

**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.)

Exodus and dispossession of Jews from Palestine: Jewish exodus and property loss in Old City, Jerusalem

Remembering the Jewish refugees of Jerusalem

7 May 2013

<https://www.jewishrefugees.org.uk/2013/05/remembering-jewish-refugees-of-jerusalem.html>

It's been 46 years since the re-unification of Jerusalem: two internally-displaced Jewish refugees, Carmella and Sarah, interviewed in 2011 for *CiFWatch* by IsraeliNurse, were able to re-connect with the Old City where they had been born. Their families were brutally evicted by the Jordanian Legion in 1948:

Perhaps most significantly – because there exists a clear political agenda to make Jews appear as newcomers and non-native inhabitants of the city – rarely does a Western audience get to hear that Jews in fact made up the majority of the city's population at least from the [mid-nineteenth century](#), or that many of them became internally displaced when they were forced to leave their homes both before and during the War of Independence.

Recently I met up with two ladies whose memories of their childhood in Jerusalem are part of the story of the city itself. Both were born there – Carmella in 1935 and Sarah in 1921. In a country in which one receives such a variety of often unexpected answers to the question 'where did your family originate?' it is fairly rare to meet people who do not have a reply. Carmella looked puzzled for an instant, and then replied "Oh – my mother came from Tsfat and my father from Jerusalem". As for Sarah – the answer to her was obvious; "From the Old City".

Neither of them could tell me exactly how many generations of their family had lived in Jerusalem before them, but Sarah was proud to recount how her great-grandfather, who lived in the [Rothschild Building](#) built in 1870 in the Jewish Quarter, had met the building's sponsor, Baron Rothschild, when he came with his daughter to tour the sites of his investment. Apparently, the whole neighbourhood had been busy preparing delicacies in honour of the distinguished visitor – mostly citron (etrog) cakes – but the Baron's clerks had warned him in advance not to partake of anything cooked in the Jewish Quarter due to the famously insanitary conditions there. In fact the only thing which the Baron consumed throughout his entire visit to the Old City was a glass of water drawn from the cistern at Sarah's great-grandfather's sparsely furnished house.

A clue to the origins of both families perhaps comes from the fact that the languages they spoke at home were Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) and Arabic, with a smattering of Yiddish for good measure.

Ladino was the predominant language among Jews in Palestine between the 17th and 19th centuries after Sephardi Jews who were exiled from Spain in 1492 returned to the land of their forefathers, settling in Jerusalem, Hebron, Tsfat, Tiberius and even Schem and Gaza.

However, after so many generations of life in the Jewish Quarter, Sarah's family, along with almost half of the Jewish population of the Old City, finally had to leave it [in 1936](#) as a result of the riots which were part of the Arab revolt. This, of course, was not the first case of Jerusalemites who were no less indigenous than their expellers being forced out of their homes: in the 1929 riots some 4,000 Jews had also fled Neve Ya'akov, Motsa, Romema, Beit HaKerem and Talpiot. Neither was this phenomenon confined to Jerusalem; in the 1929

riots Carmella's grandfather's brother and his wife were both slaughtered by an axe-wielding mob in Tsfat.



Jewish refugees leaving the Old City -1936

Carmella described their home: one of six houses built around a communal courtyard and lacking electricity, sewage or running water, but with a strong community life in which people readily shared what little they had. Both women spent their childhood under the British Mandate with regular curfews from 5 p.m. until 7 a.m. the next day. Sometimes they knew that the curfew was a reaction to activities by Jewish underground groups, but more often they had no idea why they were under curfew. One 9th of Av, Carmella's father and the neighbours in the yard wanted to pray. Because of the curfew they could not go to the synagogue and there were not enough men to make up a minyan, (prayer quorum) so they snuck out to bring additional men from surrounding streets to the prayers. Unfortunately, someone left the door to the courtyard open by mistake, and the British promptly arrested them all, imprisoning them in the Russian compound until the next morning.

On November 29th, 1947, friends and family gathered at Carmella's parents' home – the only one in the neighbourhood with a radio – to listen tensely to the UN vote on partition. As the votes were announced, they made lists of the results on scraps of paper. “We have a state!” cried Carmella's brother, but as they set off to dance in celebration on Jaffa Road, their father

urged caution; “Let’s see what happens tomorrow morning.” And indeed, difficult days lay ahead.

