



# CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

## of Major American Jewish Organizations

**Robert G. Sugarman**  
Chairman

**Malcolm Hoenlein**  
Executive Vice Chairman/CEO

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We hope this letter finds you well.

Attached is a statement signed by over forty Jewish organizations, including most of the members of the Conference of Presidents. The concerns and sentiments raised in the statement are widely held in the American Jewish community as well as by Iraqi Jews around the world. We are more than grateful for the extraordinary role and commitment of the U.S. government in enabling the rescue and restoration of this archive that otherwise would have been lost in the flooded basement of the Iraqi Intelligence building. NARA played a remarkable role and continues to work to preserve and digitize the collection.

We hope you will consider the points enumerated in the attached statement. Specifically, these items were taken by previous Iraqi regimes from Jewish individuals and communities who were forced to flee their native country and today their interests are represented by communal bodies like the World Organization of Jews from Iraq. The long term care of this archive and its accessibility must be assured. There are precedents of countries providing sacred ritual objects and Torah scrolls to expatriate Jewish communities. Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Uzbekistan all made available religious artifacts, texts, and scrolls for use by Jewish communities around the world.

The sensitivity and understanding demonstrated until now should guide any further action and assure the sacredness and accessibility of these items that reflect the history, and belong to the patrimony, of Iraq's former Jewish citizens.

Thank you for your consideration.

Malcolm Hoenlein  
Executive Vice Chairman/CEO

Ameinu  
America-Israel Friendship League  
American Friends of Likud  
American Gathering / Federation of  
Jewish Holocaust Survivors  
American Israel Public  
Affairs Committee  
American Jewish Committee  
American Jewish Congress  
American Jewish  
Joint Distribution Committee  
American Sephardi Federation  
American Zionist Movement  
Americans for Peace Now  
AMIT  
Anti-Defamation League  
ARZA  
B'nai B'rith International  
Bnai Zion  
Central Conference of  
American Rabbis  
Committee for Accuracy in  
Middle East Reporting in America  
Development Corporation for Israel /  
State of Israel Bonds  
Emunah of America  
Friends of the Israel Defense Forces  
Hadassah, Women's Zionist  
Organization of America  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
Jewish Community Centers  
Association  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Federations of North America  
Jewish Institute for  
National Security Affairs  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Jewish National Fund  
Jewish Women International  
Mecatz USA, Zionist Organization of  
the Conservative Movement  
NA'AMAT USA  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Young Israel  
NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in  
Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States  
& Eurasia  
ORT America, Inc.  
Rabbinical Assembly  
Rabbinical Council of America  
Religious Zionists of America  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Orthodox Jewish  
Congregations of America  
United Synagogue of  
Conservative Judaism  
WIZO  
Women of Reform Judaism  
Women's League for  
Conservative Judaism  
Workmen's Circle  
World Zionist Executive, USA  
Zionist Organization of America

## **Statement by Jewish Organizations on Iraqi Jewish Archives**

In 2003 a vast collection of books, documents, community records and Torah scrolls fragments was discovered in the basement of the Iraqi Security Ministry. Originally looted from the Iraqi Jewish community these items were in danger of being destroyed due to flooding in the building. With the intercession of the US government and experts from the National Archives (NARA) this entire collection, which has come to be known as the Iraqi Jewish Archives (IJA), was brought to the United States.

In the intervening years the IJA has been carefully catalogued and restored by NARA, and all important items are being scanned and digitized and will ultimately be accessible via the Internet. An exhibition has been organized by NARA which will use some of the items to tell the account of their rescue and the larger story of the history of Jews in Iraq, where today only a handful still reside. This exhibition will open in November in Washington at the National Archives and then travel to New York to be exhibited at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. The US Government has indicated that the IJA will then be sent back to Iraq in the spring of 2014 based on a decade old agreement between NARA and the coalition provisional authority (CPA).

We are grateful for the rescue of the Iraqi Jewish Archives and for the restoration work that has been carried out by NARA. We look forward to the exhibition that will soon open. But we are deeply troubled by the prospect that at the end of this long journey the US government plans to return all of these items to Iraq. It is important to enumerate several key points:

- These items were looted by the Baath regime in the 1970s and 1980s from Jewish individuals and communal institutions – synagogues, schools, etc. Since virtually all of Iraqi Jewry from this millennia-old community have been displaced, their claims today are represented by international communal organizations such as the World Organization of Jews from Iraq.
- The Iraqi Jewish Archives must be maintained in a place where their long-term preservation and care can be guaranteed.
- They should be housed in a location that is accessible to scholars and to Iraqi Jews and their descendants who have communal and historic interest and personal ties to them.

Further, we draw attention to the fact that there are still in Iraq many other possessions of the Jewish community including Torah scrolls. These scrolls should be returned to synagogue use and transferred to congregations of Iraqi Jews in America and elsewhere rather than remain in storage and remain in storage in inappropriate conditions in Iraq.

There are recent precedents when countries such as Lithuania and the Czech Republic, returned sacred Jewish items, including Torahs, to expatriate countries abroad.

In light of this, we believe that it would be inappropriate to return the Iraqi Jewish Archives to Iraq next year. Instead, we urge Secretary of State John Kerry, to consult with representatives of

the Iraqi Jewish diaspora and government of Iraq, to ensure that these fundamental concerns will be addressed before any action is taken.

**Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations**  
**Justice for Jews from Arab Countries**

1. Malcolm Hoenlein, Robert Sugarman, Conference of Presidents
2. Dan Mariaschin, Allan Jacobs, B'nai Brith
3. Rabbi Steven Weil, Orthodox Union
4. Rabbi Mark Dratch, Rabbinical Council of America
5. Gerald Platt, Julio Messer, American Friends of Likud
6. Jack Grunspan, B'nai Zion
7. Rabbi Rick Block, Central Conference of American Rabbis
8. Martin Oliner, Yosef Blau Religious Zionists of America
9. Rabbi Bennet Miller, ARZA
10. Debbie Isaac, AMIT
11. Janet Tobin, Robert Golub, MERCAZ USA
12. Jana Falic, Gail Perl, Evelyn Sommer, WIZO
13. Mark Levin, NCSJ
14. Evelyn Sommer, World Jewish Congress, North America
15. Harris Vederman, America-Israel Friendship League
16. Rita Wertlieb, Sarrae Crane, Women's League for Conservative Judaism
17. Anti-Defamation League
18. Howard Kohr, Michael Kassen, AIPAC
19. Jeffrey Levine, Russell Robinson, JNF
20. Stanley Bergman, David Harris, American Jewish Committee
21. Rabbi Perry Tirschwell, National Council of Young Israel
22. Robert Kesten, American Jewish Congress
23. Dale Schwartz, HIAS
24. Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Rabbinical Assembly
25. Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, Karen Rubinstein, American Zionist Movement
26. Fran Hirmes, Emunah of America
27. David Dangoor, American Sephardi Federation
28. Rabbi Steven Wernick, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
29. Gerald Skolnik, Rabbinical Assembly
30. Stuart Appelbaum, Jewish Labor Committee
31. Gideon Aronoff, Ameinu
32. World Organization of Jews from Iraq (WOJI)



33. Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
34. Kahal Joseph (LA Iraqi Jewish Synagogue)
35. Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
36. Jerry Silverman, The Jewish Federations of North America
37. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, Union for Reform Judaism
38. Allan Finkelstein, JCC Association
39. Ann Toback, Workmen's Circle/ Arbeter Ring
40. Elan Carr, AEPI
41. Alan Klugman, ORT America, Inc.
42. Rabbi Elie Abadie, Sylvain Abitbol, Stanley Urman, JJAC