

**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.)

Abuses of human rights

How Iraq extorted money from the Jews of Iraq (Part 2)

5 January 2021

<https://www.jewishrefugees.org.uk/2021/01/how-iraq-extorted-money-from-jews-of.html>

Here is Part 2 of a report on the situation of the Jews of Iraq after 14 May 1948 by the American Jewish Committee’s representative Marvin Goldfine. (For Part 1,

see [here](#)). **By July, 1948, the trials and prison sentences of ordinary Jews gave way to trials of the wealthier Jewish citizens. These were hauled before military courts, usually with the set purpose of extorting from them vast sums of money by way of fines for the benefit of the depleted Treasury.**

The following examples speak for themselves: In Baghdad, the Jewish millionaire and banker, Salman Zilkah, owner of the Zilkah bank which has branches all over Iraq, was brought before a military court on charges of ‘smuggling money abroad and assisting Zionists’.

The Baghdad millionaire Nathanel, whose employees had already been arrested on June 14, 1948, had at one time been the entrepreneur of a cross country automobile service, linking Baghdad with Aleppo, Damascus, Nazareth and Tel-Aviv.

At the moment of the invasion of Palestine he happened to be in Aleppo, Syria. There he was arrested by the Syrian authorities, as a fugitive, at the request of the Iraqi government, and extradited to Iraq. He was detained for some time, and later hauled before a military court on unknown charges. In addition to his travelling agency and car service, this man was also the leading Iraqi agent of several European and U.S. automobile manufacturers.

Another wealthy Jew, Salman Shamoun, was brought before a military court. He was sentenced on a charge of ‘connection with bandits of the imaginary state of Israel’, to a fine of one million dinars and one year imprisonment.

When this wave of arrests of the rich was at its height, a number of them tried to get away. But the borders of Iraq had been tightly sealed before all Jews on May 15.

The granting of special exit permits was introduced. This applied to Jews only, as by the Iraqi Constitution everyone is free to emigrate. By special decree it was made a condition for the granting of such exit permit to a Jew that he deposit 2,000 dinars as guarantee for his return at the time specified in the permit.

In spite of the deposit, which was usually forfeited to the government with extra promptitude as soon as the date, or any other condition of the permit happened to be unobserved – only about 20 Jews were let out in the four months since May 14.

The zealous forfeiture of the deposit went so far however, that by analogy, families, of whom a member had gone abroad, were threatened with the sequestration of their entire property, if he did not return. But the number of those preferring return with probable arrest to forfeiting property by staying abroad, was rather small.

During these months, when every Jew could be suspected as a fifth column-‘ist and subject to arrest, he seldom ventured forth into the streets. Commerce in general was severely curtailed despite the frantic efforts to channel it through Moslem hands. Forty leading Jewish businessmen in Iraq were suddenly arrested early in July on the charge of trading with Russia and thus supporting a Communist regime. This could hardly be an offense when some of their transactions were the direct result of a Soviet-Iraqian trade arrangement, or else carried on

semi-officially through the back door of the Russian Legation, with the assurance that the Government would keep one eye closed. All Iraqi commercial firms, Moslem and Jewish, engaged in this kind of trade.

The real reason for the arrests of the Jews only became apparent when the trials revealed the conditions for their release — payment of sums up to 10, 000 dinars or else imprisonment. A number of 'spy trials' were also staged. In August, 1948, a military court in Baghdad sentenced Joseph Kadourie Beibi to four years' imprisonment for 'spying and transmitting information to the Zionists'.

Mr. Shohat, a Jew, and Deputy Director of Railways in Iraq, was accused of participation with others in smuggling military surplus stores out of Iraq. The result of his trial, if any, is not known.

This wave of arrests and sentences was crowned in October, 1948, by the arrest of the Chief Rabbi of Iraq, Rabbi Sassoon Kedourie, for having on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) "in the course of his sermon in the synagogue exhorted the Jews to do acts contrary to the safety of the state."