During the [siege of Jerusalem](#), their daily routine revolved mostly around the fight to survive. Water was strictly rationed as the British-built [pipeline had been sabotaged](#) by the Arab militias. Initially they had to rely upon the original cisterns which collected rainwater from the roofs of the houses: Sarah and Carmella painstakingly explained to me the knack behind filling a bucket on a rope from a deep cistern. Later, water tankers began to arrive intermittently in Jerusalem and Carmella and her siblings would spend hours standing in line waiting to take their rations home in buckets and tin cans.



Queuing for water, Jerusalem 1948.

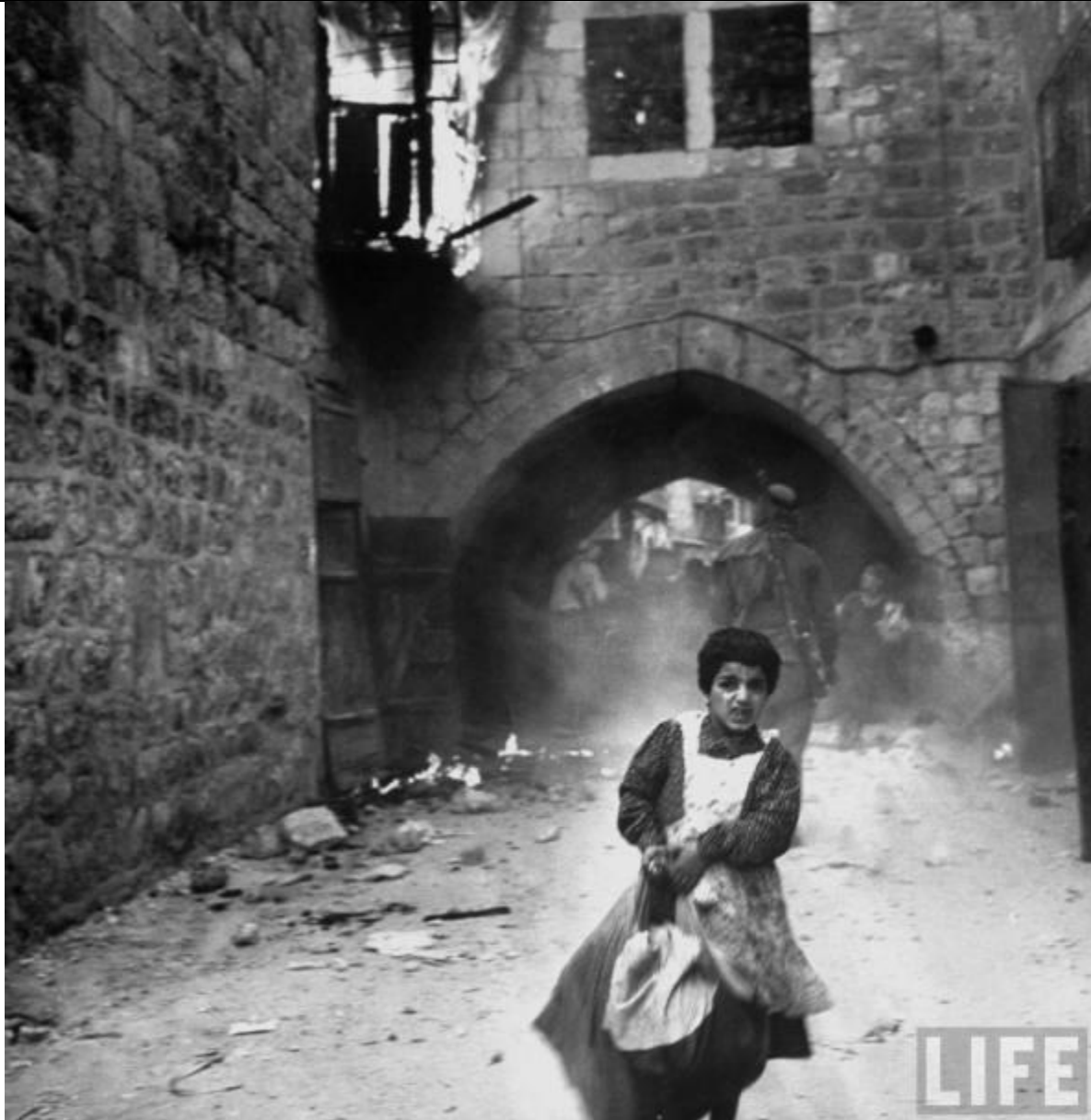
The precious fresh water would be stored in large clay pots – both Sarah and Carmella call them by the Ladino name ‘Tanaja’. One contained fresh drinking and cooking water and the other water which had already been used to wash their hands. Once a week – before Shabbat – the children would be washed, the laundry then done in the same water, the floor then washed with that soapy water and anything left used to water the few plants such as mint and lemon balm which they grew in tin cans in the yard.

