

**Palestinian Refugees - A Brief
Overview**

Terry Rempel

**Internal Displacement in the
Occupied Palestine Territories**

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Goals in the Face of Challenges**

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**The Right of Return Is
Inevitable**

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Majed Al Zeer

From the Director

It's with great pride and joy that I'd like to introduce the first edition of the Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies (JPRS). This work is a valuable addition to the activities of the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC).

When PRC was launched in 1996 debates and discussions surrounding Palestinian refugees were greatly misinformed, decontextualized and vapid. For our part we tried, with limited resource, to defend the rights of Palestinian refugees. Since then, year by year, we have grown and our work has also grown in response to the different challenges.

Since our inception we have coordinated numerous political delegations, including the largest of its kind, taking 55 European politicians. Through our delegation to Syria in 2009, we addressed the plight of Palestinian refugees fleeing violence and persecution in Iraq. We worked with both UN refugee agencies UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and the Syrian government to find temporary settlements for them. We have followed some of the refugees all the way to Brazil to ensure their well being.

Our direct humanitarian contact with refugees has given us unique knowledge and expertise enabling us to be advocates of the plight of Palestinian refugees. We have done this on various political levels, from the UN, EU and of course here in the UK. We are proud to announce that PRC is now a United Nations accredited NGO. This great privilege allows us to take part in UN conferences and seminars in raising our concerns and shaping political outcomes.

In almost two decades of activities we also organised several international conferences and seminars, bringing together academics, politicians, activists, officials, NGOs and the public. Our extensive experience and contacts have encouraged us to embark on our new project, the JPRS, in creating a new space for discussing the plight of Palestinian refugees. We hope to draw opinions from all aspects of the political, academic, legal and humanitarian sections to discuss every dimension of the plight of Palestinian refugees.

We hope this will be a vibrant and engaging arena exploring the controversial and the non controversial aspects of this conflict. Ultimately we hope that the opinions voiced here will not just be a resource for practitioners in the field of Palestinian refugees, but it will also shape the political process.

Majed Al Zeer
General Director







Nasim Ahmed

From the Editor

Opinions on the Israeli Palestinian conflict, broadly speaking, fall into two schools of thought. According to one school of thought, 1967 marks the main point of reference and according to the other 1948 marks the main point of reference.

According to the 1967 school of thought, Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, two state solutions and the peace process are the most crucial issues. According to the 1948 school of thought, the events of 1947/48, what Palestinians refer to as their Nakba (catastrophe) are the most significant. This school of thought, without diminishing the importance of key issues in the first, argues that the birth of the plight of Palestinian refugees, the reasons for their flight and political Zionism are the roots of continued dispossession and conflict and an obstacle to any future resolution based on international law and justice.

This simplistic bifurcation has enormous implications for the way the conflict is resolved. What the 1967 school of thought considers fundamental, the 1948 school of thought considers mere symptoms and consequences of underlying injustices and wrongs that are left unaddressed for over six decades. According to this logic, political processes trying to impose solutions detached from the core issues will meet continued failure just like any prognosis attempting to cure a disease by simply addressing the symptoms.

For the vast majority of Palestinians their misfortune is the result of 1948. The estimated seven million refugees, of a global population of 11 million Palestinians, see their Nakba as an ongoing event that did not cease after the creation of the State of Israel. For them the forces that lead to their dispossession continue to impose on their lives and deny them their human rights. For them the political process, and the various solutions that have emerged, especially since the Oslo process of 1993, endorses solutions that do not address the roots of their plight, instead promote an unrealistic and unfair vision of peace.

It would not be insensible to ask why the refugee issue should continue to remain a central issue, especially after six decades, and why if it is central to the conflict there is such a disconnect between the political process seeking a solution and facts on the ground. The fact is the plight of refugees did not cease after 1948 even as Israel was obligated under international law to allow Palestinians to return to their land. Instead the numbers swelled, not only due to the generational growth of refugees but more critically the expansionist policies of Israel into Palestinian territories.

The 1967 war created hundreds of thousands of more refugees, many of whom were already victims from 1948. The numbers grew unabated due to Israeli policies such as home demolition, bombings and incursions into Palestinian

territory, the illegal separation wall, its own legalised policy of demolitions in the Negev and the ongoing siege and aggression in Gaza.

This flow of new refugees and displaced Palestinians has made the refugee issue the main constant in this conflict. The Palestinians view that Israel's rapacious thirst for more Palestinian land without the indigenous Palestinians is the ultimate objective, is reinforced repeatedly This was the only way Israel could create a Jewish state in a region that was overwhelmingly populated by Palestinians and it is the only means by which Israel can further secure its desire to remain a Jewish state while simultaneously annexing more Palestinian land.





