories are important because they give people a reference point. I've been following the news with regard to what's happening right now in the city you're in, and astonishingly for those who have been following politics in Hungary as of late, we see that the threat of extremism and anti-Semitism, to be very blunt about it, is not gone.

The rallies there on the weekend of the extremist party are not only denying the Holocaust, they are saying extreme things about Jews, about Israel, and about Roma. I was very shocked to see the weekend events and learn from what I have read.

I ask you to give us some context as to the plight right now—and you're in Budapest—if you could share that with us, because our government made a decision recently to take Hungary off the list of countries of concern when it comes to extremism, I would argue. It simply said Hungary would be on a list of safe countries.

Would you conclude right now that Hungary is a safe country for people who are Jewish or Roma?

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** I would say that Canada, having such a wonderful record on human rights.... I would put Hungary as maybe the top anti-Semitic country.

Personally, I was humiliated to be so surrounded by police. The whole city has been blocked by police cars. It took me quite a long time to get here today, simply because I couldn't get in or out of any area that had anything Jewish, whether it's a Jewish neighbourhood or a synagogue.

If the Government of Hungary—and I know this is not related to what we're talking about—cannot come clean with its history.... They don't even teach anything about the Jews. Hungary had one of the biggest and most affluent Jewish populations in the history of European Jewry. Under the Nazis, 600,000 Jews were murdered. They didn't have to have any help because the Hungarian Arrow Cross made sure those Jews were being killed.

I would love to testify on that subject any time. I'm not Hungarian, but I think it's pretty scary here.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you for that.

I also want to ask you about the idea that equitable consideration of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is a necessary component of any just and lasting peace agreement. Just tell me a little bit about how you would see this in practice.

Perhaps I'll ask Mr. Fogel to add to that. Ms. Waldman, perhaps you could give us an idea of what that would look like, because that's a very important point you made.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** Right. I'm not a politician, but I understand that at some point President Clinton got an idea, which was actually implemented, to start a fund for people who had become victims of the previous war in Iraq.

What happened was when missiles, for example, were thrown at homes in Israel or other places, there was a fund that compensated such victims. The idea came up that it would be really great if international bodies got together, including, of course, the UN and the Quartet, so that when it came time to negotiate reparations or redress for the Palestinians, at that point there would be a fund that would be designated for all victims, whether they be Palestinians, Jews, or Christians, to be able to apply to the fund. That way it would not be a quid pro quo and it would not look like it—and it doesn't look like it—because we have every legitimate right to have redress as Jewish refugees, and the Palestinian issue should be addressed as well, rightly so. I think maybe create a fund that would allow everyone to tap into and to prove that they were refugees. It might take the politics out of it, so to speak, and I would advocate for that.

Of course, unless we make the issue known and unless we bring this to the floor of international bodies such as yourselves, then we won't go anywhere because you can't at the last minute come and say, "We just forgot something: the Jewish refugees should be part of this". If we get, for example, your government to start working on this, and then possibly the United States and Europe, then this becomes part of the narrative. Our narrative is just non-existent right now.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds left, if you want.

**Mr. Shimon Fogel:** I would simply add that I think it's dangerous for us to be prescriptive in terms of where this process would lead. If we recognize that the constructive resolution will come from direct negotiations, there are direct stakeholders who can deal with that.

I think for us the important issue would be to provide some validation. That, more than anything else, I think, gives people the sense that their experience is recognized, it's validated, it's valued, and it becomes instructive. Going forward, I think that one of the important things for the international community to be able to extract from the whole experience is what educational value this has for us in a generic sense as we look at the problems going forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to Mr. Dechert.

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to Rabbi Fogel and Ms. Waldman. Thank you very much for your appearance here today. I'd like to start with Rabbi Fogel.

First of all, Rabbi Fogel, I'll take just a minute—and I hope not to embarrass you too much—to say it's good to see you again and to congratulate you on behalf of all of my colleagues here at the foreign affairs committee for the award that you were presented with last evening by the Polish government for your efforts to keep alive the memory of Polish Jews who so tragically lost their lives during and at the end of the Second World War. It's a wonderful thing that you have done to keep that memory alive. It's important that people understand that history, and I know it's from that same sense of spirit that you're here today to tell us about the Jewish refugees from the Middle East.

This committee hears quite regularly from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and many other international human rights groups. We haven't heard much from any of them about this particular issue, about the plight of Jewish refugees. Do you know of any who have spoken out on this issue? Can you tell us what the positions of Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch are on this issue?

**Mr. Shimon Fogel:** I don't think they've taken out a position, and that's not especially surprising. The experience of Jewish refugees from Arab countries, post their refugee status, is remarkably different from that of Palestinian refugees. I hesitated at taking the committee into something that's a little off topic and very political, but the experience of Palestinian refugees is readily evident to everybody who cares to look. For the most part, those who haven't left the region have been limited in terms of the opportunities provided for them by the countries in which they find themselves, so the problem has grown and become exacerbated as generations move forward.

In the case of Jewish refugees from Arab lands, most have gone to Israel, but for those who have resettled in the west, their experience, post their refugee status, has been very different. So here it's more, as Ms. Waldman mentioned, about recognizing the narrative and the fact that a particular event, the creation of the State of Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, produced two distinct but equally compelling sets of refugees. One is recognized in the formal narrative of countries like Canada. The other is ignored. To bring balance and equity into the equation, to be able to move forward and say that a resolution addresses in a meaningful way the experience of all those who are impacted by the conflict, there's a need to bring in formal recognition of the Jewish experience.

• (1140)

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Thank you again to Rabbi Fogel.

**The former Israeli deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon said the following:** The problem of refugees is probably the most thorny and painful one. Everyone agrees without solving this we won't be able to achieve true peace or normalisation in the Middle East.

Do you agree with that statement? In your opinion, what needs to be done in order to bring about a broader peace process, and how does this issue fit into the equation for peace in the Middle East?

