

Jewish Request at the End of World War II – “Let My People Go [to Palestine]!” Moshe Shertok, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem (13 May 1945)

Source: Palestine Post, May 14, 1945, pp. 1 and 3; See abbreviated version of the speech in Daphne Trevor, *Under the White Paper: Some Aspects of British Administration in Palestine from 1939 to 1947*, Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Press Ltd, 1948, p. 131.

“On the heights of Mt. Scopus, the representatives of Palestine Jewry yesterday assembled to celebrate the Victory over Germany and to voice the feelings of the Yishuv at this juncture in history.

Led by their Chief Rabbis, members of the Elected Assembly, the General Zionist Council and representatives of the Jewish Municipalities and Local Councils

gathered in the hall of the Rosenbloom Building. The platform was decorated with the Union Jack and Zionist Colours, flanking a large facsimile of the Jewish Brigade Group Flash.

The meeting began with the singing by the choir of the girls of the Seligsberg School of “I Believe”, [*sic.*] the words of which were chanted by Jews on their way to the Death Camps in Poland. A special prayer was recited by the Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel giving thanks for victory and commemorating the war’s victims.

The “El Malei Rachamim” was chanted by Cantor A. Reich while the assembly stood in memory for the millions of Jews slaughtered in Europe. At the conclusion of this part of the proceedings, the Zionist flag which had been at half mast was hoisted to the top of the standard on the platform. [...] After a short opening address by Mr. David Remez, the Chairman of the Vaad Leumi Executive, Mr. M. Shertok, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, delivered a fighting speech, which struck the keynote of the rally....”¹

“In view of the staggering proportions of our catastrophe, let us not belittle the miracle of our deliverance. The designs of the enemy to make the world ‘Judenrein’ (‘Jew-clean’) stand defeated. Let us remember the countries which stood on the brink of the precipice ---one such country was England, another was Palestine. Time after time we were threatened. Let us never forget the days of El Alamein when the beginnings of our achievements and the hope of generations of Jewish people wavered between life and death and the Yishuv of 600,000 souls were confronted by the abyss of oblivion

“Is there any other people throughout the world which draws up such a balance sheet or tasted the bitter fare of death as we did? Others were menaced by conquest and enslavement; in our case alone an entire people seemed destined to perish. At a time when other peoples count their battle casualties in hundreds of thousands; we count millions slaughtered as sheep. Against the background of this overwhelming demonstration of shame and dishonor of our weakness, every manifestation of strength and valor in Jewry, the memory of every death in battle, is doubly precious. [Shertok extolled all Jews fallen in the present war, beginning] the Ghetto heroes, the fallen Palestinian volunteers, those killed in the Libyan campaign, or during commando operations in East Africa, the Aegean islands, the Adriatic, those drowned at sea and civilian volunteers, who laid down their lives in daring operations on the Syrian coast and in the Syrian desert, and who met death behind enemy lines to rescue Jews, or help the Allies, and lastly the Jewish Brigade casualties. All these deaths upon the battlefield were a consolation to downtrodden, humiliated Jewry.

They stood as a symbol that Jews can live and die differently.

This must be the last war in which the fate of the Jewish people hangs in the balance, the last time that Jews become objects of pity and consideration. The Jewish people must free itself from the humiliation of fear. It is entitled to ask the world to assist it to achieve freedom from fear and want. Will the Allied world with whom we fought shoulder to shoulder whose loyal prop we were in this whole part of the world would help us get that freedom or would abandon us to our fate? If we

are abandoned, we shall continue our struggle alone, spurning shallow counsels or false compromises. It was brought to a victorious conclusion because at a certain stage somebody was not deterred from carrying on the struggle alone. But before we reach that last resort, we appeal to all to help us rescue our brothers and ourselves. Is it all that a Jew is entitled to – not be slaughtered? A call should go out in the first instance to those who in London hold the keys of entry to the gates of Palestine. They should open them widely. [Shertok then chided Sir Anthony Eden's remark in San Francisco several days earlier that Britain had carried out its obligations to the Jews, and quoted a denunciation of the White Paper made in the House of Commons in May 1939 by Mr. Churchill. "There is a breach. There is a violation of a pledge. There is an abandonment of the Balfour Declaration. There is the end of a vision, a hope, a dream."]

And we should likewise go out to all from Moscow to Paris who hold the keys to exits [...] : Let my people go. It is a great thing to be able to proclaim from Mount Scopus overlooking our holy city that Israel lives on. Blessed be the arms to which we owe our survival. Blessed be England who stood alone for a whole year when all seemed lost. Blessed be her allies. But it is not enough that we should reiterate to England and her allies that ancient call, 'Let my people go' – what the world must know is that Israel has decided to live differently. Israel claims its country back, not to displace others but to re-settle and develop, not to subjugate others but to deliver herself.

We claim freedom of immigration and settlement, freedom to defend ourselves, to be masters of our destiny, to establish friendship with our neighbors based on mutual respect and common interest. We claim equality and statehood."