

Colette Avital – Panel III

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Even though the Nazi extermination machine meant to fully implement the final solution, and wipe out any existing memory of the Jews in the World, not all victims perished in the ghettos and death camps. Surviving hunger, hard labor, deprivations, disease, humiliation and torture was not an easy thing. Those who were strong enough or lucky enough – made it with their last forces. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the camps. This is an important date for all of us. Some of the survivors were happy, others could not believe that they were free, many died of exhaustion after leaving the camps, but most were confused and had nowhere to go. For they had lost everything: Mothers fathers, brothers , sisters, entire families. When some tried to return to their former homes, they were greeted in most cases (except For Denmark) with hostility. But those broken human beings, shadows of themselves, managed to rebuild their lives. They helped defend and build our country Israel, and distinguished themselves in many fields – in the economy, in science, in research and the arts. Today they are old and vulnerable.

We estimate that half of the Survivors in the world , some 200.000 men and women, live in Israel today. Their average age is around 86.

40% of the Holocaust survivors are 86 years old and over
60% of the Holocaust survivors in need of help are over 80
13% are 90 years and over
36% of the survivors in Israel live alone

So some 53% to 60 % need help

That , in fact, will already give you a broad picture of their needs. For legal and other reasons, the situation in Israel is complex. As you all know, Israel did not exist during WWII and there was no Nazi persecution of the Jews in Palestine at that time. And yet it is fully committed to the welfare of HS. As early as 1952, Israel and Germany signed an agreement by which Germany paid compensations to the newly born State of Israel to allow it to "help integrate the remaining Survivors" in our country. Israel, on its part committed itself to help the victims of Nazi persecutions. In 1957 the Israeli Government passed a law to compensate these victims but according to the agreement signed with Germany, only those who came to Israel until October 1953 were eligible. That created an injustice, since only 39% of HS living in Israel today, arrived in our country by



that date, the majority not being allowed to leave countries behind the iron curtain. After the reunification of Germany, and as a result of Paragraph 2 in that Agreement the Claims Conference succeeded to get compensation for victims from the former soviet bloc, among them for those living in Israel. That was a solution for many people, but it created inequalities in the rights received, and a complex system of payments. Today, according to various assessments some 45.000 Holocaust survivors live in poverty, a situation highly unacceptable to us.

This may be the result of many factors :

- * Most of these men and women have no pensions : some came from the FSU without one, others who had come to Israel from the camps , with no education, worked all their lives as independent workers, shopkeepers, seamstresses, etc, and accumulated no pensions . All these live with a small pension from the Social Security and a meager compensation as HS, but this does not help ends meet.
- * Many of the newcomers have no apartment – so they have to Pay a rent; others have to pay mortgages – and are left with Almost no money for their additional needs
- * The rising cost of living.

So, many holocaust survivors must often chose between their medical needs and food. In addition, there are always additional expenses –such as dental care, home repairs etc.

Thus, among these cases :

27% indicated that they could not heat their apartments or pay electrical bills

73% indicated they their health is poor

20% do not feel secure in their homes

65% indicated that they need help in their daily lives, such as shopping, banking, going to a doctor's appointment etc.



Having said that, Holocaust survivors receive help from the following

Sources :

- a. The Israeli Government
- b. Foreign Governments such as Germany, France, Belgium – if they are citizens of those countries
- c. the Claims Conference
- d. a host of NGO's , the most important ones being : The Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel and Amcha

a. The Government

After a long and difficult struggle led by our Organization, the Center Organization of HS in Israel, the Israeli Government took a few steps to redress the injustices created: to increase the number of victims eligible for compensation , and to enlarge the number of programs and benefits they entitled to get (this, through two laws that passed respectively in 2008 and 2014)

Thus the Government today provides the following :

- Monthly pensions are paid to 153.000 HS
- A yearly stipend and psychological care to 85.000 people (most of them flight cases from the FSU)
- Medical supplies : prescription drugs (included in the health basket)to 192.000 people.

The National Health bill , which was enacted some 32 years ago, provides to all citizens long-term coverage

In addition the 2014 bill provides pensions to widows and widowers of Holocaust survivors for the rest of their lives

In addition, a host of NGO's provide food packages and volunteers to almost all the survivors. The Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims which was created by members of our organization provides assistance, mainly home care to approximately 70.000 survivors. Its budgets come : 1/3 from the Government and 2/3 from the Claims conference. Amcha is an Organization providing the much needed Psychological support to Survivors and the Second generation, reaching out to some 18.000 individuals through 14 centers around the country through. It was also created by founding members of our organization and by a group of devoted mental health professionals. The Claims conference provides pensions and one-time payments to Individual Holocaust survivors in Israel, but also funds facilities such as Hospitals, day-care centers, old people's homes etc.



The needs of Holocaust survivors

While the total number of Holocaust survivors diminishes every year the remaining victims grow older and their needs are dramatically increasing. Jewish survivors are a part of the elderly population, but the persecutions they suffered, and the post-war adjustments have made them into a distinct, different group. They suffer from multiple problems and needs associated with aging – but they are poorer, more isolated and more prone to suffer certain illnesses associated with their experiences in the camps. The Israeli Ministry of health has recognized 10 such illnesses as directly caused by their deprivations in the camps. Obviously with the passing of time, and their advanced age today, the needs have already changed, but as they will grow older, they will become increasingly frail and disabled.

In addition to their physical suffering, we must take into account their mental suffering and the recurring post-traumatic problems. They suffer from acute anxiety disorders, and long standing adjustment disorders, and the wounds never really heal. In addition, according to two recent polls we have conducted, a large number of Holocaust survivors (around 59.5%) suffer from isolation and loneliness and mentioned spiritual support as their biggest need. Indeed many of the victims who live alone never married after the war, many are childless. Among those who married and raised families, many are widowed. Among these, a majority of Holocaust Survivors are women – who have a longer life-expectancy than men.

Thus, I believe that in the coming years and with the steady growth of the problems I mentioned we will need to double our efforts .

We will need :

- * More substantial welfare programs and the raising of the level of pensions
- * More medical care, medical especially geriatric facilities and also In-home care
- * More home-care hours
- * More dental and other care (for ex. hearing aids)

But there is no doubt that more attention will have to be given to the problem of isolation and loneliness. Today, there are "social centers" where HS can meet, but as time passes, a growing number cannot leave their homes anymore. Today there is a good number of volunteers (soldiers, students etc.) who visit Holocaust survivors in their homes, but this must be institutionalized as those are not always available and very often the visitors change.