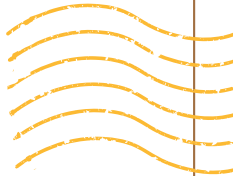




Prisoners of Zion

A Prisoner of Zion is a person who was imprisoned or exiled due to acting on behalf of Zionism, in a country where such activity is forbidden. The term has its source in the words of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in his poem "Zion, will you not ask after the welfare of your prisoners?"





Letter of the 18 Families



Operation Wedding



Avital Sharansky's Struggle



It was intended for the
Human Rights Committee of
the United Nations



The letter was sent in
August 1969 by eighteen
Jewish families from Georgia



It was the first group effort
of Georgian Jews to let
the West know about the
Jewish desire to immigrate
to Israel



The initiator was Shabtai
Elashvili, whose request to
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As a result of the letter, similar requests were made by
other groups of Jews in the Soviet Union and support
protests were held around the world under the slogan "Let
My People Go"





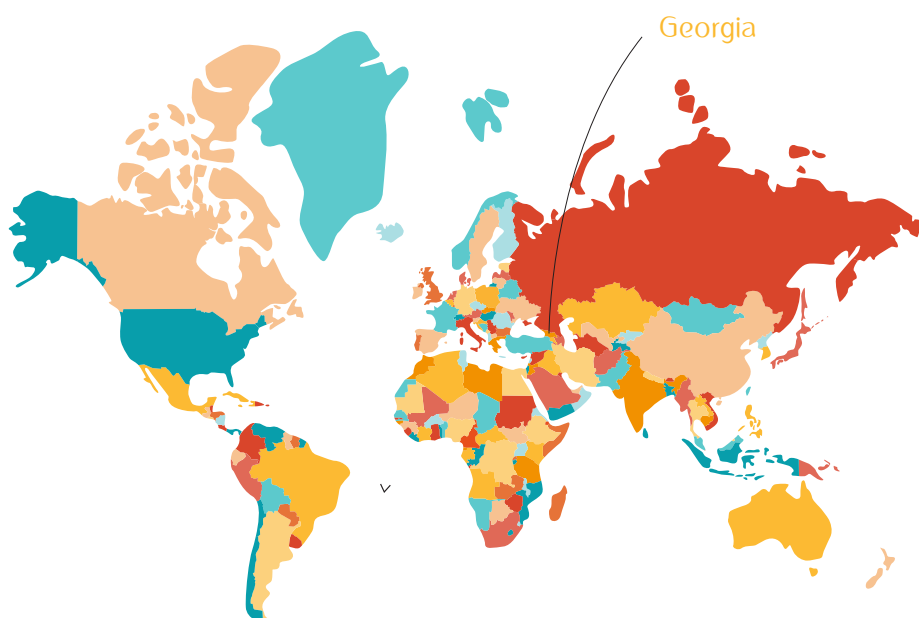
Letter of the 18 Families

The letter was sent in August 1969 by eighteen Jewish families from Georgia to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations. The initiator was Shabtai Elashvili, whose request to immigrate with his family to Israel was refused. He gathered other families (most of them were extended family), and under his leadership the heads of all the families signed a letter that expressed the Jewish desire to immigrate to Israel, as well as expressing the determination of those sending the letter.

It was the first group effort of Georgian Jews to let the West know about the Jewish desire to immigrate to Israel.

Because of the letter, similar requests were made by other groups of Jews in the Soviet Union and support protests were held around the world under the slogan "Let My People Go"

The Georgian Jewish struggle led to a change in the stance of the Soviet authorities, and throughout the seventies around 30,000 Georgian Jews began leaving for Israel and other countries.



