

# Refugees

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

In the USA a debate rages over the thousands of refugees from Central America streaming across the porous southern border. The fact that in the past few months over 50,000 of them have been unaccompanied minors makes the situation particularly emotional and complicated. This year alone some 300,000 immigrants have crossed illegally into the USA. Among them is a significant number of drug dealers and criminals, not just from Latin America, but from around the world.

The issue is both the humanitarian one of wanting to assist those in trouble, and also an existential one. What happens when the flood of refugees threatens to radically change the character of the receiving nation? Is it relevant to distinguish between political, social, and simply economic refugees? And finally, there is a principle of whether breaking the law, coming into a country illegally, should be rewarded.

This is now a problem that affects the free world everywhere. Countries that are blessed with freedom and at least a semblance of democracy are seen as places to run to when living at home is no longer congenial. If you have money or good qualifications, you will be welcomed. If you are poor, you will not. And does it matter if you also have an agenda of replacing the culture of the host nation with your own?

The movement of millions of human beings from one country to another across the globe, these quasi-invasions, sounds almost like science fiction. It is a huge, illicit, corrupt business. Human trafficking has apparently overtaken drug smuggling in profitability. And of course, tragically, many die on the way. What can one do?

In Europe it is in many ways too late. The millions of North Africans now living in France have already changed the character of the nation. It is no longer a country where Jews feel comfortable. Mobs are massed regularly to attack synagogues and assault Jews. Anti-Semitic marches are now regular features. And still hundreds of thousands continue to come in from the Middle East and Africa, either by boat from North Africa or on land through Turkey and Greece. The European Union has dithered and completely failed to deal with the issue. Its passivity means that with the dislocated from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, hundreds of thousands are going to continue risking the journey to try to get into Europe. The character of the nations is already changing.

In Israel, too, thousands of refugees from Somalia and East African religious fanatics are heading through Egypt (where none of them want to stay) across Sinai towards Israel. They are often tortured, raped, and murdered on the way. If they do get in, Israel is not the most hospitable of destinations, given the security problem and Islam's antipathy to the Jewish state. If Israel welcomed millions of Muslim refugees, it would completely lose what

often tenuous Jewish identity it has.

Indeed, why would any country want to be swamped with desperate people, often unemployable, particularly if they belong to cultures and religions diametrically opposed to the values of the host society?

The simple answer is that there are laws and conventions that require it. The Convention relating to the status of Refugees was formalized at a special United Nations conference in 1951, where certain rules were established to protect European refugees who had no state after the upheavals of the Second World War. The numbers were limited. Much later it was expanded to include anyone "fleeing their countries because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."

What started with a limited number of internal European refugees now applies to millions, who can claim that living conditions in their countries of birth are insufferable. The world population has expanded from the less than a billion then, to seven billion today. What should one do?

There are those who say that one should simply accept the reality and let the chips fall as they may. But, as we have seen in the USA, this is a matter of cost too in welfare and housing. Many governors who in principle approve of welcoming genuine refugees do not want to have to house and fund them. Either one simply opens the floodgates to all and sundry or one helps create this massive industry in human smuggling. It was the reasonable attempt to apply an amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants in to the USA that has caused this massive influx of desperate Hondurans eager to escape a country with the highest murder rate in the world. So is Honduras to transfer its population en masse to the USA, leaving a few gangster oligarchs to enjoy what's left?

You might argue that rich countries should spend money trying to reform or prop up the failed regimes the refugees want to escape from. But America has tried that and notably failed in the Middle East, South America, and Near Asia. Europe tried pouring money into North Africa to stem the outflow. Not only did it fail, but refugees are now pouring in from farther afield. Regime change can only come when enough of its own people insist on it.

Australia has tried shipping its illegal immigrants off to island camps, with disastrous results. Logically the answer is to ship them home. But due legal processes in democratic countries often prevent that. In Britain, no matter how foul or lethal jihadi rabble-rousers are, they usually avoid being sent home by claiming they would be mistreated. And the courts usually agree.

The issue is now fodder for Hollywood. But we need to think seriously about what is to be done. If the original idea was to protect those without a state, and now millions are moving from states with passports, perhaps we should be taking action against the original states for creating the problem in the first place—whether through sanctions or boycotts or international pressure. Except that, given the current state of world politics, we know that will never be agreed upon.

Clearly the conventions on refugees are simply neither working nor any longer logical or practical. Even when refugees arrive somewhere, they are often treated as pariahs. It seems the only solution is for each state to determine for itself whether it wishes to commit cultural suicide or not and act accordingly. Or indeed whether it cares if its immigration laws are flouted. But it does seem ridiculous to help failed states by taking in the very people they want to drive out for political reasons. Because all that does is to reinforce the corrupt regimes that created the problem. Instead, by forcing people to stay (by not giving them refuge) they may act to change their evil rulers. Then we would be doing them a greater favor in the long run than by allowing our states to be overrun, diluted, and in due course become failed states themselves.

Think of Russian Jews. They benefitted and enriched other societies thanks to modern attitudes. But there it was indeed an issue of religious persecution, rather than political or economic disadvantage. And isn't it significant that those Palestinians who emigrated have done far better than those who stayed? Where does self-interest end and humanity begin?

Anyone got a better idea?