

FCOA (ETHIOPIA)

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B. H. GOLD

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date June 11, 1980

to Abe Karlikow

from David Geller *DJ*

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subject Meeting re Ethiopian Jews

On June 10th the Committee on Ethiopian Jews heard a report from Yehuda Dominitz, Director of Aliya at the Jewish Agency. He gave an overview of the attempts to rescue Ethiopian Jews beginning in the early '70s when 7 Jews were brought to Israel with the approval of the Ethiopian Government to work for KOOR Industries. Shortly afterward another 23 Jews were registered for similar work but were arrested before they could cross the border. They were imprisoned for many months and some were tortured. Subsequently there were other efforts made but they were not successful. It is important to remember that under Haile Selassie and especially under the Mengistu regime, nothing has been done nor indeed can be done without the knowledge and approval of the governing authorities. Given the extreme delicacy and tenuousness of agreements with regimes like that currently in Ethiopia, public discussion of what is going on, whether in criticism or in praise, can only be harmful.

Mr. Dominitz emphasized the other difficulties involved, namely, the fact that Ethiopian Jews are spread through some 490 villages; the primitive conditions in which most of them live; the difficulty of travel in Ethiopia; the situation in "that other country"; conflicting loyalties to various leaders in the Ethiopian Jewish community; a lack of coordination and agreement between Jews in Gondar and those in Tigre; etc. The job was made even more difficult by private groups contacting Ethiopian Jews or visiting them and making statements and charges which could not be answered without grave security risks.

In 1977, 1978, and 1979 most of the Jews who were allowed to leave were from Gondar. Now they are coming from Tigre as well. In February and March of this year, 32 managed to leave; in April about 15 (via Frankfurt, Germany); in May 202; and there are about 200 Jews in June and 200 in July in the pipeline. If the emigration runs fairly smoothly in the next couple of months, we can hope that there will be further emigration in succeeding months, but there is no guarantee.

By the way, it was reported that the four teachers who had been in jail were released.

In Israel special efforts are being made on behalf of the resettlement of Ethiopian Jews. A very significant number are in poor health and require special medical attention. In addition there are specialists from the University of Beersheba and other institutions who have been called in to guide the Government's effort in settling and retraining Ethiopian Jews. Special resettlement centers have been set up because it is felt that Ethiopian Jews will need additional time and special assistance to effect their satisfactory integration.

Mr. Dominitz agreed to keep us posted on all new developments. Benny Avileah urged that we review the documents that we have been sending out because some of them contain outdated as well as distorted information. Those present were again urged to do everything possible to severely curtail public discussion of this issue.

DG:rf

cc: ✓ Bert Gold
George Gruen
Rita Hauser
Maynard Wishner