

CONFIDENTIAL

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON JEWISH SOCIAL AND WELFARE SERVICES

(CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES SERVICES JUIFS
DE BIENFAISANCE ET D'ASSISTANCE SOCIAL)

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Minutes of the Meeting
held in London
on 21st November 1975

Present: Lord Nathan (CBF) - in the Chair

Mr. M. Creeger (CBF) *✓ RT*
Mrs. R. Davison (AJDC)
Mr. T. Feder (AJDC)
Mr. V. Girmounsky (ICA)
Mr. R. Gilbert (ORT)
Sir Henry d'Avigdor Goldsmid (ICA)
Mr. F. Hollander (ECJOS)
Mr. H. Oscar Joseph (CBF)
Dr. A. Kohane (AJDC)
Miss A. Michel (CBF)
Mr. J. Neville (ICA)
Mr. C. D. Rappaport (ICA)
Mr. L. Seiderman (HIAS)
Mr. S. H. Somper (CBF)
Miss J. V. Stiebel (CBF)

The provisional Agenda was approved.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th May 1975, which had been circulated, were approved and signed.

Lord Nathan called on Mr. Feder who wished to acquaint members of the fact that Mr. Samuel L. Haber, Executive Vice-Chairman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was retiring at the beginning of December. While his successor had been appointed, this fact was not generally known yet, but he thought that members of INTERCO would like to know that it will be Mr. Ralph Goldman, at present an Associate Director of MAIBEN/JDC in Israel.

The Chairman of AJJDC, Mr. Weiler, had been responsible for some very great changes within the Joint. As he, Mr. Feder, had mentioned at the previous INTERCO meeting, a survey in depth was in process and no doubt changes would take place. When comparing the Joint budget for 1976 with that of five years ago, it could be seen that the budget had increased by \$6,000,000. The funds were needed primarily in Europe for refugees, Israel and Eastern Europe. No doubt JDC would be forced into a deficit with constant new demands that require funds.

In reply to a question from Sir Henry d'Avigdor Goldsmid, Mr. Feder said that they would go to the banks for loans.

EASTERN EUROPEAN REFUGEE SITUATION (Item 3)

Dr. Kohane reported on changes which have taken place since the previous meeting.

USSR. Dr. Kohane started his report with the movement from the USSR. At present about 1,000 Russian Jews are coming out monthly, and the total number of arrivals in Vienna since the beginning of this year amounted to about 11,500. It was expected that by the end of 1975 the number of Russian Jews who left Russia with Israeli visas would reach the figure of slightly over 13,000.

The biggest change during the present year was in the increasing number of drop-outs - people who arrive in Vienna with Israeli visas and change their direction, registering with JDC and HIAS for emigration to the U.S., Canada, and to a lesser degree, to Australia and New Zealand.

Not so long ago, just in 1971, every Jew who came out of the Soviet Union went to Israel. Already in 1973, 4% of the arrivals went to countries other than Israel. The percentage of drop-outs increased in 1974 to 18%, and this year the average figure is 40%. Obviously, this presented a great challenge and serious difficulties for JDC, HIAS and to a lesser degree, for ORT in Rome (who provide English classes for the transmigrants). Already at the beginning of this year JDC/HIAS had a caseload in Rome of about 1,800 Russian Jews. To this should be added the number of drop-outs which for this year will reach the figure of about 5,000, plus another 500 Russian Jews who arrived in Rome directly from Russia, thus reaching the staggering total of 7,300 Russian transmigrants for whom those three organizations had to provide the necessary services. Dr. Kohane stated that although there would be a record number of departures this year for the U.S. and other countries, amounting to nearly 5,000, still the caseload - which was very high at the beginning of the year - would be even higher at the end of this year. HIAS and JDC in the States will make all efforts in order to speed up the emigration and reception of immigrants in the U.S. and Canada.

Dr. Kohane reported that while the Jewish protest movement in Soviet Russia is continuing unabated, it is not getting as much prominence in the world press, as it has lost much of its "news value." Exceptions were such cases without precedent as the invasion of the synagogues in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev by the Russian militia during Passover services and the dispersal of people who had come for prayer.

