

Refugee from Iraq the country of his Ancestors

By Aharon Nathan (Iraqi Jew)

Letter to the President:

Israel's fears must be understood against its historical background. Two thousand years of persecution, execution and forced conversion culminated in Hitler's Final Solution, a solution which wiped out almost half the world's Jewish population on the watch of the civilised world.

Today it is worrying Israelis and Jews alike that what happened in Germany under the Nazis in the early 1930s is being re-enacted in a startling similar way in Europe today. Every aspect of life in Israel, its people, its institutions, its places of learning, even its acclaimed courts of justice are being demonized. Recently this demonizing has been organized and reinforced by concerted bans and boycotts here in Europe in protest they say to the occupation of Palestinian lands to which the majority of the people of Israel are opposed. All this sends shivers in the hearts of Jews everywhere reminding them of the anti-Semitic demonizing propaganda of the 1930s, which was the precursor of, and prepared the ground for the Holocaust. As Condoleezza Rice stated recently: Anti-Semitism is not just a historical fact but a current event.

The Arab World has played and continues to play its active part too in the Jewish tragedy. During World War 2 they made Jewish life in their midst a living hell. By the early 1950's when the safe haven of Israel opened, some 900,000 Jews were ethnically cleansed to Israel from Arab countries leaving all Arab countries what the Nazis called Judenrein, lands without Jews. Therefore what the Nazis failed to do the Arab countries accomplished and perpetuated. And the world accepts that as normal. These 900,000 Jewish refugees are forgotten because Israel did not leave them in camps to rot and did not ask the UN to set up agencies to serve to perpetuate their misery and status as refugees. With help from Jews worldwide these Jewish refugees with their bare hands gave themselves dignity, security and a future in stark contrast to the way rich, very rich, Arabs treated the then 700,000 Palestinian refugees and disgracefully continue to treat them today. Mr President, I was a victim and a witness of this (constructive) ethnic cleansing. My personal story tells it all.

Fleeing Iraq, in my case via Iran, whose people I will always be indebted to for their hospitality and safe passage at my desperate time of need. I arrived at the

absorption centre in Israel in 1949. I found there a mixture of people all dejected all helpless. My fellow refugees from Arab countries were desperately trying to rebuild their lives out of nothing in a land of nothing. But it was the sight of the remnants of the holocaust camps that broke my heart and my spirit. I saw frightened shadows of human beings dazed, confused and broken trying to regain their existence as humans. But the worst of all instead of hatred, rage and bitterness I found many trying to remove the concentration camp numbers on their arms feeling guilty of being alive and ashamed of not having put up a fight before allowing themselves to be led as sheep to the Gas chambers. It is the combined images of the ethnically cleansed Arab Jews who lost their countries, and the Holocaust remnants of European Jews who lost their dignity, that are engraved in my being and in the mind of every Jew who says "never again" Israelis feel the need to keep their nuclear shield not because they are on a Samson-like suicidal mission. It is because they are determined to live with pride and dignity denied to them in those dark days of the 30s and 40s. And this time, if they must die, they want to die fighting.

Fellow members of our great University, Your vote this evening will resound beyond the Quads of Oxford and the shores of Britain as indeed happened following the notorious debate of 1933. Israel desperately needs your support this evening at a time when it is waiting for a signal of hope from its Arab neighbours to create together two states living side by side in peace. It is these neighbours who can decide the fate of the Israeli nuclear weapons and make them redundant. Because it is they who continue to deny Israel and seek its destruction. Until their attitude changes Israel has the right above any other country be it Iran, Pakistan, France or Britain itself to continue to possess the nuclear shield, not to gain victory but through deterrence to prevent war and secure its continued existence. Mr President: Unlike Iran whose need for nuclear weapons is tenuous and optional, for Israel it is an existential imperative.