

Remembering the Nazi inspired 1941 Baghdad Farhud Arab Pogrom at the UN



Grand Mufti of Jerusalem al Husseini and SS Chief Heinrich
Himmler

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Reut Cohen chronicled her family's horrifying experience during The Farhud, Nazi-inspired pogrom in Baghdad on the 1st day of Shavuot, June 1, 1941 in an Iconoclast post about her heritage, ["The Farhud and my Family's Sephardic/Mizrahi Israeli Heritage."](#) In our introduction to her post we referenced a 2014 [post](#) we did on the 73rd commemoration of the Farhud and referenced an effort to obtain Holocaust benefits for the victims of the Farhud. We wrote:

On the occasion of the 73rd commemoration of the *Farhud Ha'aretz* published an article raising the question of whether it should be considered a Holocaust event, ["Lawyers make case for giving Iraqi Jews Holocaust benefits"](#). There is ample evidence of Nazi involvement in the coup by Iraqi strongman Ali Rashid al-Gaylani, the Nazi Foreign ministry, and the German Ambassador to Iraq. Then there was the role of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al Husseini who was living in Baghdad after he was forced by British Palestinian Mandatory authorities to leave given his role in the Arab riots from 1936 to 1939. prior to the occurrence of the Farhud, for sanctuary in Berlin as Hitler's house guest during WWII. Edwin Black

chronicled the 1941 Baghdad pogrom and both Nazi and Hussein's involvement in his 2010 book, [*The Farhud: Roots of the Arab-Nazi Alliance in the Holocaust*](#).



Edwin Black

Black published an op ed in today's edition of *The Algemeiner* about a special ceremony at the UN Headquarters commemorating the inauguration of International Farhud Day, [*Remembering Farhud Day and the Arab Pogroms*](#). The opening stanza of his piece we thought would not be lost of Reut Cohen, Bat Ye'or and other victims of Arab pogroms in Israel and like Cohen and her family in the West:

While I was speaking to the packed room, a woman I did not know, sitting in the front row, slowly shook her tear-stained head in disbelief and muttered softly ... barely audible ... "I never thought I would hear these words in this building."

The woman, it turns out, was of Iraqi Jewish ancestry. The building was the iconic United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan, astride the East River. The event was in a hall routinely used by the UN Security Council. The day was June 1, 2015. The occasion was the proclamation of "[International Farhud Day](#)" at the UN as a live global event broadcast by UN TV.

Farhud in an Arabic dialect means *violent dispossession*. The words I spoke that gripped the woman listening described in detail how the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, leader of the Arab community in Mandate Palestine, organized a blood-curdling massacre by Nazi-allied Arabs against Baghdad's peaceful Jewish community on June 1-2, 1941. [The ensuing mass rape, beheading, murder, burning, and looting spree](#) was the first step in a process that throughout the Arab world effectively ended

2,600 years of Jewish existence in those lands. Ultimately, some 850,000 to 900,000 Jews were systemically pauperized and made stateless in a coordinated forced exodus from the Arab world. Many Sephardic Jews consider the 1941 Farhud, which murdered and maimed hundreds, to be their *Kristallnacht*.

For the past 74 years was this constellation of tragedies commonly known and/or spoken of within the Jewish community. In fact, it took years of highly [acrimonious, sometimes public](#), debate with and pressure on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) ?? only recently successful ?? to even [induce](#) the USHMM to [recognize either the atrocity that occurred, or the Mufti's role in the killing, as a Holocaust-era persecution](#).

Black explains why it took 74 years for this commemoration of The Farhud to occur:

First, persecution of Jewish victims in Arab countries did not conform to the established line of study that followed the classic Holocaust definition, as archetypically expressed by the USHMM's [mission statement](#): "*The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.*" Note the pivotal word "European." This geographic qualifier left out the Jews of Iraq as well as their [persecuted coreligionists in North Africa](#), where some [17 concentration camps](#) were established by Vichy-allied and Nazi influenced Arab regimes.

Second, because the persecution of Jews in Arab lands during WWII and their forced exodus was considered beyond the thematic horizon, the type of well-financed and skilled scholarship that has riveted world attention on the Holocaust in Europe, generally by-passed the Sephardic experience. Certainly, the overwhelming blood and eternal

sorrow of the Holocaust genocide was experienced by European Jewry. But their deeply tragic suffering, including that endured by my Polish parents, who survived, does not exclude the examination of other groups. Years of focus on the plight of Gypsies, Jews in Japan, and other persecuted groups proves that. Undeniably, a solid nexus clasps the events of the Middle East, roiling in oil, colonialism, and League of Nations Mandates, to a European theatre brimming with war crimes and military campaigns.

Third, critics say, that many of the leading Jewish newspapers and wire services, now vastly more politicized than they were in the prior decade, did not devote sufficient space and informed knowledge to the topic. Moreover, some these critics suggest that in recent years, the Jewish press seemed to have marginalized the atrocity and its aftermath as a political discussion. "When former Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon was doing his 2012 campaign for Jewish refugees from Arab lands," asserts Lyn Julius of the British organization HARIF – Association of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East, "hardly a day went by when certain Jewish or Israeli newspapers did not politicize the matter, or suggest Israel was exploiting the issue for political gain."