**Mr. Shimon Fogel:** There's no doubt that the refugee issue is central to any resolution of the conflict. To suggest otherwise would be to deny the reality, most particularly, of Palestinians who continue to suffer in refugee camps, not only in the West Bank or in Gaza, but in all the surrounding countries around Israel. There's an urgent need for that to be addressed.

I think there are important differences between the approaches recommended by some and those that, I think, are based on a correct reading of international law and a practical way of moving forward. Palestinians should be repatriated to a Palestinian state, in the same way as for the most part Jewish refugees are repatriated to the Jewish state. Those who opt to live elsewhere—there are many among Palestinian refugees who have made homes for themselves—are already experiencing third and fourth generation lives in the United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere.

That's similar to Jewish refugees from Arab countries who have also made their homes here in Canada as well as in Europe and the United States. For those in the region, the Jews already have a resolution. They're living in Israel as full citizens, productive contributors to the state. So our attention, naturally, is directed toward what do we do in order to enhance the quality of lives of Palestinians who are still languishing in refugee camps. But that becomes part of the resolution as opposed to a recognition of the reality of having been a refugee.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Thank you. I think I have only one minute left, so I'll quickly move to Ms. Waldman.

Ms. Waldman, first may I say on behalf of myself and my colleagues here on the committee, our condolences for the way that your family and your community was treated in Libya. I'm very sorry that happened. But I thank you for bringing your stories to our committee today and, through us, to the Parliament of Canada and the people of Canada. We'll make sure these stories are heard and understood.

Many people have asked what your purpose is in coming before our committee and coming before similar committees in other countries. Are you looking for compensation? Are you looking for recognition? What is it that you seek by coming to our committee today?

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** We definitely seek recognition. My organization doesn't really look for compensation, but we are looking to educate the public, so that our narrative be included. It's very painful for me when I'm speaking to campus students or anywhere I'm invited to address the issue. Young people, and especially educated people, Ph.D.s in politics, would turn to me and say, "What are you talking about? We didn't even know there were Jews in North Africa, let alone refugees". It's something that we need to address.

I'm here today, but 10 years ago I would have never dreamt that I would be here testifying. It is because of the work of people who have been bringing this issue to the fore that we hope to have a resolution. I cannot sit idly by. I fought for the rights of victims of the Pinochet regime.

I am a human rights activist. I won all kinds of awards for human rights work. It is time for me, personally, to fight for our people and to get recognition. It's very important that our narrative be included.

I also want to speak on the issue of Palestinian refugees. It's important that people know that in Lebanon today, for example, 300,000 Palestinian refugees are in refugee camps. They're rated as the poorest people in the country simply because the Lebanese government refuses to give them nationality, a permit to work, and considers them second-class citizens. They cannot even use public schools or public medical services. They're being discriminated against by the country that is hosting them except if they go to the west. That's really very sad.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to Mr. Rae, for seven minutes.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Let me thank our guest from Hungary, Ms. Bublil Waldman, and also thank Shimon Fogel for being here.

I hope nobody misunderstands this question. Mr. Fogel's presentation talked a lot about how Canadian diplomats were, of course, aware of the terrible discrimination that existed in a number of capitals and cities where Jews had been present for thousands of years and were leaving the country, and that until Mr. Martin made his statement, there was no formal statement from Canada about the refugee situation affecting Jewish refugees from the Maghreb and from other countries in the Middle East.

I have to say that in my meetings with Israeli leaders going back to 1979, I never heard from a single Israeli leader of any political stripe asking that the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries be included in the discussions about what the ultimate solutions would be. It didn't seem to be part of the Oslo discussion—unless I'm wrong—it wasn't part of the Madrid conference in 1993.

I'm not being argumentative. I'm just asking as to.... We have to recognize that this is a relatively recent issue to be placed on the political table not only in Canada but virtually everywhere.

I'm asking for guidance here. At what point historically did it seem necessary and appropriate to make this part of what would be a comprehensive or a political resolution of the situation in the Middle East?

Am I wrong? Have I missed something?

**Mr. Shimon Fogel:** Descriptively, I think, you're reasonably accurate. The only comment I would make about the premise of the observation is that I do recall that at the beginning of the Oslo process, when Canada was invited to serve as the gavel holder of the refugee working group, there were some focused discussions about what the scope of the working group's activity should be, and whether they should include consideration of Jews who had become refugees from Arab lands.

The conclusion then, one which, frankly, we supported, was that the working group was focusing its efforts on providing material help to Palestinian refugees so that they too could benefit from the peace dividends going forward, and to bring them in parallel with other dimensions of the peace process so that there could be some uniformity when it came time to move toward resolutions.

There was a deliberate decision to not address Jewish refugees from Arab lands, because they in fact had already benefited from meaningful resolution by their absorption into Israel or into countries throughout the diaspora.

Where I would offer some comment is that, first I think we have to divide it into two separate categories. As a Canadian, it's important for me to make a distinction between Canada's response to the reality of Jewish refugees from Arab countries to that of Jews who were facing similar challenges in Europe prior to World War II.

In the case of Jewish refugees from Arab countries, Canadian officials were very responsive. They recognized it quickly. They recommended steps to address it. The result was an expedited process of immigration to Canada. In that respect, there is no quarrel or grievance against Canada's approach.

We focus on somehow formally recognizing it, and that's really the nub of your question. In that regard, I would offer just the following thought.

The immediate instinct when confronted with an issue of refugees is to fix the problem, to provide them with material help, to support their transition into a safer environment, and so forth. With respect to Jewish refugees from Arab countries, that was less of an urgent call because it was resolved, whereas I think we would all agree there are acute problems confronting Palestinian refugees, who require attention today to materially enhance the quality of their lives.

It is only when we get to a point where we're actually starting to focus on what a comprehensive resolution looks like that we do an inventory of all of those outstanding issues that require some attention. From our perspective, attention to the Jewish refugee claims from Arab countries starts, and may end, with formal recognition of including that narrative that Ms. Waldman referred to.