Terry Rempel*

Palestinian Refugees - A Brief Overview

Palestinian refugees are often described as one of the largest and longest-running unresolved cases of displacement in the world today. More than two-thirds of Palestinians of an estimated 7 million persons have experienced some type of forced displacement either within or from their historic homeland over the past sixty-plus years. It is also one of the most studied cases of displacement. In the past six decades, hundreds of studies, books, and articles have been written about almost every aspect of the Palestinian refugee situation, with the volume of literature mushrooming over the past two decades. This article provides a brief and broad overview of some of the major features of the Palestinian refugee case. Such an approach obviously glosses over important nuances and details for which the reader will have to consult the extensive body of literature and wide range of online sources on Palestinian refugees.

Multiple waves, ongoing displacement

The majority of Palestinian refugees were displaced in the context of the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. An estimated 750,000 Palestinians became refugees in 1948 with another 400,000 displaced in 1967, half of whom were refugees from the previous war. Both wars also resulted in much smaller, but no less significant, populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs). One of the lesser known features of the Palestinian case, however, is the ongoing nature of displacement. The earliest wave pre-dates the 1948 war when upwards of 100,000 Palestinians were displaced within and from Palestine as a result of British measures to contain and suppress Palestinian resistance to British rule and Zionist efforts to establish a Jewish state in Palestine through immigration, colonisation, and the creation of political and military state apparatus. Displacement continued after the 1948 war as Israel transferred internally and expelled tens-of-thousands of Palestinians to «cleanse» border areas, assert control over Palestinian population centres, and expropriate land for Jewish settlement and development of the Jewish state. Since 1967, land confiscation, settlement expansion, house demolition, revocation of residency, and construction of the West Bank Wall have contributed to ongoing displacement within and from the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT: the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip). Palestinian refugees have also experienced secondary forms of displacement within and from Arab host states due to political instability and armed conflict over the past sixty years.

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Root causes of displacement

There is a tendency in much of the discourse on the Palestinian refugee question to focus on the macro causes of Palestinian displacement. Much of the debate revolves around a discussion of which party is responsible for starting the two wars that led to the displacement of the majority of Palestinians - a careful examination of each wave of displacement reveals a systemic pattern of violations of both the laws of war and fundamental human rights. These include, among others, attacks on civilian populations, destruction of property without military necessity, and expulsion of the civilian population as well as mass denationalisation and expropriation of property on discriminatory grounds. The fact that these policies and practices «travel» across time (at least since the 1948 war) and space (across the «Green Line» dividing Israel from the OPT) and overwhelmingly affect Palestinians rather than Jewish Israelis further underscores the systemic and discriminatory nature of Palestinian displacement and dispossession. With most of the histories of the refugee question and the two major wars written by historians, the legal implications of the actual practices that led to displacement and dispossession have received relatively little attention.

| Year | Number of Palestinians Displaced/Expelled |
|---|---|
| British Mandate: 1922–1947 | 100,000 – 150,000 |
| Nakba: 1947–1949 | 750,000 – 900,000 |
| Israeli Military Government: 1949–1966 | 35,000 – 45,000 |
| 1967 War | 400,000 – 450,000 |
| Occupation, Colonization, Apartheid 1967-2009 | Tens of thousands |

Table 1; Source: Badil (Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights), Survey of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Person 2008-2009

Definitions and labels

This ongoing pattern of displacement and the unique regime established to assist and protect Palestinian refugees (see below) has also led to an array of often confusing definitions and labels. “Palestine refugees” or “1948 refugees”, for example, comprise both UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) registered (those entitled to receive assistance and protection) and non-registered refugees. There are also a number of «cross-over» cases in which non-registered refugees may be registered for the purpose of assistance because they are deemed to have suffered significant loss or hardship related to the events of 1948, but do not appear in UN registration data because they do not meet registration criteria. “1967 refugees” are also referred to as “displaced persons” due to the fact that they did not cross an «international border» during the 1967 war. ‘Ex-Gazans’ comprise a sub-category of 1967 refugees who found refuge in Jordan. Due to the fact that the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian control until 1967, this smaller group of refugees was given a different status than those displaced from the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. While entitled to receive UN assistance and protection, 1967 refugees are not registered. The relative «invisibility» of the group of Palestinians displaced within and from Israelsince 1949 stems, in part, from the fact that they have not be given a specific label. Some became refugees and others were internally displaced. Yet another category of Palestinian refugees include those displaced from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip since 1967. They are often referred to as either “post-1967 refugees” or “other” Palestinian refugees. Palestinians displaced

inside Israel are sometimes referred to as “present absentees” by virtue of the fact that they are physically «present» in the country and, at the same time, ‘absent’ with respect to their property under Israel’s land regime. Today they are more commonly referred to as ‘internally displaced’ as are Palestinians who were displaced within the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip during and after the 1967 war. ‘Undocumented refugees’ may fall within any of the above categories. The major feature of their situation, as the label suggests, is the absence of documentation, which results in the absence of any legal status and the denial of both assistance and protection from national and international authorities.

