

Aspects of World Jewry: Celebration and Concern

Awake, awake, put on strengths, O arm of the Lord; Awake, as in the days of old.
(Isaiah 51:9)

Issue

Changes in the U.S.S.R. and the countries of Eastern Europe that affect the Jewish people, the 500th anniversary of Spanish Jewry's immigration into Turkey and the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry to Israel offer cause for celebration, concern and action.

Background

In this century many critical historic convulsions and tragedies have occurred. Yet hope has arisen. The final outcomes of crises are still to be determined.

The 1917 revolution in Russia, the development of Communism and its later control and expansion in Eastern Europe and the rise of Germany's National Socialism proved to be overwhelming disasters for the Jewish people and others. The borders resulting from World War I and World War II led to prolonged tensions. As a result of Communism's fading grip on nations and people now struggling for greater freedom, "windows of opportunity" are opening for Jews, the countries in which they live and Israel. We rejoice that our people are now free to emigrate. We, however, are saddened because when countries become bereft of Jews, Hitler has won his horrendous battle to make Europe judenfrei.

The change from the former Ottoman Empire to today's Turkey is an example of the massive upheaval seen during this century. In World War I Turkey fought on the side of Germany and Austria, losing her vast Ottoman Empire, which covered what is now Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel (then Palestine), Saudi Arabia, Yemen and some Aegean islands. In 1492, when the Spanish Inquisition forced the expulsion of Jews, they were allowed to settle throughout Turkey's empire.

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods celebrates great events with gratitude to all who helped make them possible:

- 1) The return to Judaism of those of our people who had long been denied the right to study and practice their religious heritage. They are now, whether they stay in the U.S.S.R. and other countries of Eastern Europe or join the multi-thousands who are making aliyah to Israel or elsewhere, again free to be Jews.
- 2) The modern miracle of 24,000 Ethiopian Jews air-lifted from Addis Ababa to Israel to be welcomed by relatives and others to new lives in the land of our people.
- 3) The 500th anniversary in 1992 of the settlement of Spanish Jews in Turkey and her former Ottoman Empire. They have been allowed to live in Turkey ever since as Jews practicing their faith and customs among a population of 98% Moslem people.
- 4) Recent and continuing political and geographic changes which are opening passages toward greater freedom and democracy.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

Resolution

Even as we celebrate great advances that we desire through continuing peaceful change, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods calls on its affiliates to:

- 1) Aid and support projects on behalf of Soviet and East European Jewry in their countries of current residence and in Israel: particularly the further development of Hineni, the World Union for Progressive Judaism-assisted congregation in Moscow; the expansion of Reform or Progressive congregations elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R.; the increased publication in Hebrew, Russian and other Eastern European languages of indigenous liturgies and material on our movement.
- 2) Educate themselves about anti-Semitism and oppose it publicly wherever it occurs and urge their respective governments to protest against it.
- 3) Aid and support Jews who desire to leave their native lands for Israel and elsewhere.
- 4) Cooperate with the World Union and congregations in travel missions to the U.S.S.R., countries of Eastern Europe, Israel and other places to forge contacts with our people and to welcome newcomers into our movement.
- 5) Seek higher immigration quotas and work to change restrictive or exclusionary policies for those desiring to enter their countries.
- 6) Assist in the integration of the refugees and immigrants in their communities.