President Clinton came up with some kind of formula. It's rather complex. I don't know that it's in the committee's interest to inquire into it. But I think in terms of allowing stakeholders to exit a comprehensive resolution of the conflict, complete and whole, it has to include some kind of validation of their experience.

I think it's in that respect that we got more attention to it over the last decade than previously.

• (1150)

**Hon. Bob Rae:** I was making the point last week. I think we had a very useful historical discussion on how the word "refugee" appeared in the 1967 resolution without any adjective in front of it. We can say legitimately that Resolution 242, which is the touchstone of a lot of discussion still today about how we're going to get to where we need to get to, is one where you can say there's no reason the world couldn't recognize the refugee situation involving the Jewish population in Arab countries. There's no reason that can't or shouldn't be done in that resolution.

My sense from listening carefully to what Ms. Waldman had to say, and I'm very appreciative of her description, is that there's a big difference between recognizing a narrative as part of something that needs to be done in the world, and looking at what the political issue is here with respect to whether or not we're going to get people to the table to discuss the issues affecting the Palestinians and the Israelis and the Israeli government. I think that's something we need to reflect on when we look at what our own resolution will look like.

It seems to me we do need to think very carefully. We can't draw an exact parallel between the situation involving the Palestinian refugees who still maintain their refugee status and those hundreds of thousands of Jews who left the Middle East—a great proportion went to Israel, and a large number went to North American countries and elsewhere—who are now in the second and third generation of being settled.

The narrative absolutely has to be told. That history has to be understood. The question of what political form that takes seems to me to still be a question that we as a committee need to consider as we go forward.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rae. That's all the time we have. We're going to finish with Mr. Van Kesteren for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to both witnesses for being here.

Like Mr. Rae, I must confess I knew very little, which would probably be an exaggeration, about your plight and what happened to the Jewish community in Africa and other places. I share with him that puzzlement as to why this hasn't come forth. I have an idea, and I don't want to put thoughts in your mind, but Madam Waldman, maybe you could expand on it. I'm somewhat reluctant and cautious to say this but it's almost the equivalent of an abused child who has suffered the pain for so long and then grows up and finally faces his or her abuser.

There's also an equivalent there too as the abused is very reluctant to take that responsibility and to accept the fact that this has happened. Is there a little of that? We talk about the Stockholm syndrome. I don't know what syndrome you would call this, but is there a little of that as well as to why this hasn't become foremost in our news when we discuss Middle Eastern policy and such?

Ms. Waldman.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** First, maybe it's not politically correct to say so, but the United Nations has never been a friend of the Jews. The United Nations has made sure that every single time they have made a resolution about the Palestinians—over 190, I believe—there has never been one single, solitary resolution about us. Twice the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recognized us as refugees, but never once has the UNHCR recognized us in any other way or given us the benefit of a resolution. When it comes to issues of refugees, people always look to the United Nations as being the expert. I think that has a lot to do with erasing, so to speak, our history from the face of the earth.

The other part, and again this is a personal opinion, is we never looked at ourselves as victims, and we felt very ashamed of our history. I can only speak from personal experience. When my family got out and they established themselves in Israel or in other places, they felt that what had happened to them was very shameful. They lost a lot of their dignity. They lost a lot of their pride. They lost their culture. They felt pain and they didn't want to revisit it.

In fact, surprisingly enough, in the same vein as you're talking about, my organization, Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, has just now started with another group, Sephardi Voices, a program where we are doing videos of witnesses, people such as myself from every Arab country. It took 40 years for us to speak out because it was so painful. That may not be the only reason, of course. But I know that at first my mother would not tell her story, and she has a much more dramatic story than I do. It wasn't until two years ago that I was able to convince my mother to sit in front of a video camera and tell her story.

I think part of it is psychological. It may not have been the right way to go about it. Did we do it the right way? No. Should we have spoken out at first? Yes. I sometimes was asked by Libyan Jews, "Aren't you afraid that Gadhafi might come after you?" After all, Gadhafi was alive while I was doing this work. I had received some threats, letters. Two of my Libyan Jewish friends who escaped to Rome were killed by Gadhafi. There was always this fear of speaking out. Unfortunately, I think that is also part of what happened.

I think because we were absorbed so successfully in our business ways, and because we have a life and we're not sitting in a refugee camp, the flame was not on all the time. After all, we are successful. I think Israel in many ways looked at it that way too: "Well, you're citizens of Israel now. We're proud of you. You're part of our accomplishment. You're no longer refugees." Or at least they don't look at us that way, but I think that legally we are refugees and our narrative and our rights need to be in a place where they belong.

•(1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I know Ms. Laverdière wants to ask a quick question, so I'm going to let her do that before we wrap up.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you both for your very interesting presentations. It's always a pleasure to see you, Rabbi Fogel, and to hear your wisdom and your intelligence.

I have one very quick question about Resolution 185, which was passed in the U.S. Congress. What was the follow-up to the resolution? What happened after?

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** Is that for Rabbi Fogel or for me?

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Yes, Mrs. Waldman.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** There is an organization called Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, and we are working with Congressman Nadler. A bill was written and we're working on getting it introduced. The bill has very similar language to that of the original Resolution 185, but it would be much more binding because it would be a bill. We are working towards that goal.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Mrs. Waldman, I was wondering also whether you're in contact or in cooperation with other similar organizations dealing with refugee issues.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** Refugee issues that regard this particular—

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Other groups of refugees.

**Mrs. Regina Bublil Waldman:** Yes. Actually, there are some groups in Israel that represent, for example, their respective groups, whether it's Egyptian Jewish refugees, Tunisians, Algerians, and so forth. We coordinate some efforts, and we also coordinate oral history through testimony of people who served in prisons, escaped, or whatever their stories [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

**The Chair:** I guess the teleconference is over.

**Mr. Shimon Fogel:** Although I know you are mindful of the time, perhaps I could just offer a 30-second closing thought.