The number of refugees

The lack of a universal refugee definition, as described above, combined with the absence of a comprehensive registration system each contribute to confusion over the total number of Palestinian refugees. UNRWA and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) registration systems exclude major refugee groups (e.g. 1967 refugees) and IDPs. A relatively small number of refugees, moreover, may be registered with both agencies, although measures are being taken to correct this anomaly. The number of UNRWA-registered refugees (4.77 million as of January 2010) is often cited incorrectly as the total Palestinian refugee population. The actual number of refugees is closer to 7 million. This includes around 1 million 1948 non-registered refugees and another million 1967 refugees who, as noted above, receive UN assistance and protection but are not registered. There are no accurate figures or estimates for the number of Palestinians who have been displaced from the OPT for the first time since 1967. Estimates of annual out-migration are not necessarily indicative of refugee status. If the estimated number of IDPs is added to the above refugee population, however, the total number of Palestinians who have experienced some form of displacement surpasses 7 million out of a global Palestinian population of more than 10 million. In other words, nearly three-quarters of Palestinians have experienced some form of displacement since 1948. The above population figures cover the total number of Palestinians who have been forcibly displaced and are unable to return to their homes of origin inside Israel or the OPT, not necessarily those who are in need of assistance and protection on a day-to-day basis. In line with international practice, the figures also include descendants of refugees and IDPs.

Figure 2.1: Percentage Distribution of the Palestinian Population Worldwide by Type of Displacement, End 2005

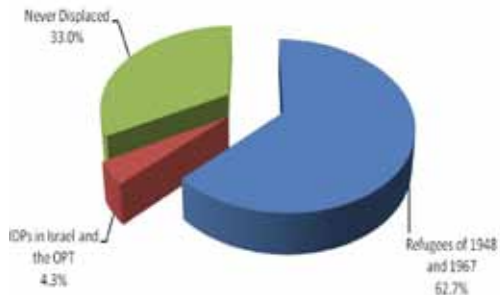


Table 2; Source: Badil: Survey of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2008-2009

Table 3: Breakdown of Refugees Registered with UNRWA in Host Countries

| Field of Operations | Official Camps | Registered Refugees in Camps | Registered Refugees |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Jordan | 10 | 338,000 | 1,951,603 |
| Lebanon | 12 | 222,776 | 422,188 |
| Syria | 9 | 125,009 | 461,897 |
| West Bank | 19 | 193,370 | 762,820 |
| Gaza Strip | 8 | 495,006 | 1,073,303 |
| Agency total | 58 | 1,373,732 | 4,671,811 |

