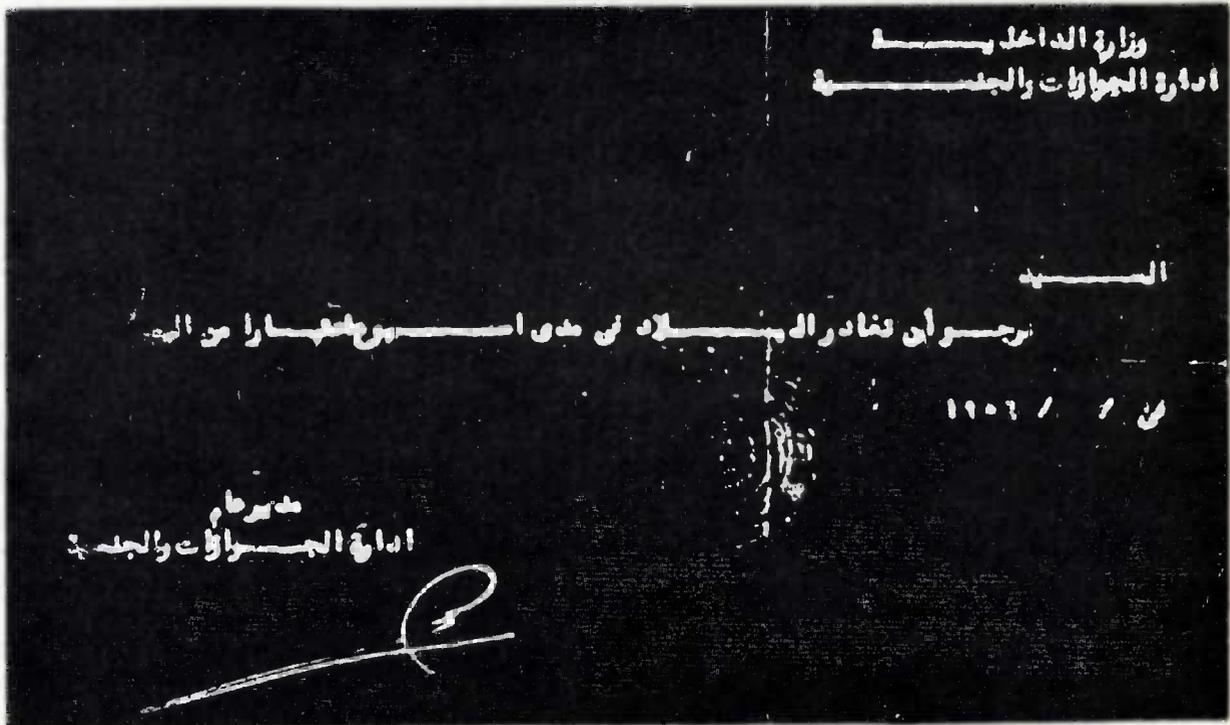




THE PLIGHT OF THE JEWS IN EGYPT



Photostat of Official Expulsion Order

Translation: Ministry of Interior, Passport and Nationality Administration: Room No. __, File No. __. Mr. __: You are requested to leave the country within one week from this date and to report immediately. __, 1956. (signed) Director, Passport and Nationality Administration (signature illegible). [Number of file, name, room number and date blocked out to avoid identification.]

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This Fact Sheet is one of a series of publications issued by the American Jewish Committee during its Fiftieth Anniversary Year.

For a half-century, the Committee has upheld the right of every man to be judged on his merits, not by his religion, color, birth-place or ancestry.

In those countries where democratic principles are faltering or alien, the Committee seeks to protect Jews from oppression; to enable them to live not only in safety, but with dignity and full equality, and to emigrate without penalty, should they wish to do so.

The American Jewish Committee is a non-Zionist organization. It has sought to help the State of Israel to become an effective advocate of liberty in the Middle East and to provide a dignified life for those who need or wish to settle there.

THE PLIGHT OF THE JEWS IN EGYPT

The plight of Jews in Egypt today is a tragic one. Since November 1956, thousands have been formally expelled by the Nasser Government. Many more thousands have been forced to emigrate "voluntarily." At least 10,000 of the estimated 35,000-55,000 Jews in Egypt have had to leave the country. Those who remain face economic strangulation; with their goods and assets sequestered and their funds blocked, it is no longer possible for them to earn a living. They have been given to understand that there can be no future for Jews in Egypt.