It draws from what Bob Rae observed a couple of moments ago. I think we have to ask ourselves the question of how Canada can contribute in this particular regard. I would be really hesitant about our presuming to shape or to define how we get satisfactory redress. The contribution we can make is to bring closure to the conflict, to allow for all of the stakeholders to feel that they've been noted, recognized, and validated.

The contribution Canada can offer, I would suggest, which the committee could consider by way of a recommendation to the House, is simply the recognition of the reality of their experience and that it has to be noted in a comprehensive resolution to the conflict.

If we could offer that contribution as a template for other countries to follow, I think we would have made a meaningful addition to the dialogue toward peace.

•(1205)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We appreciate your time.

It doesn't look as if we've been able to get Mrs. Waldman back, so thank you very much. We're going to suspend the meeting to get set up for our next one.

•(1205)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1210)

**The Chair:** If members would come back to the table, we will get started.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Mr. Chair, I would like to say that I will present a motion to this committee next Thursday to have it submit a report to the House and request that the House give the Standing Committee on Finance the authority to separate Bill C-60 into six separate bills that could be sent to the appropriate committees. My motion will indicate which committees it could all be sent to.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ladies, welcome. Thank you very much for being here today. We have Lisette Shashoua and Gladys Daoud, both as individuals.

We'll start with Ms. Daoud, and after your testimony we'll take some time to go around the room. We'll turn it over to you, Ms. Daoud, and then we'll go over to Ms. Shashoua.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud (As an Individual):** Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, in 1970-71, the then Government of Canada decided to intercede on behalf of 17 very desperate Jewish families who were trapped in Iraq, with the objective of reuniting them with their Canadian sons and daughters. Your predecessors exchanged our freedom for bales of wheat with a country in desperate need of feeding its population. I owe my life today to that endeavour.

My name is Gladys Daoud. I arrived in Canada on August 28, 1971. I am a management consultant and a lecturer by profession. I have two degrees, a Bachelor of Arts and an MBA, both from McGill. I have two children, a lawyer and a director of finance, as well as two grandchildren. I consider myself blessed to be a citizen of Canada.

This is in great contrast to my life in Iraq.

I was born in Baghdad into a wealthy and prominent Jewish family. On my father's side, my grandfather was a wealthy landowner who owned sizable tracts of land all over Iraq. On my mother's side, my grandfather was a banker who was in charge of the country's treasury.

After World War I, Iraq became independent from the Ottoman Empire. Jews played an important role in the financial, cultural, and political life of the new country. Iraqi Jews occupied prominent positions in the ministries of finance and justice and in Parliament. Furthermore, Jewish lawyers were instrumental in drafting the constitution of the new state.

My grandfather sent my father and his two brothers to France for their education. My father became a doctor, and was lucky to return to Baghdad before World War II. His two brothers, one a real estate developer and the other a medical student, ended their short lives in a concentration camp in Germany, but that is another story.

My father returned to Iraq and established his medical practice after serving in the Iraqi army as a colonel. My parents' life in Iraq until the creation of the State of Israel was relatively happy, even though it was marred by tragic events that occurred at various intervals. For example, my paternal grandfather was murdered. His

murder was not investigated by the police, and his murderer was never brought to justice.

In 1941 the people of Baghdad, encouraged by the pro-Nazi government at the time, went on a murderous rampage in the Jewish quarter, killing close to 200 Jews and pillaging homes and businesses. My maternal grandfather miraculously survived despite being hunted by rebels trying to get hold of the key to the country's treasury. In spite of that, my parents endured and prospered.

After the creation of the State of Israel, the Iraqi government embarked on a policy of ethnic cleansing and persecution of its Jewish population. Prominent Jews were publicly hanged. Jewish businesses were confiscated. Import licences were cancelled. Jewish public servants were fired.

Jews were forbidden from leaving the country under the pretense that they would join the Zionist enemy and attack Iraq. Under international pressure, the government finally relented, and allowed Jews to leave Iraq provided they abandoned all of their assets in favour of the state. Out of 150,000 Jews, 140,000 left the country, abandoning all of their possessions with the exception of one suitcase of clothes.

Those who stayed behind were deluded optimists who believed that the violence directed at the Jews would pass, and that coexistence in harmony with their Muslim and Christian neighbours was still possible.

Things took a turn for the worse in 1963, after the Baath regime took power. Their first priority was to embark on an ethnic cleansing policy towards the Iraqi Jews. They banned all exit visas for Jews, and actively promoted a culture of hatred and incitement towards them.

I was a teenager going to school in 1967 when the Six Day War took place. I saw my entire world collapse around me. All Jews in Baghdad were declared spies and enemies of the people. The radio was blaring all day, calling the people to action to kill the Jews. Needless to say, we were terrified, and we had nowhere to go.

● (1215)

The government proceeded with a plan of total isolation and economic strangulation. Employers were instructed to fire their Jewish employees. Christian and Muslim co-workers and business partners were terrified of being associated with enemies of the state, and thus all Jewish-owned businesses closed their doors, and our school lost all its teachers. Our Muslim and Christian friends whom we grew up with no longer dared to speak to us.

My father's medical clinic was adjacent to the local government intelligence office. His patients were afraid of being seen there, so the only patients he treated were policemen and the intelligence officers who were treated free of charge while keeping a close watch on his movements.

As Jewish students, we were refused admittance to any higher education. The few students who were already enrolled in university were regularly beaten by their classmates while the teachers and administration turned a blind eye.

I finished my government high school exam in June 1967. I ranked second in all of Iraq and was immediately accepted into Baghdad University. In fact, I had also applied to McGill and MIT and was accepted at both of these universities. However, on learning that I was of the Jewish faith, my acceptance at Baghdad University was retracted and I was refused a passport to study abroad. For the four years that followed, I endured the life of a non-person and watched all my hopes and aspirations go to ashes as I sat confined to my room, between four walls, thinking of what other young people all over the world were doing.

