



Yishuv

The Jewish community in Palestine. Right before World War II, the relations between the *Yishuv* and the British Mandate authorities were strained due to restrictions made on Jewish immigration to Palestine. Despite the friction, the *Yishuv* considered itself an obvious ally of those countries fighting the Nazis, and 30,000 Palestinian Jews joined the British army.

By the time the Nazis began implementing the "Final Solution" in 1941, the *Yishuv* had set up communication pipelines to Europe; nonetheless, information was not yet clear about what was going on. Specific reports about the horrors of the Holocaust began arriving in early 1942. The *Yishuv* itself faced mortal danger at that time: the Germans in North Africa were advancing towards Palestine. Only when that threat was destroyed in mid-1942 could the *Yishuv* begin to deal with the issue of European Jewry.

In the fall of 1942 a group of Palestinian Jews returned to Palestine from Europe bearing terrible reports of mass atrocities. This shocked the *Yishuv* into mourning, and then into action. In January 1943 the Joint Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency was founded. From then on, the *Yishuv* initiated many programs for rescuing European Jews.

At the end of 1942 Romania suggested a deal whereby thousands of Jews would be returned home from exile in Transnistria in exchange for millions of dollars. The Jewish Agency kept in contact with Romanian representatives and provided financial help for the Jews in Transnistria. In 1944 the survivors began to return to Romania. Another rescue scheme was the Europa Plan, initiated by the Slovakian Jewish community's Working Group. This called for the payment of large sums of money in exchange for the lives of Jews who had been deported to Poland. In June 1943, after considering the offer's legitimacy, the Jewish Agency agreed to help pay the Germans \$200,000 as a down payment. However, transferring large sums during wartime proved impossible. Another Jewish Agency plan included parachuting young Palestinian Jews behind occupied lines to boost the Jews' morale and



convince them to participate in armed resistance. In the end, 37 young people actually took part in this venture.

The Jewish Agency adopted other rescue proposals, such as giving out "protective passports" to Jews in German-occupied countries; according the Jews Prisonier Of War status; exchanging them for German prisoners of war; transferring them from Europe to North Africa; or keeping them in transit camps in their own countries, under the protection of the International Red Cross. The most important, and perhaps the boldest proposal of all, was the suggestion that the Allies demand that the Germans immediately stop the annihilation of European Jewry. However, the Allies did not seriously consider any of these proposals.

After the Bermuda Conference of April 1943, the *Yishuv* realized that there was very little chance of a mass rescue. Instead, they would have to direct their efforts toward "small rescue" operations. This meant smuggling Jews across borders; organizing the exchange of small groups of Jews for Germans; sending packages of food, medicine, money, and documents to Jews in the occupied countries; and maintaining mail contact in order to boost the morale of European Jewry.

In the spring of 1944, soon after the Nazis began deporting Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, they made a proposal to the *Yishuv* regarding the release of one million Jews. The *Yishuv* leaders did not believe the Germans were really interested in sparing Hungarian Jewry, but they hoped that negotiations could help halt the Deportations. However, the Allies were not able to cooperate with the *Yishuv* in getting the plan together. That summer, the Jewish Agency begged the Allies to bomb the train tracks leading to Auschwitz and its extermination area. These appeals were also rejected. (see also Parachutists, Jewish and Auschwitz, Bombing of.)