Displacement of Officials

The government also undertook a 'purge' of all Jewish officials and civil servants. This, of course, had no purpose other than to deprive Jewish officials of their position and livelihood, and to put in their stead Moslems, usually proteges of those who had these posts in their gift.

In September, for instance, it was reported that the following, who had worked in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, had been dismissed; Khouji Yishak, Salman Youseph, Haikh Khouji, Tsyinn Halali, Saleh Shabath, Salim Zion Jacob, Elias Jacob Haboub, Abraham Rejwan, and Nissim Aaron.

Following this, a general Government order was issued to all government departments on October 18, 1948, to the effect that all Jewish employees are to be dismissed in order 'to ensure the better -guarding of state secrets'. In accordance with this order, most Jewish public servants were dismissed outright, without pension or compensation.

Some of the senior officials, whom it was found too difficult to dispose of in this summary way, were retired on pension; and a few were merely suspended from actual service, by means of long leave, and the like. Among those retired on a pension was Ibrahim el-Kebir, the Jewish Comptroller-General of the Treasury, the man who only two months earlier had been one of three Iraqi delegates to London to negotiate new financial arrangements.

In Parliament, too, a resolution was adopted to 'purge' all departments of 'Zionist elements'. Furthermore, this system of exclusion and discrimination was extended to government schools: whereas in former years a high percentage of Jews attended the Government High School for Trade and Commerce, none of the 100 new pupils admitted in 1948 was a Jew. In the result, the government services, once largely managed by Jews, are today virtually

depleted of all their Jewish staff, and these are going about in search of new occupations, which in the present state of anti-semitism in Iraq they cannot find in the general community, and which by virtue of the state of depression in the Jewish community, they cannot find there either.

Plundering of Jewish Property

So much for the attack on the person of the Jews, and their freedom. The assault on their property was, if anything, a much better organized effort, pursued with much greater zest and promise of personal reward. Like Egypt, so Iraq had right from the day of the U.N. partition decision permitted and encouraged a wave of official, semi-official and unofficial blackmailing of Jews.

Jews were forced to contribute immense sums to the various fighting and refugee funds to buy peace and stave off accusations of lack of patriotism, they spent vast sums in this way.

For instance, Shafik Ades, of Basra, who was later tried and executed by a military court, contributed in March, 1948, on one occasion 300,000 dinars to the Arab Liberation Army. But, it did not help him in the end.

In Iraq, as well as in Egypt, there was a sufficiently large number of Jews to make their contributions to these funds a major part of the total donations. In Iraq, even more so than in Egypt, the Jews formed the leading class of bankers, financiers, and big merchants. They were a readily available and traceable source of funds. By their voluntary contributions earlier they had shown how much money they could voluntarily afford to throw away for the sake of appeasement.

The Iraqi Government, and a number of officials and others learnt from this the great object lesson that it was possible and worthwhile to force the Jews to pay for the war in Palestine, in which Iraq had found herself engaged, and at the same time to tap these sources in order to replenish the impoverished State Treasury, as well as several private pockets.

Fantastic as this may sound, it was not new. It was merely the lesson learned by the Orient from the Nazis, who had controlled Iraq seven years ago, and had never been forgotten. In addition to the trials of wealthy Jews, already referred to above, the following are some authentic details, which have leaked out, of steps taken to exact Jewish money: In Baghdad, a fresh fund raising campaign was begun after May 15. It is reliably reported that the majority of the contributions were from Jews, to the tune of half a million dinars. The Government also started a fund campaign to help the 20,000 Palestine refugees, who had gathered in Baghdad.

Every night in May and June, 1948, Radio Baghdad broadcast a long list of Jews who had contributed to the fund, thereby exerting strong pressure on all Jews to contribute. Another, and much more effective form of obtaining funds from the Jews was by sequestering and 'attaching' their property, mobile and immobile.