I applied for a secretarial job at the Belgian consulate and was accepted. Three weeks later, I was called into the consul's office and informed very politely that although I was not being asked to leave, they had received word that my father would be imprisoned should I not leave immediately. Needless to say, I did just that.

My family's bank accounts were frozen, our property was confiscated, and we were only able to survive thanks to the money that my mother had the foresight to bury in our garden. We were forbidden to leave Baghdad. Our telephone line was cancelled, and we could not meet with other Jewish families since this could lead to an accusation that we were conspiring against the state. Our condition was desperate.

To make things worse, the government decided to publicly execute 14 Iraqis in 1969, most of whom were innocent Jews. I personally knew a couple of them who were students like me, unable to work or study and trying to keep busy by learning a foreign language. They were hanged in the public square and the population was given the day off and invited to gather and dance in celebration underneath the dangling corpses. I still have nightmares about being back in Baghdad and reliving the anguish of those days.

Those were not the only Jews who lost their lives. Every so often, a Jew would randomly be arrested, never to be heard from again. Their families to this day have no closure.

The situation was so desperate that we had no choice but to seek to escape by any means possible. Many left on foot or on the back of a mule, across the mountains in northern Iraq and into Iran with the help of Kurdish guides. Some were arrested and brought back. Those who were carrying any diplomas or valuables with them would try to flush them down a toilet so as not to provide proof about their intended flight. These secret departures added to the despair of those left behind. They saw their close friends and relatives disappear while they were left behind not knowing what the next day might bring.

On April 17, 1971, with one suitcase of clothes and some pocket change, my parents and I locked the front door of our home in Baghdad for the last time and started a long journey to come to Montreal to seek a new beginning.

•(1220)

I was free at last to make a life for myself. That day will remain etched in my heart and memory for all time. I am thankful for the many blessings our great country offers.

By the mid-1970s, most of the Jews were gone from Iraq. We owe our survival to all the people in the free world who demonstrated on

our behalf and put pressure on the authorities to intercede for our freedom.

Today there are five elderly Jews remaining in Baghdad.

The 2,500 years of history and Jewish tradition by the rivers of Babylon came to an abrupt and gruesome end. The religious shrines, artifacts, and books of learning that remain in Iraq should be the only reminders, except, as we speak, the Iraqi authorities are trying to deface these shrines and erase any reminder of the Jewish existence.

I hope this story serves as a reminder to all of us to remain vigilant and stand up against all incitement of hatred, racism, and discrimination. Let us always strive to uncover the truth and seek justice for all.

Thank you very much for your time and for the privilege to tell my story.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Daoud.

Ms. Shashoua.

•(1225)

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua (As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen.

For 25 centuries, Jews lived in harmony with the inhabitants and contributed to the economic, social, and cultural background of first Babylon, now Iraq. There were a few pogroms against the Jews in Iraq, most notably in 1929 and later in 1941: the infamous farhud incited by the Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem. In 1948, the State of Israel was created. Iraq, along with four other Arab countries, suffered a sore defeat on the front against Israel, so Iraq needed a scapegoat to justify this defeat. They tried and hanged the innocent Mr. Shafiq Ades as an Israeli spy. They hanged him in front of his house and forced his wife and children to watch. Three of his children live in Montreal today. Sixty-five years later, this family still carries the scars and the trauma of this inhuman tragedy.

I will now tell you my own story. My father was the son of a well-to-do, self-made merchant and property owner in Iraq. In the early 1920s when England decided to appoint a king in Iraq, King Faisal I, they chose my grandfather's house for him to live in. My grandfather, Shaul Shashoua, duly moved out and rented his house for a nominal sum to the king until a suitable palace was built for him to move into.

Up until 1950, there were approximately 150,000 Jews in Iraq. After the farhud and the persecution of the Jews by their fellow citizens and the government, and after the hanging of Mr. Shafiq Ades, Iraq stated that it would now allow the Jews to leave for Israel on condition they renounce their Iraqi citizenship. Nearly the entire Jewish population asked for this *laissez passer*. They were denationalized and their assets were frozen while they were still in Iraq waiting for their turn to leave.

Upon their departure they were searched and further stripped of their cash and jewellery, allowed one suitcase each, and only 50 Iraqi dinars to take with them. The Government of Iraq duly confiscated all their property immediately upon their departure. My father and mother, however, decided to stay and weather the storm along with around 7,000 other Jews. Things stabilized slowly in the country, yet Jews, including my sisters, left Iraq for various reasons, never to return. All those who left were eventually stripped of their Iraqi nationality and had their assets frozen. I, being the youngest, stayed with my parents.

I have to stress here the fact that we who chose to stay in Iraq despite all the persecutions had no connections with Israel, especially because of the total Iraqi boycott of Israel. Even drawing the Star of David was taboo, even in the privacy of our own homes.

The regime in Iraq underwent many revolutions and *coups d'état*, the last one in 1962 when the Baath Party arrived with Saddam Hussein. This party soon restricted travel for the Jews again. They froze the sales of our own property all over again. In 1967, the Six Day War broke out and Israel won the war. As a retaliation against Israel, Iraq tightened the screws on the now 3,000 innocent Jews remaining there. They cut off all our telephones. They refused to admit Jews at universities. They revoked all commercial licences. They instructed all businesses to fire their Jewish employees. There was no unemployment insurance in Iraq, so they had no money left to live on. They froze all our assets. Eventually they allowed us to withdraw only 300 dinars a month from our own bank accounts for daily expenses. Many Jewish children were fainting at school from hunger because their parents had no money left for food. When my grandfather passed away in 1968, my mother and grandmother were forced to pay the government rent for the house my grandfather built in 1927. They were paying for the shares my mom's siblings should have inherited, but now belonged to the Iraqi government.

