

Aliya Bet

("Illegal Immigration", *Ha'apala*), the organized entry of Jews into Palestine during the period of the British Mandate in direct defiance of the British government's restriction on Jewish immigration.

By the early 1920s, Great Britain had publicly committed to help establish a Jewish state in Palestine. However, as the British authorities were strongly affected by Arab pressure, they began withdrawing their support for the Jews. In the early 1930s they put severe quotas on Jewish immigration. Zionist groups responded with a policy called *Aliya Bet*, meaning illegal immigration. The Jews in Palestine called these immigrants *ma'apilim*, from the word *ha'apala*, meaning upward struggle. The British called them illegal immigrants. Most reached Palestine by boat and tried to enter the country secretly. Approximately 530,000 immigrants entered Palestine before the State of Israel was established; one-quarter of that number entered by way of *Aliya Bet*.

The first ship of illegal immigrants reached Palestine in 1934. At that point, the Jewish Agency leadership did not approve of illegal methods of immigration. However, by 1939, David Ben-Gurion realized that *Aliya Bet* was the only real option for Jews to reach Palestine. The *Mossad le-Aliya Bet* —the official *Aliya Bet* organization - was then created.

During World War II, *Aliya Bet* became one of the principle ways of rescuing Jews. However, the *Mossad* had to contend with many problems, including the restriction of ship use, lack of funds, the continuing British blockade of Palestine, and unsafe conditions. This led to the slowing down of *Aliya Bet*, and by 1942, its complete postponement. The *Mossad* resumed operations in 1944 when the Jews of Palestine became aware of the extent of the "Final Solution."

After the war, *Aliya Bet* became the crux of Zionist activity, focusing the world's attention on the plight of those Holocaust survivors who wanted to immigrate to a Jewish state. Tens of thousands of would-be immigrants arrived at the shores of Palestine on dozens of ships (among them the Exodus 1947), only to be caught by the British and interned in detention

camps. About half were held in Cyprus until the State of Israel was established in May 1948.