In May, 1948, the Government requisitioned a great number of Jewish-owned houses in Baghdad in order to 'house in them Palestine refugees'. Many Jews were thus rendered homeless. Even schools, including the Baghdad Alliance School and the Kadourie School, were requisitioned for refugees, as well as synagogues, Jewish clubs, and Jewish hospitals.

As far as banking was concerned, the Iraqi Defense Minister Sadek el Bassam Pasha, published a decree on July 17 1948 v/heraby all Jewish-owned banks, such as the Zilkah bank and the Credit Bank, were prohibited from doing any financial transactions or business, 'in order to avoid Jewish banks smuggling Iraqi capital out of the country'.

The various political parties in Iraq gave their full support to these anti-Jewish measures of theft and plunder by confiscation. At a secret session of the Iraqi Senate and Chamber of Deputies on July 12, 1948, to which no Jewish member was invited, Hussein Jamil, a member of the National Democratic Party demanded "confiscation of all Jewish property in order to use it for building a concentration camp for the Jews", and to undertake various 'purges' against Jews.

The right-wing Istiklal Party supported this proposal. This latter party is known to have planned and organized a full scale assault on the Baghdad Jewish quarter on Friday, May 14 in order (to quote their own words) "to liquidate the Jewish quarter." The plan was foiled when details leaked out to the Jews who alarmed the police.

On the other hand, the fact that all Iraqi parties agreed in persecuting and impoverishing the Jews is abundantly clear from a joint letter which all the Iraqi parties sent to all foreign-owned banks, business houses, and to Government departments in June 1948, demanding the immediate dismissal of all their Jewish personnel. In order to facilitate the easier disposal over Jewish property, and particularly of laying hand on it, the Government of Iraq by special decree ordered all District Governors to arrange lists of all property belonging to Jews who had left Iraq.

An informed source estimates the amount of money extracted from Iraqi Jews by blackmail and intimidation between May and November 1948 alone, at 4 million dinars. The climax of property sequestrations from Jews, and the refilling of the war-depleted State Treasury, and of private pockets came in 'the wake of the trial of Shafik Ades, a Jewish millionaire who had settled in Basra some years before.

After being accused, of actively assisting the Zionists, and found guilty by a military court in Basra, he was hanged, and all his property to the tune of 5 million dinar was sequestered. (*The trial of Ades is dealt with in Part 3 – ed*). There is every ground .for believing however, that the conviction and execution were merely a means of bringing about the sequestration and actual cashing in of 5 million dinars.

Other instances, of a slightly less extreme nature, though in every respect alike in type, were reported from all over Iraq, In the township of Amara, a score of Jewish families had been

residing for a long time, and had held honorable positions. When the storm broke in Iraq, these people fled the town from an instigated mob and went to Baghdad until the storm blew over.

The local municipality, however, seized the occasion, and after a short time sequestered the property, which was considerable, of all those Jews who had fled and, not yet returned. A little later, the same pretext for sequestration was adopted by the Iraqi Treasury. In October, 1948, the Treasury issued an order to the effect that all Jews living abroad must return to Iraq at once. Those remaining abroad by the end of October would have their property in Iraq forfeited. It is to be especially noted that just as in the case of Ades property, and of several others, forfeiture was to the Ministry of Defense, and not to the Treasury, thereby emphasising the fact that Jewish property was directly being used to pay for the Iraqi army in Palestine.

The sequestration of Ades' 5 million was by no means an isolated instance. Several days after his execution, the authorities acquired the taste for large scale penalty forfeitures. They proceeded to arrest some 60 of the wealthiest Jews in Iraq, the heads of the Jewish community, for the 'offense' of Zionist leanings.

Later, 400 more Jews were arrested and sent to a concentration camp, because they had property in Palestine and had sent out of the country large sums of money. It is reliably known that in a large number of these arrests without trial, and particularly of the wealthy Jews, which were the vast majority, release was effected only by paying colossal bribes and ransom money.

