

Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries and Iran (JACI)

WJC Mission Statement

Since its inception in 1936, the World Jewish Congress' mission has been to protect the rights of the Jewish people and their communities wherever they may be. Today, the WJC officially represents Jewish communities in 100 countries in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the State of Israel resulted in an unprecedented yet oft ignored crisis – the flight of the Jews of Arab countries from their ancient homes dating back to Babylonia. Despite their *dhimmi* status under Arab rule, Jews managed to prosper economically and forged strong communities and traditions. However, the proclamation of the Jewish state made their life across the Middle East and North Africa increasingly unbearable. Jews were first persecuted, and then chased out of their homes and stripped of their personal and communal property. The 850,000 Jewish refugees fled to the newly-established State of Israel and to friendly countries in the Diaspora.

Yet, despite the magnitude of the calamity, the Jewish refugees' stories have been forgotten by official historians.

To this end, the World Jewish Congress is working to raise awareness of the issue of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries with the general public and the diplomatic and political community and restore historical justice for a community that makes up more than 50% of the population of the State of Israel. The WJC leadership will raise the issue at high and low-level diplomatic meetings with officials around the world, especially in countries where there is a large concentration of Jewish refugees including France, the United Kingdom, the United States, corners of Latin American, etc. The WJC will also use its vast network of local Jewish communities and activists to raise the profile of the issue among all Jews and especially with the younger generation.

The WJC is in a unique position to negotiate the preservation of Jewish holy sites and Jewish heritage in countries in the Middle East and North Africa by strengthening its diplomatic relationships with Arab countries, as it has done in the past with regard to Jewish immigration from these lands.

The World Jewish Congress will also partner with its affiliated organizations in order to promote parliamentary hearings and legislation on the issue. The WJC's affiliate organization, the International Council of Jewish Parliamentarians (ICJP), has already begun working on organizing parliamentary activities surrounding JACI. In 2009, ICJP Chairperson and Italian MP Fiamma Nirenstein held a hearing at the Italian Foreign Affairs Committee with the participation of experts and fellow parliamentarians. Similar action is planned this year in parliaments in Europe and North America. Moreover, the WJC will partner with the Israel Allies Caucus Foundation to foster support for hearing and legislation regarding the right of the Jewish refugees in parliaments across the globe.