

'Rectify injustice' against Israel, Cotler tells U.S.

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NEW YORK - Former justice minister Irwin Cotler and other Canadian scholars presented the U.S. Congress yesterday with its first testimony on Jews driven from Arab lands following Israel's creation in 1948.

The group was among experts helping U.S. lawmakers decide on a pair of bills that would oblige the Bush administration to actively oppose the Arab-led practice in Middle East peace efforts to speak only of Palestinian refugees.

While key Arab voices continue to push for a "right of return" for descendants of some 600,000 Palestinians whose pre-1948 homes are now inside Israel, the general discourse for decades has all but ignored tens of thousands of Jews, Christians and other minorities who were similarly turned into refugees.

"The time has come to rectify this historical injustice," Mr. Cotler told members of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington in a written statement. He argued the United Nations, where Arab countries have mustered majority backing from Muslim and developing states to pass 101 resolutions speaking only of Palestinian refugees, bears "express responsibility for the distorted narrative."

Mr. Cotler is considered a leading expert on the issue, having helped produce in 2003 a study titled Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: The Case for Rights and Redress.

Co-authored by fellow Canadian Stan Urman, who also gave testimony in Washington, the study spoke of new evidence Arab states reacted to the creation of Israel by orchestrating the persecution of their Jewish citizens.

"Today, we cannot allow a second injustice, namely for the international community to recognize rights for [only] one victim population," Mr. Urman, executive director of New York-based Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, said.

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