The Soviet propaganda tries to explain the decreasing number of Russian Jews leaving the country by the adverse news received from those already in Israel and by the fact that those who wanted to leave have already done so. The Soviet government claims that they are presently approving over 95% of all applications for emigration, and consequently the decrease in emigration is caused by the drop in the number of applicants. However, the facts belie this explanation. We know that about 250,000 affidavits have been sent to Soviet Russia from Israel, but only about 120,000 have received permission to leave. It could therefore be assumed that about 130,000 applicants have not received their exit visa. Furthermore, it is known that this year an average of 2,400 affidavits have been sent to Russia per month, but only 1,000 exit visas are being issued monthly. The fact is that not only an increasing number of people - including almost all activists - are getting refusals of their visa applications, but many others are afraid to apply because of the repression and persecution used by the Soviet government against people registering for emigration.

Dr. Kohane went on to state that in view of the worsening situation of the Soviet Jews and the ever lengthening period of waiting for visas, the budget for assistance to Jews in Russia had been increased by about 70% during this year. This had made it possible to send to Russia a record number of over 40,000 parcels and 4,000 cash gift vouchers. The gift vouchers, which are rather expensive, enable the recipients to purchase goods in special shops where items which are almost unavailable on the local market are sold exclusively for foreign currency. Those gift vouchers were being sent to special and priority cases. However, last month the Soviet authorities informed their licensed firms handling such transfers that gift vouchers would no longer be permitted after the end of this year. Consequently, the gift vouchers would be replaced by sending bigger parcels of much higher value.

As regards returnees from Israel, Dr. Kohane recalled the situation which existed last year when about 1,000 of them had arrived in Belgium. Now, the number of new arrivals from Israel is very low, and as most of those who arrived have already emigrated, the total number of returnees from Israel now waiting in various European countries for emigration to the West is down to about 1,200. There was a variety of reasons for the decrease in the influx of returnees: The increase in the number of drop-outs who would become potential returnees; most people who wished to leave Israel had now gone; and the knowledge that Jewish organizations would not support them or register them for onward emigration.

RUMANIA. JDC had increased its budget for this country to give better cash assistance to the aged. As far as emigration was concerned, there had been more discussions in Washington during the last few months, but there was hardly any increase in emigration so far.

HUNGARY. JDC was continuing to finance the welfare program on behalf of the needy aged in Hungary. Furthermore, JDC might look into the possibility of extending this program during a visit to the country, which might take place soon.

POLAND. It is estimated that there are no more than 3,000 - 4,000 Jews in Poland, the great majority of whom were receiving regularly cash gift vouchers -- which meant for most of them the difference between life and starvation, as witnessed by the many letters being received. Furthermore, the Union of Jewish Congregations in Poland, its religious services, synagogues, celebration of Jewish holidays, baking and distribution of matzoth, were being supported.

Dr. Kohane used the opportunity to express his thanks for the CBF grants on behalf of various projects in Rumania, Hungary and Poland, which had been of considerable value.

Mr. Gilbert inquired whether there was any significance regarding the ban on vouchers to Russia. Dr. Kohane said that this was an unpleasant and sudden development, and this unexpected decision was the reason why more gift vouchers had been sent during the last month than during the past three years.

Mr. Girmounsky mentioned that they had had some experience regarding the sending of money to Russia, but due to the adverse exchange position they were now sending parcels to needy people.

SITUATION IN MOSLEM COUNTRIES (Item 4).

Mr. Feder said that the recent U.N. vote on Israel did not seem to have had very much impact in Moslem countries.