It was intended to catch the attention of the international community and highlight the suffering of the Soviet Union Jews and their inability to leave the Soviet Union in any other way



The codename given to the attempted hijacking of an empty civilian aircraft on 15th June 1970 by a group of Soviet Jews who had been denied permission to immigrate to Israel



Mark Dymshits came up with the plan after reaching the conclusion that he belonged in Israel and understanding that he would not be allowed to leave the Soviet Union



The goal was to escape to Israel



The main goal of the mission was to expose the suffering of Soviet Jewry, who wished to immigrate to Israel but were being held back from doing so behind the Iron Curtain, to the world





Operation Wedding

Operation Wedding was the codename given to the attempted hijacking of an empty civilian aircraft on 15th June 1970 by a group of Soviet Jews who had been denied permission to immigrate to Israel, and human rights activities in the Soviet Union. The mission intended to catch the attention of the international community and highlight the suffering of the Soviet Union Jews and their inability to leave the Soviet Union in any other way- and in order to escape to Israel.

Despite the failure of the operation, the event was significant in the history of the Soviet Union immigration to Israel. The trial attracted international attention concerning the violation of human rights in the Soviet Union, and opened the gates for the wave of immigration that happened in the seventies.

Mark Dymshits was the one who came up with the idea of the plane hijacking- a pilot and former serviceman who decided that he belonged in Israel yet understood that he would not be allowed to leave the Soviet Union. When he searched for partners, he met Hillel Butman- one of the activists in the Zionist Group from Leningrad- and told him of his plans. The plan turned into a project that aimed to expose the suffering of the Jewish people of the Soviet Union who wanted to immigrate to Israel but were trapped behind the Iron Curtain. They decided that if the plan will succeed, then they will hold a press conference in Sweden, and if it fails the attempt will be proof of their desperation. According to the plan, all passengers on the plane will be Zionist Jews who wish to immigrate to Israel. The cover story was that it was flight to a big family wedding (and this is how the name of the mission was born).



The couple didn't receive permission to immigrate to Israel, and Avital immigrated alone right after they were married, in the hope that her husband will receive permission to immigrate soon after



In 1947, Natan (Anatoly) Sharansky married Avital in a synagogue in Moscow.



Avital led the defiant struggle of hundreds of thousands of people for the freedom of her husband, including turning to authorities and governments throughout the world



In July 1978, Natan was found guilty of treason, spying for the United States, spreading incitement and anti-Soviet propaganda. He was sentenced to thirteen years of imprisonment



The public, diplomatic and high-profile struggle eventually succeeded, after twelve years



In 1986, the most famous Prisoner of Zion was released from prison





Avital Sharansky's Struggle

Natan Sharansky, was born in the Soviet Union as Antoly Borosovich to a Jewish family. Sharansky was a passionate Zionist and encouraged Jewish people to immigrate to Israel. Sharansky was denied the right to immigrate to Israel in 1973 and was a prominent spokesperson for those denied permission to immigrate, and for other Prisoners of Zion. Soon enough, in 1978 he was accused of treason, spying and other crimes, according to the Soviet rule. Sharansky was sentenced to thirteen years in prison and was sent to Siberia. He became the symbol of resistance against tyranny and was a prominent figure in the struggle for human rights under Soviet rule. Avital, Natan Sharansky's wife, was at the forefront of the headquarters of "Let My People Go" which worked to free Natan. Avital Sharansky made it to Israel twelve years before her husband did and on arriving, managed a wide and incessant struggle- at first in order to bring him to Israel, and later when he was arrested by the KGB and charged with treason, she fought for his release from the hands of his captors. She flew around the world, speaking to the hearts of presidents and prime ministers, and recruiting activists for the release of her husband, who became not only a symbol of Zionism but also the most famous and admired Prisoner of Zion in the world. Sharansky was released from jail in 1986, thanks to the aggressive fight for his release- a fight that created international pressure from the US and the State of Israel. After his release, he immigrated to Israel. Natan Sharansky served as a minister in the Israeli government, was awarded the (American) Congressional Gold Medal of Honor and the (American) Presidential Medal of Freedom. Today he serves as the Chairman of the Jewish Agency. "My Brother's Keeper" continued to operate on behalf of Soviet Jewry until the gates opened, allowing unrestricted immigration to Israel.