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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS
PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION

Written statement* submitted by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, a non-
governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 July 2002]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Jewish refugees from Arab countries – the forgotten millions

1. In the chronic Middle East tragedy, where a key stumbling block has always been the question of the return of, or compensation for, Arab refugees from Palestine, the time has come for the international community to remember the other victim - the forgotten millions of Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

2 In 1945, there were 140,000 Jews in Iraq; 60,000 in Yemen and Aden; 35,000 in Syria; 5,000 in Lebanon; 90,000 in Egypt; 40,000 in Libya; 150,000 in Algeria; 120,000 in Tunisia; 300,000 in Morocco, including Tangiers (a total of 940,000, plus a further 200,000 living in Iran and Turkey). Of these ancient Jewish communities, less than 40,000 remain today out of the total population of about 1.2 million. In the Arab world (i.e. not counting Turkey and Iran), their number is under 2,000, down from roughly one million 50 years ago. In the 20th century, thousands of Jewish men, women and children, the young and the old, were brutally massacred in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Aden, and the Maghreb (often under British or French colonial rule), and also in Palestine during the British Mandate.

3. As to how these countries became *Judenrein* ("cleansed" of Jews) since the 1940s, a key article, "Jews in Grave Danger in all Moslem Lands," published in the *New York Times* of 16 May 1948, speaks volumes (a recent collective book provides details: see Malka Shulewitz (ed.), *The Forgotten Millions. The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands* (1999).

4. In her latest study, *Islam and Dhimmitude. Where Civilizations Collide* (2002) (www.dhimmi.org), Bat Ye'or refers to the *Times* article and quotes an appeal from the President of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. Stephen Wise, to the U.S. Secretary of State, George Marshall, on 18 January 1948:

"Between 800'000 and a million Jews in the Middle East and North Africa, exclusive of Palestine, are in 'the greatest danger of destruction' at the hands of Moslems being incited to holy war over the Partition of Palestine (...) Acts of violence already perpetrated, together with those contemplated, being clearly aimed at the total destruction of the Jews, constitute genocide which, under the resolutions of the General Assembly, is a crime against humanity."(pp.175-76)

5. A recent example of such acts of violence is the *jihadist* Al-Qaeda bombing of the ancient al-Ghariba synagogue of Djerba in Tunisia on 11 April 2002. That was not a simple accident, as first claimed by the Tunisian authorities; it was finally acknowledged as a criminal act after Germany insisted on a full enquiry (10 of the 17 dead were elderly German tourists, and many others were among the badly wounded). An Al-Qaeda spokesman recently claimed responsibility. Tunisian Jewry is now reduced to about 1,000 persons, a remnant of a biblical community with its roots in the ancient Phoenician past. Like 99% and more of their co-religionists before them, most will leave.

6. Pogroms and persecutions, and grave fears for their future, regularly preceded the mass expulsions and exoduses of the Jews whose ancestors had inhabited these regions from time immemorial, well before successive waves of Arab conquest and occupation beginning in the seventh century.

7. More than 650,000 of the Jewish refugees were integrated into Israel's small area of 20,000 km² beginning in the 1950s, even while the country was threatened with annihilation by neighbouring Arab League States which, for over 40 years, refused the UN 1947 Palestine Partition Plan. A further approximately 300,000 Jews found refuge, and a new homeland, in Europe and the Americas.

8. Roughly half of Israel's 5 million Jews - its total population is about 6.2 million, of whom roughly 20% are Arab, Druze, and Bedouin Israelis - is now composed of these refugees and their descendants, who received no humanitarian aid from the United Nations, and who did not ask for it. It was the world Jewish communities, just emerging from the Shoah, who worked together with Israel to achieve this integration.

9. Yet it was the defiance of international legality by the Arab League in 1947-48, for decade after decade, in a failed attempt at politicide against the State of Israel, that led to the Arab Palestinian catastrophe. A parallel commitment on behalf of the less numerous Arab refugees of Palestine (in 1948 they numbered 550,000, although the figure of 750,000 is often quoted) to their integration in any of the 21 Arab States (covering 10% of the world's surface: 15 million km²) was considered too great a sacrifice, in spite of their immense oil resources.

10. In Jordan, whose surface covered 77% of Palestine as recognized by the League of Nations in 1922, only partial integration was carried out for many decades. Turning a blind eye to article 15 of the Mandate, Britain had decided in 1922 that no Jews would be authorized either to reside or buy land in Transjordan. This decision was ratified by the Kingdom of Jordan in its law No . 6, sect. 3, of 3 April 1954, reactivated in law No . 7 of 1 April 1963, sect. 2, which states that any person could become a citizen of Jordan if he was not Jewish. When Jordan made peace with Israel in 1994, this *Judenrein* law remained.

11. George Orwell's remark about everyone being equal - except that "some are more equal than others" - could be applied also to refugees. Indeed, some refugees *are* considered more equal than others. But the forgotten millions - those Jewish refugees from Arab lands - were not helped by the UN, nor were they kept for over half a century in refugee camps breeding hopelessness and frustration, and a culture of hate and death. Orwell's remark might also be applied to scores of millions of refugee, on all continents, who were displaced during the many tragic conflicts throughout the 20th century.

12. The transfer of populations on a large scale, a consequence of war or for political reasons, has been a characteristic of human history, particularly in the Islamic Orient. Deportations, expropriations and expulsions of *dhimmis* - Jews, Christians, and other indigenous peoples - were recurrent throughout the long history of "*dhimmitude*," including in Palestine. One should question the real motivation of a selective memory, so historically flawed, which systematically spotlights the Arab refugees from Palestine, but not those forgotten millions - the Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

13. Security Council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 (adamantly refused by the Khartoum Arab Summit Conference, with the formula: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiation with Israel, no concessions on the questions of Palestinian national rights.") refers to a just solution to the refugee problem; this implicitly included Jewish refugees from Arab countries, as well as Arab refugees from Palestine.

14. The dire hardships endured by the great majority of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries have never been considered by the United Nations, nor has the loss of their inestimable property and heritage dating back three thousand years. The time has come for this great injustice to be taken into consideration in the context of a just and equitable global solution to the ongoing Middle East tragedy.

15. The World Union for Progressive Judaism appeals to the Sub-Commission, and other appropriate UN bodies, to consider urgently the rights of these ancient Jewish minorities: (a) in relation to Mr. Asbjorne Eide ' s forthcoming final report at its fifty-fifth session (2003); and (b) in relation to the working paper by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro on the return of refugees' or displaced persons' property.