MOROCCO. Morocco has the problem of the Sahara and a few Moroccan Jews had signed up for the march. Some of the Jewish leaders wished to be helpful to the King in this matter, and he had learned from Mr. Engel, their country director, that two persons were coming out to meet the Jewish leadership in the U.K., U.S.A. and possibly also other countries. They wished to tell the world about the King's positive attitude on Jews and also his reasons for the Sahara venture. This action resulted in a split among the Jewish leadership in Morocco. At present, the two persons were in the U.S.A., although their reception by some of the Jewish leaders in Europe whom they had met had been rather negative. The economic position in Morocco was not too bad. There was little unemployment, and in fact a number of Jewish teachers had left their schools because they obtained better paid employment elsewhere. There were still 17,000 to 20,000 Jews in Morocco and 5,000 Jewish children attending Jewish schools. A few Moroccan Jews had returned from Israel, as they were unable to have their passports renewed when they got to France.

At the last meeting Mr. Feder had mentioned the difficulty of funds in Morocco because of the bad rate of exchange to the dollar. This has improved somewhat with the strengthening of the dollar. There was still very little movement out of Morocco, to Israel or Canada.

TUNISIA. Very many Jews from that country who had left for France came back for holidays, because they had money and property which had been left behind. There were approximately 7,000 Jews still in Tunisia, but it was not expected that more than 1,000 or 1,500 would want to leave the country. There were very many aged and sick. There was a new Chief Rabbi in Tunisia who was very pro-Tunisian. Sometimes he managed to get things done for the Jewish community, but he was not against the Tunisian government taking over empty synagogues without payment to the community. The President of the Jewish community was retiring at the end of this year and it would be very difficult to replace him.

IRAN. The Chairman of the Jewish community had been arrested for profiteering. He was sent to the mountains but on returning he was given three additional months in jail.

Some problems had arisen when Jewish visitors had been shown around, although the Joint was showing only the positive element, like the ORT school. However, the Jewish community in the country had complained about such visitors, especially that they were taking photographs, as they felt that these might upset the government. At the previous meeting he had mentioned that the government would take over the Jewish schools, but it was not known at that time how the scheme would work. The government had, in fact, taken over the secular education, but the Jewish organizations still paid for foreign language classes, Hebrew and religious education. It might prove difficult in the future to give a proper Jewish education in those schools.

SYRIA. There had been an easing off of some of the restrictions, but it was not known why this should be so. JDC had learned that a few Syrian businessmen were allowed to travel outside the country, but they did not approach any Jewish organizations.

LEBANON. Mr. Feder had had a meeting with the leader of the Jewish community in Geneva. Despite his efforts, Dr. Attié had insisted on going back. He felt responsible for the Jews left in the country, and he wished to help them leave. Mr. Seidenman would give a fuller report on this question.

Mr. Seidenman, referring to Dr. Kohane's report on Russian Jews in Rome, said that they could not move to other countries as quickly as it had been hoped. Some difficulties had developed with regard to the reception in American communities, because they had made such efforts to take so many. Now integration problems in some of the major Jewish American communities had arisen, and the communities had requested a slower rate of new arrivals. There had also been an impact on fund raising and the availability of money which could be used by the American Jewish communities for resettlement. As the number of new Russian arrivals increased, the communities ran out of cash for this purpose. There would be a meeting during the week of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Miami to discuss this problem. The Russian Jews showed great interest in emigrating to Australia and New Zealand, as they were made most welcome by the Jewish communities there.

MIDDLE EAST REFUGEE MOVEMENT (Item 5).

MOROCCO. Mr. Seidenman reported that, since the last INTERCO meeting, he had been to Morocco twice. The difficulties which had previously arisen with regard to special facilities regarding emigration had been overcome. At the end of September he had been in Rabat and, as a result of his discussions, all facilities had been restored to HIAS. There was a general new passport procedure in Morocco, for which anybody leaving the country had to produce documents such as birth certificates, tax clearance, etc. Many of the Jews now living in towns had originally lived in small mountain villages. They could not go back because this would present a danger to them, and it was impossible for them to obtain the necessary documentation. HIAS had now been given a promise that such documentation would be waived. While he was in Rabat, a number of documents were presented and signed. The new arrangements should be of a permanent nature.

As mentioned by Mr. Feder, several families had returned to Morocco from Israel - i.e. three families returned to Rabat who had been in Israel between three and five years. They did not want any contact with Jews in Rabat for the moment, but their return created a stir in the city. The returnees expressed disappointment in the life in Israel and thus others were discouraged from emigrating.

