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ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Letter dated 24 August 1972 from the Permanent Representative of
Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I refer to my letter addressed to you on 21 August 1972 (A/8767) regarding new repressive measures directed against Soviet Jews who wish to unite with their families and their people in Israel.

On instructions of my Government I have the honour to transmit to you a statement by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Golda Meir, delivered in the Knesset yesterday, 23 August 1972, and the resolution adopted by the Knesset on the same day.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 50 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Yosef TEKOAH
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

* A/8760.

STATEMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, MRS. GOLDA MEIR
CONCERNING SOVIET JEWRY, DELIVERED IN THE KNESSET
23 AUGUST 1972

Mr. Speaker, Honourable House,

Once again the Knesset has been alerted to voice its solidarity with our Jewish brethren in the Soviet Union.

Like a bolt out of the blue the news came upon us of the new and heavy oppression inflicted on the Jews in Soviet Russia.

The Soviet authorities resolved that every Jewish intellectual who wishes to come to Israel be compelled to make an exorbitant payment - a head-tax - as a personal ransom in exchange for the right to leave for Israel and a penalty for their educational achievements. This law was not promulgated anywhere - and no public announcement of it was ever made.

According to the news we have, the amount of the ransom ranges from the sum of 4,000 roubles for graduates of co-operative institutes to a sum of 20,000 roubles for university graduates in the sciences. A university graduate, for instance, will be obliged in accordance with this "human price-list" to pay a ransom exceeding 12,000 roubles. A graduate of an institute of the arts or an academy of music will have to pay a ransom of 9,600 roubles.

It must be stressed that this ransom is imposed on every intellectual separately, even in the same family, so that the total ransom for one family may well be double, three times or four times as heavy, all in accordance with the number of "intellectuals" in every family. These sums are over and above the 940 roubles which are nowadays being paid by every member of a family above the age of 16 whose emigration to Israel has been approved.

The payment of ransom does not as yet entitle one to emigration to Israel and is enacted retroactively on all intellectuals whose immigration into Israel has been approved who have not yet emigrated.

During the last few days reports have reached us that the Soviet authorities are preparing further tariffs for those who completed their high school or trade school tuition. If this be true, there are no inhibitions for whoever is capable of embarking on the way of extortion.

Members of the Knesset,

The ransom decree is part and parcel of a more extensive campaign of Soviet anti-Jewish policy meant to deter Jews from submitting applications for immigration into Israel, to put further handicaps in the way of young Jews wishing to learn and study, to sabotage the immigration into Israel of intellectual Jews by means of fines they are unable to pay, and above all to blot out the national awakening of Soviet Jewry.

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This cruel decree was preceded by a long row of oppressive and discriminatory measures intended to deter Jews from submitting applications for immigration into Israel.

The Soviet authorities prevented the emigration of a high percentage of Jews residing in the old Soviet districts, i.e. in the regions outside the Baltic States and the areas annexed after the Second World War, as well as Georgia and Bukhara. Only 20 per cent of those who applied to go to Israel in the old regions were granted permits to leave.

In spite of the immigration in previous years, there are today almost 100,000 Jews who received requests to immigrate from their relatives in Israel, but they are still knocking at the doors of the Soviet authorities in the hope of receiving permits to immigrate into Israel.

During the last few months arrests took place in the old parts of the Soviet Union and Jews were jailed and in some cases were sent to hospitals and lunatic asylums.

We must know that for the "crime" of applying for an exit permit to Israel a whole set of oppressive steps and chicaneries is put in action by the authorities. For instance, dismissal from their jobs, expulsion from the university, humiliating censure at public meetings, etc. We have lists of scores of Jewish scientists who were dismissed from their jobs on the morrow of their submitting applications to come to Israel.

And there are those whose applications were rejected but they continue to be punished for the very submission of their request to leave.

Frequently the applicants, even if they are 30 years of age or older, are required to produce written consent from their parents concerning their emigration. These written consents cause their parents and relatives trouble at their places of work. Lately broadcasts from Israel have been methodically jammed though the Voice-of-Zion broadcasts to the diaspora deal with cultural and artistic subjects carefully avoiding controversial political topics.

We learned recently that the Soviet authorities have also started to disconnect the telephones in the homes of those struggling for immigration to Israel.

All the above steps - in addition to the payment of the head-tax - are meant to deter Jews from submitting applications for immigration into Israel. But the head-tax is the severest and most oppressive of the lot.

About 20 per cent of all recent immigrants from the Soviet Union fall within the category of those subject to the head-tax, and this is while the head-tax does not yet apply to high school graduates. Furthermore, imposing the head-tax on one university graduate may well hold up the immigration of a whole family or cause further separation within families part of whom have already arrived in Israel, whilst others remained behind and are subjected to the ransom decree.

