

bcc: Bertram Gold ✓

memorandum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date December 30, 1980
to Abe Karlikow
from M. Bernard Resnikoff

CONFIDENTIAL

subject

This is a preliminary report about the situation of the Falashas, as per your request. Other people who are well informed to whom I would have like to have spoken are not immediately available, and I will follow it up. Meanwhile, I share with you the little bit I have learned so far, and I will report to you separately what this source is.

The information you received at your end seems to be correct, and I received confirmation here that some 100 Falashans were held back at the border, and were detained in jail for some three or four months. The increase in military patrols is what led to their capture, for what is essentially an illegal act. In addition, famine, epidemics and rains all created an atmosphere where a benign condition, from time to time, was not operative. And yet, they are expected in this country shortly.

As to the detractors who continue to criticize Israel for dragging their feet -- it should be pointed out that in the year 1980 we started off with some 300 Falashans here and will end off the year with some 1,000. Those American friends of the Falashans who have been quick to criticize Israel are guilty of "charlatanism" and may be doing so only because this is a sure way of raising a quick dollar.

Diplomatic activity to aid the Falashans has taken place with the Swedish government, the Germans, the British, the Americans, the Canadians and, to my surprise, Cuba as well -- which, it turns out, was not that interested. Also, in such cases on which there were humanitarian grounds, the American Red Cross has been involved.

Meanwhile, the problem in Beersheva is based on the fact that there are equal numbers of two different tribes who are traditional rivals. This rivalry has been heightened by the fact, ^{that} Yona Bougala, one of the veteran elder statesmen, is becoming increasingly aged, feeble and, apparently somewhat senile -- and this has triggered off a fresh fight in order to determine who is the heir-apparent. Certain it is that the Jewish Agency has reacted negatively to the strange suggestion that separate programs of absorption and ulpan be set up for the two different tribes: there is no precedent for it, and there is no intention to do so.

More to follow.

MBR/sw

