

**Submission to the UN Human Rights Council “Commission of Inquiry” on Israel
created May 27, 2021 by resolution A/HRC/RES/S-30/1**

Organization: HARIF on behalf of the descendants of Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa – victims of Arab and Iranian discrimination and repression on the basis of Jewish identity.

Biography: HARIF is a UK charity representing Jews from North Africa and the Middle East (UK no.1186454), and dedicated to promoting their history, culture and heritage. Over 2,000 years of history in the Middle East and North Africa came to an abrupt and tragic end just 50 years ago. Jews departed for Israel and the West, leaving an enormous cultural and economic void behind. In another 20 years, few Jews who were born in these countries will still be alive. A vital chapter of Jewish identity, history and culture – an entire civilisation – will be lost. HARIF is here to make sure it is not forgotten.

Issues to which our submission applies:

- (1) “Underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict in and between the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem [*sic*], and Israel; as well as systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity;”
- (2) “Facts and circumstances regarding alleged violations of international humanitarian law and alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021;”
- (3) “Identification of those responsible;”

Submission: (This submission itself does not constitute an endorsement of the “Commission of Inquiry” or its mandate.)

Syrian exodus

The 1947 Aleppo riots made our family want to flee Syria

23 May 2021

<https://www.jewishrefugees.org.uk/2021/05/the-1947-aleppo-riots-made-our-family.html>

In 1947 after riots broke out in their city of Aleppo, the parents of Ofra Basul-Bengio, now a professor at Tel Aviv university, contemplated smuggling out their family from

Syria to Israel. But they could have been executed if caught. Finally, in 1954, Ofra's father managed to obtain passports from the governor of Aleppo, rarely given to Syrian Jews. She tells her story to *Haaretz* (with thanks: Lily)

The first time we attempted to escape Aleppo was shortly after the United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine in November 1947. A powerful fear seized us and all the Jews in the city during the war, when we were compelled to cope with bitter experience of seeing the burning of our businesses, schools and synagogues, including the Central, or Great, Synagogue, which housed the ancient Aleppo Codex (the priceless manuscript of the Hebrew Bible created in Tiberias in the 10th century).

Our family, who lived in a Muslim neighborhood and saw with our own eyes the torching of the Jewish-owned café opposite our home, and heard the angry crowds chanting that, "Palestine is our land, and the Jews are our dogs," decided that there was no alternative but to try and flee Syria before it was too late.

It was decided that everyone in the family would put on the clothes of Arabs. My mother and we four girls wore veils; my father and the four boys also put on traditional Arab clothing. To further hide our Jewish identity, our parents assigned each of us an Arab name, like Fatma or Mohammed.

We locked our house with all its contents and set out for the railway station in the hope of boarding the first train that would take us to Lebanon, and from there to the Land of Israel.

But immediately after we got on the train, the conductor announced that if there were Jews among the passengers they had to disembark immediately or face severe punishment. We had no choice and were forced to get off for fear we would be found out. That ended our first escape adventure – but not our ordeals.

Fearing the pogroms would continue, our family joined other Jews in the home of a Christian family that had undertaken to protect us and others afraid for their lives. The image of the men standing and reciting Psalms for our salvation has never left my memory.

After a time the situation calmed down somewhat and we were able to return to our home, though the urge to try again to leave Aleppo did not abate.

The desire to flee stemmed not only from existential fears but also from a potent affinity for Zionism that had informed our lives even before the war broke out in Palestine in 1948. My father, Kemal-Avraham Basul, had visited that land in 1934, when the rail line between Damascus and Haifa was still operating.

The intention was to see whether it would be possible to immigrate with the family, but it didn't work out at the time.

Still, the longings for Zion did not diminish – for example, my father used to read us stories in Hebrew, like the one about little Yossi, who wanted to get to the Land of Israel. The tale fired

our imaginations and touched us so deeply that our eyes and his welled up with tears each time he read it to us.