Food too was strictly rationed with each item weighed scrupulously by the shop-keeper in exchange for coupons. Carmella’s family lived mostly off bean or lentil soup with small amounts of meat becoming a rare delicacy and bread limited to 200 grams per person. Carmella’s father used to give his portion of bread to the children, saying “I’m grown already”. Just before Pessach a truck-load of fresh vegetables managed to make it through the blockade. Carmella recounts how that became a whole day’s entertainment as everyone gathered around just to gaze at the vegetables – the likes of which they had not seen for so long.

Fuel was also severely rationed and because they had no electricity, both light and heat came from the paraffin they had to stand hours in line waiting for every time the arrival of a lorry load was announced by megaphone. That winter was a particularly harsh one in Jerusalem, and

often the only way they had of warming themselves was to stand around the kettle or cooking pots.

On the afternoon of the Declaration of Independence Carmella's family once more gathered around their radio, but yet again violence followed their celebrations: the next day shops were burned to the ground in the Old City and less than two weeks later it fell to the Jordanian forces. Many of the men were arrested and taken prisoner by the Arab legion, including Carmella's father. He returned only almost a year later, but Carmella says "We don't know what he went through there. He never talked about it". The women and children were transported by lorry to the Katamon neighbourhood from which the Christian Arab residents had fled and four or five families found shelter in each empty house. Carmella's family later moved to the Nahalat Zion neighbourhood which had been built in 1908 to answer the growing need for housing outside the walls of the crowded Old City.



Jewish girl, Rachel Levy, 7, fleeing from street with burning buildings as the Arabs sack Jerusalem after its surrender. May 28, 1948. John Phillips

With war still raging and the Arab Legion installed in the Old City, the nights became unbearable with repeated shelling forcing them to huddle together in the lower storey of their building, along with all the other neighbours. The lack of food and water became even worse; children had not been able to go to school for a year and few people had work as factories and workshops had closed due to lack of materials.

Like all the other young men, Carmella's brothers were of course fighting in the army, specifically at Latrun and Ma'ale HaHamisha. The dead from the battles were brought to Bikur Holim hospital and every morning, Carmella and her mother would make their way

there to check that the names of her brothers did not appear on the list of names of the dead attached to a tree in the courtyard with a drawing pin.

After the first cease-fire, there was an improvement in the amount of goods which got through to Jerusalem, and the schools re-opened at last, but the fighting still continued, as did the shelling by the Arab Legion. Carmella's best friend was injured and her father killed by a direct hit on their house.

By 1967, Carmella was married and living in Kiryat HaYovel . Her husband, like many others, had been called up some three months before the war broke out and was stationed on the Egyptian front. Once more the women of the family found themselves alone in wartime. Day after day they would hear Nasser threatening total annihilation of the Jewish state on the radio and there was a real fear that the tiny young country would not be able to survive such an onslaught. With a shortage of air-raid shelters making for unbearable over-crowding, Carmella and her two small children took to sleeping in the corridor outside their apartment as an alternative.

Soon, soldiers coming to visit their families began telling them that the Old City had been re-taken: stories which at first they did not believe as there had been no official announcement on the radio. Gradually they began to realise that after 19 years they could indeed finally go to the Western Wall. It was the festival of Shavuot, and so as observant Jews they walked all the way to the Old City – along with Carmella's youngest sister who was nine months pregnant at the time and yet insisted upon not missing out on such a momentous occasion.

Carmella was surprised to see that the Old City retained many of the features she remembered from 19 years before – the same paved streets, the same lack of electricity, sewage or running water – and that it was terribly neglected. When they arrived at the Western wall, they at first wondered if they had come to the right place; their memories were of a narrow, confined area beside the wall where they had always prayed, but now it was an open area with plenty of room for the crowds of people who had come to be part of the miracle. Torah scrolls appeared from nowhere, and people prayed and sang, elated not only by the fact that their most holy site which they had been unable to visit for 19 years was once more accessible, but full of relief that their country actually still existed.