In that vein, the day before the June 1, 2015, UN event, one prominent Jewish newspaper published an article on the Farhud, which included this observation: "Now, Jewish organizations and the Israeli government deploy it [memory of the Farhud] frequently to support their claims for refugee recognition on behalf of Middle Eastern Jews." Before the UN ceremony, three different irate members of the audience showed me this article on their tablets, and the consensus of disdain was expressed by one Sephardic gentleman who objected, first quoting the newspaper with derision: "'Deploy it frequently to support their claims for refugee recognition on behalf of Middle Eastern

Jews?’” and then adding, “They would never say such a thing about the European *Kristallnacht!*” The complainers were equally astonished that this prominent article made no mention of the Mufti of Jerusalem. They felt the complete omission of Husseini’s involvement and the marginalization of their nightmare was typical of the roadblocks they had encountered during their decades-long struggle for recognition of their anguish.

Black noted the poignancy of International Farhud Day recognition:

But on June 1, 2015, yes, 74 inexcusably years late and, yes, not an hour too soon, after waiting for thirty minutes beneath a gaggle of umbrellas in the torrential rain at a narrow admittance gate on First Avenue, and then into a packed hall at the UN, attended by diplomats from several countries, human rights activists of various causes and key Jewish leaders from a communal spectrum, in an [event broadcast worldwide live by the UN itself](#), the stalwarts of Farhud memory gathered to finally make the proclamation of International Farhud Day – and made it loud and clear. In doing so, they made history by simply recognizing history.

All they wanted was to be remembered – to change the headline on their suffering from “the forgotten pogrom” to “the not forgotten pogrom.” All they wanted was to draw back the curtain of their sorrow without an asterisk, without a parenthetical, without a “but also” or a “however” or a political catchphrase to qualify or filter their disconsolation. In short, they wanted to take their place in the annals of misery for the same reason all other Jews gather into that space: so they can help whisper endlessly the words “never again” as a beacon to humanity.

The proclamation for International Farhud Day recognized the

key role of the Grand Mufti and Nazi Arab allies who organized and fomented the pogrom:

The [official proclamation](#) was read aloud that day to the world: "On behalf of Iraqi Jews everywhere who yearn to commemorate the Farhud, the Holocaust-era massacre by Arab nationalists in coordination with the Nazis, which occurred June 1-2, 1941 in Baghdad, killing hundreds of innocent Jews and brutalizing thousands more, and pillaging their property ... and on behalf of those who recognize that Palestinian Arab leaders, including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, were central instigators of the violence in Baghdad, along with Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gailani and the Golden Square coup plotters ... and on behalf of those who yearn to recognize that the Farhud was the first step in the process which resulted in the forced exodus of 850,000 to 900,000 Jewish refugees from centuries of peaceful existence in Arab countries ... The organizations and individuals assembled and represented here, this June 1, 2015, in New York City at the United Nations, do hereby proclaim June 1st as *International Farhud Day*, to recognize and commemorate the Nazi-allied massacre by Arabs, the mass forced exodus that followed, and the 850,000 to 900,000 Jewish refugees from Arab Lands. We recognize this date as a lamented day of history that should not be forgotten."

We note the signatories and witnesses of the proclamation:

[Seven parchment copies](#) were signed by the five key organizers: Rabbi Elie Abadie of Jews for Justice in Arab Lands, Alyza D. Lewin for both the American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists and the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, Maurice Shohet of the World Organization of Jews in Iraq, Avi Posnick for StandWithUs, and myself as historian. Signing as witness for the proceedings was Malcolm Hoenlein of the [Conference](#)

[of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations](#). Numerous Jewish and non-Jewish organizations both [here and abroad](#) added their voices as co-sponsors, such as Philadelphia-based [Scholars for Peace in the Middle East](#), [HARIF – Association of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East](#) in London, the [Zionist Federation of Great Britain](#), and the [Babylonian Heritage Society](#) of Israel.

Having interviewed Dr. Daniel Williams of the Israel Allies Foundation Jerusalem Call, we were pleased to note the presence of the Congressional Israel Allies Caucus at the Farhud UN Event:

On behalf of Congressional Israel-Allies Caucus in the House of Representatives, co-chair Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ), issued [a public statement](#) expressing “deepest solidarity with Iraqi and the Arab world’s Jews. Franks declared, “Today we will change the first of June from a day of a near-forgotten tragedy into International Farhud Day – a day of commemoration – when we call on the entire world to remember the disaster that befell the Arab world’s Jews, and to do justice by them and their descendants.”

Black recognized the active role of the Israeli Permanent Delegation at the UN members of the Foreign Ministry and regional Consul Generals who made arrangements for International Farhud Day at the UN. His professional feelings as an historian and activist were summed up in this comment:

My end was simply the history. History, when connected to the present, can be a spark plug for the future.

We suspect that Reut Cohen and her family in California must find this UN commemoration abiding, yet saddened by the fate that befell their family and fellow Iraqi Jews during the barbaric Farhud on Shavuot in 1941. They may take comfort that their relatives and hundreds of thousands of other Jews

expelled from Arab lands have contributed materially and spiritually to the growth of the third Jewish Commonwealth, The State of Israel.