These organized persecutions and excesses have had two public repercussions, and justify reproduction: After his return to the Senate sittings, from which he had apparently been absent during the rise of the storm, the only Jewish senator, Ezra Menahem Daniel, made a speech which is a sad but typical apologia for Iraq Jewry's attitude toward Zionism.

It is also an example of the dignified manner in which Iraqi Jewry is bearing the humiliations and assaults upon it. Senator Daniel delivered an expose on the development of Zionism in Iraq, pointing out that both Emir Feisal I, former King, as well as the British authorities, had encouraged the movement. He indicated that the Jews of Iraq were not Zionist-minded, and that they chose to remain in the country where they dwelt for so many centuries, unless provoked by starvation or terror to leave.

Other Iraqi Jews have supported this general view advanced by Mr, Daniel. They claim that most of the Jews of Iraq, particularly the wealthy class, are primarily Iraqi in spirit and temper. Zionism never attracted a large following even before its interdiction. It is contended by some that of those who went to settle in Palestine, some have returned to their homes in Iraq, while many who remained feel a closer kinship to the Palestinian Arab than to their westernized co-religionists.

Only within the past one-and-a-half years has a strong urge to leave the country developed among the youth. About 1000 have already succeeded in crossing the border, often at great

risk to themselves and with the hired help of some Arabs. It is paradoxical that the very action taken against Zionism has only served to generate it.

On the other side of the line, among the persecuting government authorities, a no less symptomatic event needs recording. The Iraqi Defense Minister, Sadel el Bassam, resigned his post on September 27, 1948. Apart from his failure to prosecute the war in Palestine successfully, one of the principal reasons for the resignation was disagreement between him and some of his Cabinet colleagues over his extreme anti-semitic policy.

In his letter of resignation to the Prime Minister he said *alia*: "...and considering the attitude taken by some ministers towards steps taken by the military courts against Zionism, and especially Zionist officials, I find it imperative to resign.'

This reason was publicly confirmed by the Prime Minister in Parliament on September 28. The resignation has, however, not brought about any basic changes in the Government's declared policy against the Jews. True, the wave of arrests subsided to a certain extent. But, the Jews who were imprisoned by military courts on trumped up charges have not been released.

Nor were any Jewish civil servants or merchants reinstated in the positions from which they were ousted. Furthermore, in the field of sequestration and confiscation, no restitution whatever has been made. The reasons are near at hand: the political climate in Iraq regarding Palestine and the Jews has not changed in the least.

Iraq having disengaged herself from the hapless Palestine affair by quiet withdrawal of her troops, the home population remain as keyed up as ever over the Palestine issue. The Iraqi state funds are too low to permit any restitution, even if there were the will to make it. This will is, however, as absent as before, and the Jews dare not raise a voice in that direction. They are anxiously content if no further apocalypse descends upon them.

The present position is, however, that Iraqi Jewry has been excluded from commerce and industry and from most income sources. It is therefore quickly descending the slope of poverty, and large sections of the community are in urgent need of material assistance. In the spiritual sphere, the assaults and degradation as well as the poverty, are creating growing decay and ruination.

Travel Prohibited

The right to travel in and out of the country was one of the first measures adopted after the war which drew new distinctions between Moslems and Jews. Already in 1946 no Jew could leave the country without guaranteeing the sum of 2,000 dinars that he would not go to Palestine and that he would return to Iraq. The provision was not the result of legislation but merely represented an administrative order by the Chief of the Passport Department.

A Jew, Dr, Samuel, after giving his guarantee, did in fact visit Palestine in 1946 and returned to Iraq to take up the matter as a test case but without any positive result. After November 29, 1947, the provision for a simple guarantee was changed to the requirement of an actual deposit

of the same sum. The final step was taken on May 15, 1948 when no Jew could succeed in procuring a passport or exit visa to leave the country. Conversely, no Jew of whatever nationality can secure a visa to enter Iraq, The Jews are virtually trapped and have become veritable hostages in the hands of the authorities.