• (1230)

On top of this, they started to go to Jewish homes at random, usually after midnight. They would search the house, vandalize it, arrest the father, the son, sometimes even the daughter. The accusation was always that they were spying for Israel.

It got to the stage that any time a car passed by at night, I would wake up, kneel, and pray that this car would not stop at our house to raise havoc in our lives. My mother and I bought sleeping pills to commit suicide if ever they came to arrest us.

In 1968 the random arrests intensified. Men were now tortured and forced to say they were spies. They were tied to ceiling fans that were turned to full speed. Some had their fingernails, toenails, teeth pulled out. Their genitals were electrocuted. Many died from the torture alone.

All these arrests and this torture culminated in mock Mickey Mouse trials in December 1968 and January 1969. The defendants were not allowed to have their own lawyer. The state appointed one for them, who further incriminated them as spies for Israel. They sentenced them and hanged them that same night.

When we woke up on January 27, 1969, to our horror we found out that 14 innocent men had been hanged. Ten of them were Jewish. At least three of these victims were less than 18 years of age. The

Iraqi courts jacked up the ages to make it legal internationally to hang them. All the charges were glaringly trumped up.

The Iraqi people, so hungry for blood, went into a frenzy of jubilation. Thousands were dancing and chanting and poking the dead men. Women were breastfeeding and entire families were picnicking in front of the dangling bodies of those martyrs. The radio was blaring that the country was now rid of their spies, and encouraged the public to continue denouncing the fifth column.

We were still attending university then, and were in the midst of mid-term exams, so we had no choice but to go to university that day. I was thinking, "Surely we are among the educated. Surely they are smart enough to discern that the whole trial is utter nonsense. Plus, they are our friends, our colleagues. They will surely sympathize. They'll understand." Yet to our surprise, when we arrived at the university, we were greeted with banners applauding what the government did and demanding more such acts. They were looking at us and laughing. The message was, "You are next." We were horrified, yet we were too terrified to show our grief.

Israel attested that those victims were innocent and not its spies. There was a world outcry following these fake accusations, and the Iraqi government defiantly answered that it had enough trees to hang all the remaining Jews in the country.

You can just imagine the sheer terror that dominated our daily existence after that horrid day. It was the blackest day in our young teenage lives, a day that is indelible in the memory of any Jew who was living in Iraq then.

Eventually, in 1970, a small window of opportunity presented itself to us. There was a temporary truce between the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the Iraqi government. The Kurds were willing to help us escape because they too were a mistreated minority and understood what we were going through. The Iraqi government decided to turn a blind eye to the Jews who were escaping, partly because of international pressure, partly because they were paid by Jewish agencies abroad for each one who left. Yet the big prize was still the assets left behind.

They still managed to terrorize us anyway, because from time to time they would perform mass arrests of entire families.

Seeing that there was no future for me in Baghdad, I decided to take a chance. I knew that by leaving illegally I was endangering both my life and the lives of my parents, who were staying behind in the hope of someday salvaging some of their now frozen properties. We were acting out of desperation.

I was among the lucky ones. I managed to escape with another family successfully. However, many of my friends were caught while trying to escape; some of them were even arrested twice. Imagine the interrogations, the torture, and the terror they went through.

I arrived safely in Iran in November 1990 and stopped in London on my way to North America.

•(1235)

I met many of my childhood friends and met some of my uncles, aunts, and cousins for the first time because they had left Iraq before I was born and were, as I have just become, banned from ever going back.

I finally arrived at my final destination, Canada, that wonderful utopia called Canada, where I was reunited with my sisters and even more family. We finally tasted freedom. North America was and is this haven where everyone is equal and free. We arrived in this glorious country where we were able to finally close an ugly chapter of our lives and start a new and fresh one.

I became a flight attendant with Air Canada. I was able to fly all over the world, except to Baghdad to see my parents. For 20 years, we could not speak to them because their telephones had been cut off during the Six Day War. The letters to and from my parents were censored and took three weeks to reach Baghdad. It took another three weeks to get an answer. I never knew if they were still alive from the time they would write the letter to the time I'd receive that letter. For 20 years I had that constant ache about my parents. It was like a scar in the heart that would never heal. It was also this constant worry about their welfare, well-being, and safety.

Finally, a miracle happened. After the Iran-Iraq war, they granted passports to everyone in Iraq, including the Jews. My parents were finally able to leave Iraq. The first time I heard them on the phone I did not even recognize their voices. It was a miracle that they finally arrived in Canada in 1990. We were finally happily reunited. We were with our beloved mom and dad, who waited 20 years in vain to sell any of their properties. My dad was 80 years old. He left everything he owned in Iraq and came out with nothing. All his siblings had long lost their inheritance upon leaving Iraq 40 years earlier.

They came penniless, but Canada offered them a haven to come to after all those wasted years when my parents lived in constant fear. They missed all the special occasions with their children, such as their daughters' weddings, grandchildren, bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs. My parents got to meet their grandchildren for the first time only after they became teenagers. They did manage, however, to walk me down the aisle when I got married to my wonderful husband.

It is a happy ending in many ways because most of us survived those harrowing times, but it does not mean that we did not suffer emotionally and financially and we still struggle to make a living while we have all these properties in Iraq that we cannot access. I would like to point out also that none of the Iraqi Jews who came to either Canada or the United States, or to England for that matter, asked for or received refugee status or privileges, including my parents. We all came as immigrants and threw ourselves immediately into starting new lives, into working hard, paying taxes, and enjoying, as well as serving, this glorious country that has so much to offer. It is a happy ending because we arrived in this wonderful country called Canada.

In closing, we pray that God bless Canada and the United States, these two great countries where we live free and normal lives, our new wonderful country and home that embraced us and that we are

privileged to be a part of. We hope to continue to contribute towards its growth and well-being. Amen.

Thank you, Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to start on my left-hand side with Madame Laverdière.

Seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much for those two moving stories.