LEBANON. The Jewish community numbered between 1,500 and 2,000. Regular contact had been established through the community leader who was already over 80 years old and a very courageous man. The contact had been once weekly by telephone. When the President of the community came out, he was told of information received from Israel that the position for the community in Lebanon was going to worsen. He was asked to urge everybody to leave as soon as possible. The President returned to Lebanon despite messages from his own community to stay away, but he felt a moral responsibility. He returned to Lebanon on the 17th September after having agreed that HIAS should telephone him daily. During the recent Civil War most members of the Jewish community went into the mountains and therefore escaped the fighting. Three Jews were killed by sniper fire, but this was not an anti-Jewish action. The people returned to the city, but many could not reach the airport for departure. Dr. Attié had only managed to get out on his second attempt, reaching the airport because he had been given cover by Lebanese tanks.

Mr. Seidenman said that remarks had appeared in the London "Jewish Chronicle" which gave an entirely false impression of the Lebanese Jewish community situation, and he hoped that the paper could be persuaded to give accurate information.

There were no accurate figures available regarding departures from Lebanon. It was known that families were leaving now for London, Paris, New York, Rio de Janeiro and Israel. About half the Jewish community had left the country. A great number of people had no money because of the closure of the banks in Lebanon. However, HIAS had means to get tickets issued by Air France when required.

Mr. Joseph mentioned that, in this country, the Jewish Refugees Committee had helped two families to extend their permits. The Home Office had indicated that there might be some difficulties if more people came from Lebanon, because it was not a specifically Jewish problem, but the Home Office promised to be helpful as they had always been in the past.

ASSISTANCE TO FALASHAS (Item 6).

It was mentioned that an important development had been that, after a number of months, at long last a representative of the Falasha Welfare Association was again in Ethiopia. Mr. Gershon Levy had sent very optimistic initial reports. He had started a census of the Jewish population, and it might be known in a few months what was really required in the country. The F.W.A. was preparing a budget for schools, both those in existence and possibly new ones, as well as for a pilot project for feeding in schools and the extension of existing preventive health services.

Mr. Hollander mentioned that there could possibly be some help on this question from government sources in Sweden. The amounts mentioned would be quite important, but it all depended on the reception such a scheme would receive from the Ethiopian government. Dr. Kohane said that Mr. Levy was trying to arrange the registration of the F.W.A. in Ethiopia and there was also a hope that he would receive a resident's permit.

DEVELOPMENTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS (Item 7).

Dr. Kohane reported that INTERCO had been approached by the Jewish members of NGOs in New York to join in the protest against the recent Resolution on Zionism passed by the United Nations, and they submitted a draft of a statement with the request that INTERCO sign it also. The members of INTERCO had been consulted in advance and they approved the statement, which in the meantime had been sent to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

During the last three days there had been meetings in Paris of the NGOs accredited at UNESCO, and the Jewish organizations suggested that a Motion condemning the Resolution passed by the United Nations be submitted to the 15th International Conference of NGOs at UNESCO. This Motion was signed by the various Jewish NGOs which have representatives in France - namely, the International Council of B'nai B'rith, World Jewish Congress, the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations, the International Council of Jewish Women, the International League for the Rights of Man, and INTERCO.

In the past INTERCO had been represented at the various meetings in France (mostly UNESCO) by Mr. Schrager (former Director of ORT in France). However, because of Mr. Schrager's absence due to prolonged illness, a vacuum had been created which was filled temporarily by Mr. Elzas (Secretary of the European Council). In order to achieve permanent representation and smoother cooperation, it was decided to appoint Dr. Ivor Svarc (Director of HIAS and JDC in France) as INTERCO's representative at UNESCO, at the Council of NGOs accredited at UNESCO, and when necessary, at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

NEXT MEETING.

The Chairman thanked all speakers for their reports and it was decided that the next meeting of INTERCO should be held on Sunday, 23rd May 1976, in London.

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