The wall of isolation and secrecy which was thrown around these developments has been crumbling since November 24, 1956, when the American Jewish Committee first called attention to the facts. A few days later, the Committee published Egyptian documents as irrefutable evidence. These disclosures were promptly minimized or disclaimed by Egyptian leaders. Additional data, assembled by the American Jewish Committee's overseas staff after interviewing hundreds of refugees newly arrived in Europe from Egypt, confirm the grim picture of terrorism and persecution.

This fact sheet is issued in order to present the truth.

THE JEWS OF EGYPT BEFORE NASSER

There has been a Jewish community in Egypt for almost two thousand years. About 7,000 strong in the early 1800's, it had grown to well over 65,000 by 1947, when Egypt took its latest census.

During the past century, Jews participated in all phases of Egyptian life. They served as senators and deputies, cabinet ministers and members of the former royal court. They played a prominent role in business, finance and industry, and in the expansion of Egyptian agriculture, and constituted an important segment of the Egyptian middle class. They were active in cultural activities and, ironically, in the nationalist movement for an independent Egypt.

Under Egypt's first nationality law, adopted in 1929 -- seven years after the country gained independence -- it was difficult for members of all minority groups to obtain citizenship. Consequently, only about 10,000 Jews were Egyptian citizens in 1956. About 15,000 were foreign nationals, holding passports from a variety of countries. The remainder were legally classified as stateless.

After the Arab-Israel war in 1948, several hundred Jews in Egypt were arrested, and their properties sequestered. The situation of the entire Jewish community was precarious. There was some improvement after King Farouk was deposed and General Mohammed Naguib came to power in 1952. In April 1954, however, Naguib was overthrown by Colonel Abdel Gamal Nasser. Arrests of Jews began soon after. Thirteen Jews were put on trial as "Zionist agents and saboteurs." Two committed suicide as a result of the treatment they received; two were executed; others were sentenced to long imprisonment.

During the period 1947-1956, a sense of increasing uneasiness caused many Jews to emigrate. Since the number of these departures has never been ascertainable, the Jewish population at the end of 1956 could not be precisely determined. Estimates range from 35,000 to 55,000.

NASSER'S MASK OF TOLERANCE

Late in 1956, after the French-British-Israeli forces moved against Egypt, the Western press began to carry the first accounts of Egypt's systematic program of terror and expulsion. As a result, the Egyptian Government took a number of measures to reassure the world:

---December 10, 1956: Zakaria Mohieddine, Minister of the Interior, in an interview published in the Journal D'Egypte: "...Egyptian Jews are treated without any discrimination whatsoever, and if we have detained a certain number of Egyptian Jews their number is no more than 120."

---December 13, 1956: Dr. Mahmoud Fawzi, Foreign Minister, quoted in The New York Times: "Out of 66,000 Jews in Egypt, only 120 have been interned for valid reasons of public security."

---December 17, 1956: Lieut. Col. Hatem, Director General of the Information Department, termed reports of Egypt's persecution and expulsion of Jews "completely false."

---December 20, 1956: Egypt's Chief Rabbi, Haim Nahoum, eighty-four years old, blind and under a doctor's care, was required to issue a "voluntary" statement: "We address to God our warmest prayers for the grandeur of Egypt, her prosperity and the welfare of her sons."

BEHIND THE MASK

The U. S. press has found reason to be skeptical of Egypt's official disclaimers:

Despite an Egyptian denial, there is enough evidence now that Jews are being deported from Egypt---because they are Jews---to require United Nations intervention.... The methods used are so similar to what Hitler did before the war as to be frightening. ---The New York Times, editorial, November 29, 1956.

Egypt...is making it very clear that all Jews should go at the expense of leaving most of their material wealth behind. ---New York Herald Tribune, news release, December 10, 1956.

The second flight from Egypt is now in full swing. I have just seen it. The apologists for the Nasser regime say there is no persecution of Jews in Egypt but I would bear witness that I have seen it and felt it and heard it in the past few days... Egyptian officials claim they hold only 131 Jews there but every Jew in Cairo knows there are hundreds and some reliable sources believe the figure may run to 3,000. ---William Richardson in the New York Post, December 18, 1956.

Nasser's Nazi Advisors

The dexterity and speed with which the Nasser Government has moved against its Jewish population have been cited by many observers as indicating that practised hands have been guiding this campaign.

It is well known that Egypt employs many foreign advisors, including Communist technicians from Russia and her satellites. But the employment of German Nazis, former Wehrmacht officers and members of the Afrika Korps has been largely hidden from the world. At present, it is estimated that some 200 or more work in Egypt, including:

---SS General Wilhelm Voss--in charge of Egypt's Central Planning Board and chief advisor to the War Minister.

