

WJC STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
'OPTIONS FOR ACTION'
- DRAFT -

ISSUE	Jews from Arab Lands
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BACKGROUND	<p>As the diplomatic arm and umbrella body of Diaspora Jewish communities worldwide, the WJC has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the claims and concerns of Jews from Arab lands not be forgotten. With the creation of the State of Israel, Jewish life in most Arab lands, which had flourished for centuries, became untenable. Consequently, the great majority of Jews were forced to flee their countries of origin and abandon their communal and private assets. While Arabs have succeeded in pressing the claims of Palestinians displaced by the birth of Israel and the Six-Day War, the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab lands, most of whom were successfully absorbed in Israel, has largely been ignored by the international community. At the beginning of the new millenium, the WJC embarked upon a campaign to raise public awareness of this issue. This involved several conferences and publications.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Ideally, the WJC should be a pioneering force in ensuring that rights for Jewish refugees be included on the Jewish political agenda. What is needed is to raise this issue, as a matter of law and equity, every time Palestinian refugees are mentioned, whenever and wherever - at all international for a, whether at the UN, the EU, the UNHRC. The Knasset has adopted a resolution that pledges that the subject of Jewish refugees from Arab lands will be discussed at any comprehensive peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. In terms of other immediate tangible goals, the WJC should advocate for the</p>

	<p>protection of Jewish heritage sites in Arab lands. The restitution issue should await the comprehensive peace settlement when Palestinian–Arab claims are brought to the table.</p>
<p>OPTIONS FOR ACTION</p>	<p>Given the importance of the Quartet to any resolution of the Arab-Israeli conundrum, the WJC should strive to raise the rights of Jewish refugees among members of that all-important body. This could eventually weaken the Palestinians' exclusive monopoly on the issue of Middle East refugees—and ensure that our concerns be brought to the fore.</p> <p>The WJC should also target parliamentarians and the media in order to raise their awareness of the issue. There is widespread ignorance of the problem and we could do much to rectify that situation, especially among those who shape policy and public opinion. To that end, the WJC should think in terms of organizing parliamentary hearings in all European capitals and also further afield, as well as in the relevant international organizations. Further fields of activity could include various interfaith forums, especially those in which Muslim and Arab Christian representatives are represented. It could also appear as a specific agenda item for the International Council of Jewish Parliamentarians (ICJP).</p> <p>The WJC is in a rather unique position to interface with Arab governments in countries that do not recognize Israel, in much the same way as it did in Eastern Europe before the collapse of Communism and the resumption of relations with Israel. Any WJC agenda would be best implemented through the judicious use of a combination of quiet, backstage diplomacy and public action. In terms of diplomacy vis-à-vis the Arab world, this would be best undertaken by the WJC President and the Executive in close coordination with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, once the agenda is established, WJC regional affiliates can act on a local level with their national governments, Arab embassies, and Arab diaspora communities in the countries in which they live. JD's will obviously play an important role in furthering the agenda by acting as an energetic vanguard. Despite the fact that thus far, this type of activity has not yielded the results for which we would have hoped, it should still be pursued.</p> <p>The plight of Jews from Arab lands as an unfinished item on the Jewish diplomatic agenda might also be a subject to be dealt with by a competent author in the <i>Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs</i> and/or a public Israel Council on Foreign Relations (ICFR) event.</p> <p>The WJC should continue to develop its cooperation with Justice for Jews from Arab Countries.</p>

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