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Members of the Knesset,

This cruel and shameful decree enacted by the rulers of the great Soviet Union, which has rightly prided itself on providing a chance for education to all its citizens, is anti-Jewish in spirit and inhuman in content. This is a decree aimed against the Jewish community in the Soviet Union. But its immoral significance is universal inasmuch as it contains elements of brutality against man, human spirit and liberty, and man's right to live in affinity with his people. This policy actually tells every educated Jew in the Soviet Union: "Your brains and whatever you have studied and thought don't actually belong to you. Since you are a Jew, it is doubtful whether you are entitled to study and gain an education at all. And if you are bound for Israel to join your people - it is your duty to suffer. As for us, we will do our best to find clever means to prevent your emigration in all ways possible without being choosy about our means".

This cynical device is drawn from the arsenal of punishments which were appropriate to the dark period of the history of the Soviet Union, which we had all hoped had passed, never to return. This decree evokes disquieting memories from dark days. It enslaves intellectuals in the very state whose people arose and proclaimed that they intended to see an end to slavery and serfdom and to liberate mankind. There were many Jews who believed this vision would come true and who took part in the struggle for the implementation of this human ideal.

Also the Jewish contribution to the development of spiritual and scientific values in the Soviet Union is great indeed.

There are some dark corners left in the world where slave trade is still practiced. According to the rules of this trade, those who are stronger in body fetch a higher price for their owners. In the Soviet Union they have now worked out a price list which is based on the value of the brain - the spirit - or one might even say, the soul of man.

The people of Israel and the entire Jewish people wherever it is, will neither accept nor acquiesce in the gravity of this decree, which cannot be regarded as a matter affecting only Soviet Jewry. It is a challenge to every Jew in Israel and throughout the world. If a Jew in the Soviet Union becomes saleable commodity then we are all affected, until they become free men too. We cannot be silent in the face of this persecution. We shall accept neither its cruel motives nor its destructive consequences. For many long and painful years we waited for the arrival of our brothers from there. Recently there has been a trickle of arrivals. Our brethren who arrived from there were not only a source of joy for us, but also a source of hope for the future. In spite of the bitter quarrels between us and the Soviets over their Middle East policy, we were unstinting in expressing our appreciation for those who came and the hope that emigration permits for family reunification would increase in time.

I repeat this is not simply the struggle of Soviet Jewry with whom we here in Israel identify. Nor is this merely a struggle Jews the world over identify with. It is the struggle of the entire Jewish people. This struggle is rooted in

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the solidarity of the Jewish people and all the content and essence of the emergence of the Jewish state is bound up in it. It is one struggle, one front. We ask for the solidarity and support of all those who loathe bondage and serfdom because this conspiracy is directed against basic human freedom.

And indeed a wave of protest has spread throughout the world, amongst peoples and in countries in every continent not excluding enlightened circles amongst the Soviet peoples.

And it is no wonder that the soul of every man and woman in Israel, in the Jewish people and the entire enlightened world, is filled with anger and demands that the disgraceful ransom be abolished. That those of our people who wish to emigrate be allowed to do so without paying a ransom, without discrimination, without a price list and without selection on the basis of education and property.

Members of the Knesset,

I feel duty bound in the name of the Knesset and the people of Israel to say a word of encouragement to our brothers who are directly affected, both to them and their families, to all those who are hit and will be hit by the penalty of this murderous decree. We are with you. We shall not forsake our obligations as Jews and human beings to fight alongside you and to enlist all possible public support until the decree is cancelled. You have proved your spiritual endurance and your longing for Zion, and we are confident that you will also have trust in us and in the Jewish people.

Your just struggle which has enjoyed and will continue to enjoy the support of public opinion throughout the world has borne fruit in the past and shall do so in the future. Your struggle will be as pure as it is just.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE KNESSET ON 23 AUGUST 1972

1. The Knesset notes that the head-tax imposed by the Soviet authorities on Jews holding university degrees in the Soviet Union who desire to emigrate to Israel is an infringement of human rights and a trampling underfoot of human morals and an attempt to prevent the immigration of Jews to their historic homeland. This device aims at cutting off the Jewish community in the Soviet Union from the Jewish people and from the State of Israel.
2. The Knesset appeals to the Government of the Soviet Union to repeal this shameful decree which is aimed only at the Jewish citizens and recalls the czarist, anti-Jewish legislation.
3. The Knesset takes note with deep appreciation of the great response all over the world amongst peoples, parliaments, governments, progressive organizations, scientists and religious leaders - who all raised their voices in protest against the ransom and demanded its cancellation.
4. The Knesset appeals to all governments, parliaments and international institutions and organizations as well as to the enlightened public opinion in all countries, to work towards the abolition of the head-tax imposed on the Jews in the Soviet Union who wish to return to their historic homeland.
5. The Knesset calls upon the Jewish people to mobilize its strength, neither to rest nor to cease their efforts until the "diploma levy" is abolished and the freedom of emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union is insured in effect.
6. The Knesset calls upon scientists of all nations to rise to the defence of the human and national rights of their colleagues in the Soviet Union.
7. The Knesset sends its good wishes and its hope that they might continue their good fight to our brethren in the Soviet Union, who are struggling for their human rights and their affinity with our people. The Knesset declares that the people in Israel as well as the Jewish nation the whole world over will not rest until the head-tax is abolished.
8. The Knesset takes note of the Government statement as delivered by the Prime Minister at the special session on Wednesday the 13th of Elul 5732 (23 August 1972).