---Dr. Johann von Leers, associate of Goebbels and notorious anti-Semite--advises on anti-Jewish propaganda. Indicative of Egypt's attempt to hide her Nazis is the fact that William Stevenson of the Toronto Star was expelled from the country twenty-four hours after filing the first interview with von Leers.

---General Otto Remer--headed the Egyptian training program which created the fedayeen guerilla fighters.

NASSER'S FOUR-PRONGED ATTACK AGAINST THE JEWS

On November 1, 1956, the Egyptian Government initiated a series of measures directed against the Jewish community. Four lines of action were pursued:

1. Arrests and imprisonment.
2. Expulsion from the country.
3. Economic strangulation.
4. Denial and revocation of citizenship.

Arrests and Imprisonment

On the night of November 1, squads of Egyptian police invaded Jewish homes in each of Egypt's leading cities. Forcing entry without any warrant, they concluded their searches by taking at least one member of the family--- usually the head of the house--off to prison. Families were warned not to leave their homes, except to purchase food for an hour or two a day. Building janitors were given firearms and invested with police authority to keep Jewish tenants in confinement.

For the first few days, prisoners were shunted around to a variety of common-law jails--such as the Citadel in Cairo, and the Prison des Barrages, about 25 miles from the city--and into various internment centers. Finally, they were grouped into five camps:

---The Abassiah Jewish School in Cairo held stateless Jews and those who were Egyptian citizens.

---The Prison des Barrages held Jews who were Greek, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Iranian, Romanian, Polish and White Russian -- any nationality except French or British.

---Two school buildings in Cairo, French and British, were internment centers for British and French citizens including several hundred Jews.

---The B'tesh prison at Heliopolis, a Cairo suburb, held 42 Jewish women.

Egyptian wardens warned prisoners that they were under martial law: that they had no civil rights. They were packed into cells without light or air, or into overcrowded school internment centers where it was forbidden to open the windows for days on end. Sanitary facilities could be used only under guard and at certain times. Some prisoners were lashed on the feet; others were cuffed and beaten when they refused to sign papers presented to them by the Egyptian authorities. Only after the intervention of the Red Cross were internment conditions somewhat alleviated and even the most elementary hygiene conditions observed.

As of December 7, 1956, at least 900 Jews had been arrested. With arrests still continuing, these figures represent an extremely conservative estimate.

Expulsion from the Country

Mass expulsion began about November 15. At that time, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior ordered a number of Jews--most of them stateless--to report immediately to Ministry offices. There they were told that unless they left the country within a few days (usually three to seven), they would be put into concentration camps. Here again, only one member of a family was usually chosen--most often the breadwinner, so that the whole family would have to go or be left without means of support.

Jews who have been interned are, almost without exception, expelled aboard planes or International Red Cross transports that now ply regularly between Alexandria and European ports. These prisoners--only a small fraction of the total number expelled--are brought directly from the jail to the plane or ship, usually in handcuffs. The departure of one such group--967 Jews from Cairo--was described by foreign correspondent William Richardson:

For the last hundred yards they were marched through the streets while Arabs shouted at them. At the station they were left handcuffed and under guard for more than an hour. A mob gathered, began cursing and spitting, and then threw stones. The guards laughed and their officers taunted the Jews: "You're going to die."¹

Soon after the expulsion program started, and with the obvious "approval" of the Egyptian government, the offices of the Grand Rabbinate in Cairo began registering Jews for emigration. Expulsion orders reached Jews of every status--Egyptian citizens, stateless and foreign subjects alike. All were required to state that they were leaving "voluntarily," would not return, and were renouncing all claims against Egypt.

At first, when the emigree left Egypt, the police took back his expulsion order, so that there would be no evidence of formal expulsion. Later, such orders were not even written; Jews were simply required to sign a statement that they had received verbal orders. In some cases, even Jews holding Egyptian passports, who refused to sign "voluntary requests" for emigration, were physically "persuaded" to do so by the Egyptian police. In other cases, interned prisoners were told that they would have to remain in jail until they agreed to give up their citizenship and leave the country. Word of such incidents, spreading rapidly among the Jewish population, contributed to the exodus.

Within three months, at least 10,000 Jews left the country.²

At the outset, those departing were permitted to take only 20 Egyptian pounds (approximately \$57) and a small valise of personal effects. Today, they may take 100 Egyptian pounds (about \$287) plus two valises. All emigrants are carefully searched by customs officers, to make sure that no personal valuables are carried away.

1. New York Post, January 8, 1957.

2. By February 10, 1957, ships leaving Egypt had carried over 8,500 Jewish refugees to Europe: 2,092 to Greece; 3,855 to France; 2,600 to Italy. Many others left Egypt by air, going directly to Switzerland, Belgium and elsewhere. Thus, 10,000 is a conservative estimate of the total.