[*Translation*]

They were extraordinary.

My question is almost personal.

Ms. Daoud, if I understand correctly, you still live in Montreal?

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** Yes.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** So, you are not too far from my riding. Maybe you even live in my riding.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** Which riding is that?

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** It is the Laurier—Sainte-Marie riding, which includes the Plateau Mont-Royal.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** Yes, I'm right near there. I can walk there.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I am honoured to have you as a neighbour.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I will come visit you.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you. I will be pleased to welcome you.

I would like to know how you came to Montreal. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to hear your whole story. However, I know you were admitted to McGill University.

How did you manage to leave Iraq and come to Canada? What is your story?

•(1240)

[*English*]

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** Shall I speak English or French?

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** As you wish.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I'll continue in English, and they can translate.

My brother was lucky to leave in 1963 before the Baath regime closed all exit visas to the Jews. So he was a Canadian, and he applied for us to be reunited. I'm very curious to go into the Canadian archives today and find out how this whole transaction happened, because it took three to four years.

Canada did not have representation in Iraq, so the ambassador would be in Lebanon and he would fly to Iraq and they would call us that day. We would go to the passport office and bring all kinds of documents and they would see us for five minutes. As soon as he would leave, our documents were all shoved in a drawer, never to be heard of.

It took Canada three years of trying to get us out. As I mentioned, there were 17 families that already had children here who were Canadian citizens and were part of this effort.

That's how I got out. Even when we left Iraq, we were not allowed to have a Canadian visa on a passport. I was a refugee. I laughed because I had no citizenship whatsoever. We had to go and wait in Europe until they could give us the Canadian visa on a passport, to be able to fly to Canada. That's when I activated my acceptance to McGill University, because I had been accepted before.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Those are very moving life stories.

I have two questions. First, how many Jewish Iraqi people or descendants are there in Canada now? Second, is there a forum or group where you can meet and share your experiences, which must be very traumatic?

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I cannot give you the exact number because I don't think we ever tracked that number. I can tell you that we are part of a synagogue in Montreal, a Sephardic synagogue, and there are at least 400 families. Would you agree?

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** There should be at least 1,500 minimum.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** Well, 400 families.

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** Yes, but there would be around 1,500 Iraqi Jews probably in Montreal.

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** There is a sizeable community also in Toronto.

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** Talking about a forum, we never talked about it, not even to each other. I think we were too busy trying to forge a life for ourselves. We are just starting now to each tell how we escaped. We're just starting to talk about it to each other, because nobody cared how anybody else left. We all cared that we arrived. We didn't care how we arrived. But it's becoming like a thriller now. Each one has a story. We are just starting to collect stories. There is no real structure; we are starting to hear it from each other.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** You were also saying that there are still five people in Iraq who must be very old.

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** One of them was our math teacher in Baghdad, in elementary school, so she must be way over 90 now.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Are you able to be in touch with those five people to see...? No. I see; it's all impossible.

I have one last question. You were also talking about shrines and monuments. I understand from what you're saying that some of them have been preserved up to now, but I presume some have been lost too. How do you see the future, and what can be done to preserve those monuments and shrines?

• (1245)

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I am part of an international committee to try to preserve those shrines, because, again, when the U.S. army went into Iraq, they were able to salvage a lot of the parchments, the papers, the documents that were confiscated by Saddam. They found them in a basement. They were flooded and damaged to a large extent, but they brought everything to the U.S., and they have them. They're holding them at the state department, so it's a tug of war. The Iraqi government lays claim to them, and we are trying to salvage them because we feel it's part of our heritage. We don't know; the

Iraqi government could put pressure and claim them for themselves any day, so we're trying to repair them and at least have an exhibition to be able to see the contents. These are just the documents.

Going back to the shrines, there is in particular the shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel. As in any other religion, whether Christian or Jewish, the Muslim religion came after, and they literally claimed a church. We know the Church of Constantinople used to be a church, but now it's a mosque. They would automatically erect a mosque on top of every temple or shrine that belonged to another religion. The tomb itself, up to two years ago we had some Iraqi friends who were able to take pictures to show the Hebrew writing on the tomb. We put pressure through articles in international newspapers, and then they stopped trying to deface it.

The population itself believes we were rightfully settled in this country. It's funny, because the first government that came after Saddam wanted to meet with us. I travelled to England to meet with the minister, who told us they wanted us to take care of our shrines, because they think that because we left there is a curse on Iraq and the Iraqis. He said that. That's why we started a committee to try to fulfill that, that we should try to at least take care of the remaining shrines in Iraq.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Brown, please, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I've got all kinds of questions, but thank you so much, ladies, for being here and sharing your stories. In our experience, we would associate these kinds of stories with the Second World War. We don't associate them with the modern age and our generation. It's out of our realm.

Ms. Daoud, you quoted "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down". This is not the first time that the Jewish people have had this story in Babylon, and it's reprehensible that it's repeated. It really is.

I have three questions. Two of them go together, and perhaps each of you can address them.

First, your story will always be your story, and nobody can take that away, but is there anything that would ever bring closure for you on this? Ms. Shashoua, you talked about frozen assets. The second part of that question is, are you looking for international governments to put pressure on the Iraqi government for repayment, to release some of that to the people who fled? My other question is, because of your own experience, are you concerned that your story is going to be repeated, if not in Iraq, somewhere else, to the same degree?

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I definitely think that history repeats itself. We've seen that over and over again, so definitely, to answer that. That was your third question.

The first question, do I myself expect redress for properties confiscated from my family? It's funny because I would say it took 50 years, 60 years.... As I said, my uncle had property in France and finally there was some kind of redress. We received some minimal sum of money from the Germans for property that he had in France. Will we see that? Personally, I have moved on. It is not an issue.

Where I feel very strongly is the question of justice. I feel it's been a unique situation where we suffered the same calamity as the Palestinians suffered of leaving their houses. We know how wrenching and devastating that is, except they have been kept as refugees. They're still forced to live in camps, refugee camps. We moved on. We have a happy ending, but the injustice is the same. We suffered great injustice, and I never hear about it. I only hear about the nakba and the Palestinian refugees. I've never heard anybody say anything about Jewish refugees and what they suffered.

• (1250)

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** Personally I would be very happy if we could get some of our assets back. We've had a very rough time financially, so why not, if we could? As Gladys said, I'm not counting on it, but I would love it to happen, no matter how small. No matter how small it is, it's going to be very large because both my grandparents were extremely wealthy, and that's the sad part. My parents sat there waiting for something to come and they wasted their lives.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Who do you think should take the leadership on this? Should the Israeli government take the leadership on this? Is there a government that you think should tackle this, or do you think it's the responsibility of the United Nations? Do you have any ideas where that should come from?

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** As the lady said, I don't think the United Nations would so much as try anything. I really don't know. I know international lawyers or something might, because there's a lot of money there. There is a lot of money in Iraq left by the Jews. It's not pittance. That's why the teacher is still hanging on to it, but once she's gone, I don't know what's going to happen. There is a lot of money left by Iraqi Jews. It's really a sizeable amount.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Is that confirmed? Are there legal documents that—

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** Yes, there are.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** What about refugees who are coming from other Arab countries? If we start in one place, we have to take it to the next. How do we make that happen? What does that look like?

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I think that now that the story is being told, and you've heard from Gina Waldman who is speaking for the Jews of Libya, each country is getting organized to provide the history, the stories, whatever documentation there is. You'll get a lot of support and help from the communities themselves to tell the story.

To answer your previous question, I feel I'm a citizen of Canada. My story belongs to the Canadians.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Do you have any comment on repetition of this situation? Do you see any danger signs? Please speak to that.

**Ms. Lisette Shashoua:** I think hatred should be stopped now. I think nobody is allowed to start inciting hatred. I'm seeing it seeping through, and it's terrifying. When I was in Iraq, I was safe in their country, but we came here and we thought we would never see

hatred or anti-Semitism again, and it's seeping through. That's the reality. I didn't want to say this publicly, but I'm happy I'm saying it.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Well—

**The Chair:** Thank you—

**Ms. Lois Brown:** May I simply finish?

We did have a committee that made an investigation into the new anti-Semitism we've seen. There is a report that was tabled in the House of Commons. Perhaps you'd like to have a copy of that to take a look at what our investigation brought forward and some of the suggestions.

I'm sorry.

• (1255)

**Ms. Gladys Daoud:** I would like to take one minute.

You are asking, what are the chances of this thing recurring and happening? Well, let me tell you, it's happening as we speak.

I hear every day that the Christians who are now a minority in all of the Arab countries are in the same desperate situation that we were in. In fact, they always said that after Saturday comes Sunday.

I hear about it. They keep getting in touch with me saying that their families are in desperate situations, that they're still in Iraq, they're still here, they're still there. So history is repeating itself and now the international community has to do something. We see it happening.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to finish with you, Mr. Rae, for seven minutes.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** I'll make a brief comment and then ask you to comment on it.

Mr. Chairman, the last couple of sessions we've had an extraordinary opportunity to hear the real experience of not only communities, but of individuals whose lives have been terribly affected by the politics of the whole of the Middle East, by this rising nationalism, this xenophobia which includes anti-Semitism and excludes all others. The dangers and risks of extremism, not only in the Middle East but everywhere, are in front of us all the time.

We've also heard about the importance of this group, these MPs, this House, understanding the nature of the historical experience, what has actually happened, because I think Canadians need to know the story. You are our fellow Canadians and we need to be able to share that story with people.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'm reminded of the fact that Rabbi Hillel was in Iraq; he was in Babylon. Of course, he is one of the most famous of the teachers of Judaism and asked the famous three questions. Right? You asked your three questions. He had his three questions: If I am not for myself, then who will be for me; but if I'm only for myself, then what am I; and if not now, when?

It seems to me that the witnesses who have come forward require us to ask the same question, that we respect the importance of the Jewish community expressing itself and recovering its historical memory. It's not unusual.

I was asking earlier about why it's taken so long for some of these accounts to come out, and I think, in fact, it's natural. It's taken the world several generations to fully appreciate the impact of the Holocaust and we're still coming to grips with the impact of the Holocaust.

This second nakba, the Jewish nakba, the nakba experienced by people leaving, is one that I'm sure was suppressed. People were getting on and making a living, whether they were making a living in Israel or making a living somewhere else. As time has gone on, they've had a chance to tell their stories.

People should be reminded that the Middle East is actually a very complex place. Nobody should pretend that the Middle East is all of one thing. It has obviously a strong Arab and Muslim history, but it also has a Christian history, and not Christians who came from western Europe but who lived there and have been there for thousands of years. It's the same with the Jews. The Jews didn't suddenly emerge from nowhere. They were there for thousands of years living in the Middle East. It was their home.

These are stories that we need to hear. I think the committee needs to consider what we do and how we make sure we provide the appropriate recognition to show that we understand the vitality of this experience, and also understand its relevance.

I want to express my personal appreciation to the two witnesses. I know that if my colleague, Mr. Cotler, were here, he'd want to express his appreciation as well. He has helped to lead the fight in defining this issue for Canadians, and I do want to make sure you understand that we hear what you're saying. As Mr. Martin said, a refugee is a refugee, is a refugee.

At the same time, it's important for us to understand the uniqueness of each refugee experience. The Palestinian situation is unique to itself, and this experience is unique to itself. We have to understand the different elements that make it up, and I think what you've done today is extremely worthwhile.

I hope you feel that you've been able to tell us like it is and tell us a story that many of us would not otherwise have known or understood. I think it's very important that we express our appreciation to you for doing that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you very much for taking the time to be here.

They are very important stories to be told, so thank you so much.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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