Economic Strangulation

The Government of Egypt has made it plain that Jews not officially expelled now face the choice of leaving voluntarily or remaining without means of survival.

Economic strangulation of Egypt's Jewish community is taking place under Military Proclamation No. 4, headed "Regime of Sequestrations" and dated November 1, 1956. Article I states:

The director-general of the management of properties of persons interned or placed under surveillance, charged with the execution of the provisions of Law No. 176 of 1956, will assume the management of the properties of the following persons and institutions:

1. All physical persons who were interned or placed under surveillance in execution of the law relative to the state of siege.

2. Every society, association or foundation, whatever its purpose may be, functioning under the control of any single person cited above, or any person having an important interest in it.

3. All persons who reside outside of the Republic of Egypt but pursue activities which are prejudicial to the security of the State.

4. All branches, agencies or bureaus domiciled in the Republic of Egypt and functioning under the control of any of the aforementioned persons or those who have an important interest in them.

Jews either "interned" or under "surveillance," and therefore subject to this order, represent the economic mainstay of Egyptian Jewry--the largest and most important enterprises; and the main sustenance, through voluntary contributions, of Jewish religious, educational, social and welfare institutions.

Similar action against British and French nationals, Jewish and non-Jewish, has proceeded under another Military Proclamation No. 5. Proclamation No. 4., however, was aimed almost exclusively at Jews -- stateless, Egyptian citizens and nationals of countries other than Britain and France.

But this measure was only the beginning.

Jews working for sequestered firms were either fired immediately or advised that they would be dropped as soon as substitutes were trained. Often, these discharges were called "indefinite suspension," to avoid paying pensions or allowances legally due.

Non-sequestered firms employing Jews were unofficially advised that it would be difficult to obtain export-import licenses and other essential Government permits while Jews were on their payrolls.

Various professional societies and guilds published public announcements expelling all their British, French and Jewish members, thereby preventing doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants from continuing to practice their professions.

In other economic spheres, regulations were adopted which, in effect, eliminated all Jews and Westerners. A Cotton Exchange ruling, for example, that all transactions must be carried on in the Arabic tongue, made it impossible for the overwhelming majority of non-Moslem brokers to do business.

Bank funds belonging to Jews have been blocked. Thus, those who had means, instead of being able to help the needy, are themselves in dire straits.

It should be noted that the Egyptian Government has been careful to cloak these measures against Jews in language that omits the word "Jew." Through these various devices, devious and direct, the Jewish breadwinner has suffered the seizure of his business, the loss of his job, the closing down of his professional practice, the wiping out of resources and livelihood alike.

Denial and Revocation of Citizenship

In November 1956, Egypt modified its citizenship and nationality laws in order to keep Jews from becoming Egyptian citizens, should they desire to do so, and to provide a legal base for withdrawing the citizenship status of those Jews who had attained it.

Article 1, of the new law of November 22, 1956, stipulates that "Zionists" shall not be eligible for citizenship; and Article 18 of the same law asserts that "Egyptian nationality may be declared forfeited" by order of the Ministry of the Interior in the case of persons classified as "Zionists." The law, however, does not define Zionism, leaving Egyptian authorities free to interpret it as they please.

Furthermore, under the new law, only individuals "established on Egyptian territory before January 1, 1900, who conserved their residence until the date of promulgation of the present law" are eligible for citizenship. Since there is no documentation available in Egypt that would enable a person to prove he had been there continuously since 1900, this clause gives the Egyptian authorities additional ground for denying citizenship at will.

WHAT THE U.S. CAN DO TO HELP

Since the great majority are stateless, emigration of Jews from Egypt presents many problems. However, a number of countries--France, Britain, Italy, Brazil, Switzerland, Israel, and others--are aiding them in their efforts to find new homes.

Although the United States has cautioned the Egyptian government on its treatment of Jews, the emigration requirements of the McCarran-Walter Act have not been eased to permit their entrance. There are several important steps the U.S. could take:

1. The Jews driven from Egypt deserve the same humanitarian considerations so generously accorded the refugees from Communist Hungary. The parole provisions of the McCarran-Walter Act should be utilized to admit some of them to the U.S. on the same basis as Hungarian refugees.

2. The U.S. should institute a "mercy airlift" for all who are permitted to come here.

3. The U.S. should urge the Secretary General of the United Nations to investigate Egypt's treatment of Jews and her violation of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Pertinent Provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 9: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

Article 15: "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality."

Article 17: "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."

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