Source: UNRWA website

The scope of their losses

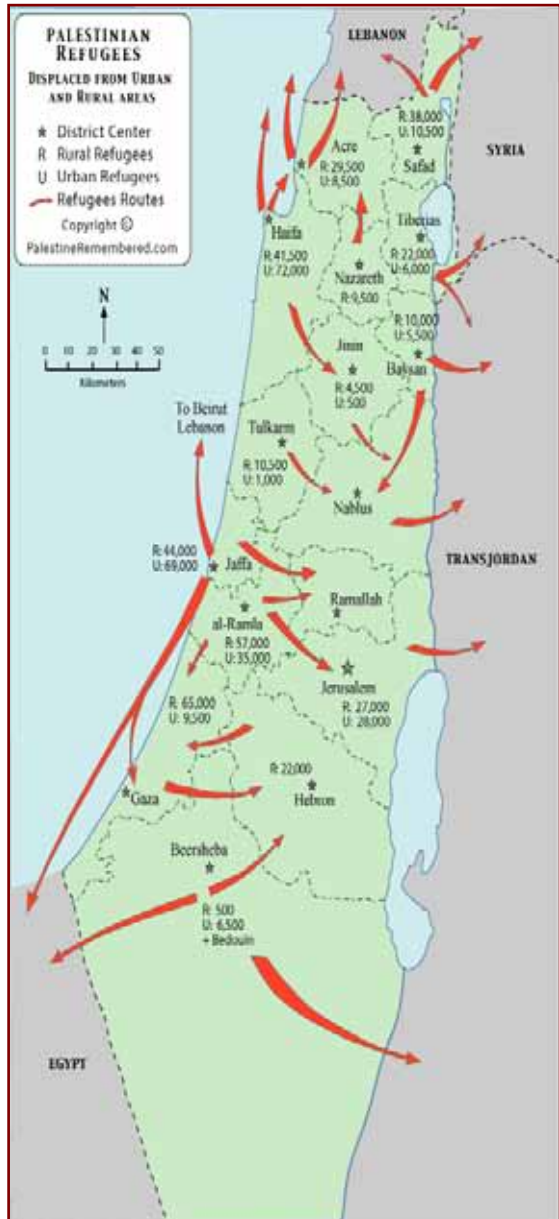
The scope of Palestinian material losses since 1948 varies according to the categorisation of losses (e.g. movable, immovable, other), sources of documentation, and criteria/definitions used to determine ownership. The following overview focuses on a limited group of immovable properties (land and residential property), based on records from Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli and UN registers, and covers private, communal, and customary forms of land ownership. In 1948 and continuing through the 1960s Israeli authorities destroyed more than 500 Palestinian villages (approximately three-quarters of Palestinian villages inside the de facto borders of the Jewish state) comprising an estimated 125,000-150,000 homes (including depopulated urban centres like Jerusalem). An estimated 17,000 sq. km of land was expropriated and transferred to the state to be held as the «inalienable» property of the Jewish people. Jewish «ownership» of land inside the de facto borders of Israel thus increased from approximately 11 percent to over 90 percent as a result of the 1948 war. Between 1949 and 1966, Israel expropriated over half (700 sq. km) of the land owned by its Palestinian citizens. Expropriation, albeit at a smaller scale, has continued since 1967. Following Israel's military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Jewish «ownership» of land there increased from less than one percent to over 10 percent with the expropriation of more than 400 sq. km in the West Bank and a smaller amount of land in the Gaza Strip. Approximately two percent of Palestinian villages were destroyed, as were several refugee camps, half of the city of Qalqilya, and the Moroccan quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem as well as an estimated five percent of the housing stock comprising several thousand homes. Despite the dismantling of Jewish settlements and the redeployment of Israeli forces outside the Gaza Strip in 2005, Israel remains in control of the majority of Palestinian land in the 1967 OPT, either through expropriation or military occupation.

The international response

The international regime responsible to protect, assist, and seek permanent solutions for Palestinian refugees is comprised of three major UN agencies. The UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) was established in 1948 to facilitate the implementation of the UN «peace plan» (GA Res. 194), which provided for the voluntary return of refugees to their homes of origin. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949 (GA Res. 302) to provide assistance to the refugees and facilitate their economic reintegration in the region. When the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established a year later, it was decided to exclude Palestinian refugees from the agency's mandate since they were already receiving protection and assistance from other UN bodies. This was later codified in article 1D of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. However, the convention's drafters added a second inclusion clause in the event that the UNCCP and UNRWA ceased to provide protection or assistance. In fact, in 1952 the UNCCP ceased to provide such protection and overall responsibility for resolving the conflict was devolved (GA Res. 512) to the parties themselves. Confusion over mandates, and political opposition to UNHCR intervention, however, led to what is often termed today as a «protection gap» for Palestinian refugees. In 1967 the UN further requested UNRWA to provide assistance to refugees displaced during the second Arab-Israeli war. In the last decade UNRWA and UNHCR have begun to address the protection gap in a systematic manner. Due to the ad hoc development of the «Palestinian regime», smaller groups of refugees and IDPs (i.e., those not displaced during the two major wars) often find themselves excluded from and unable to access protection and assistance accorded to 1948 and 1967 refugees.

Status in host countries

The majority of Palestinian refugees today reside in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the Gaza Strip. A smaller number reside in Egypt, Iraq, the Gulf states, and elsewhere in the region. Palestinian refugees also reside in various regions outside the Middle East. While there is considerable information on the status of refugees in the five major host states and territories, there is significantly less and often little information on the status of those refugees who have sought temporary refuge elsewhere. In the 1950s and 1960s the League of Arab States began to develop a regional approach to the refugee crisis. The 1965 Casablanca Protocol was a major effort to regularise the status and protect the basic rights of Palestinian refugees. League of Arab States efforts are particularly important given the fact that most states in the region are not signatories to the international refugee convention. The status of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East deteriorated in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of political instability and armed conflict across the region, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, the OPT, but also in Egypt. This period also marked the beginning of a slow but significant movement of refugees in search of safe asylum in countries outside the region. In the last two decades, armed conflict and military occupation has also led to secondary displacement and a major deterioration in the status of refugees in Kuwait and Iraq. Today the status of Palestinian refugees varies across the region. In many cases, the treatment of refugees falls below regional and international standards. The situation of refugees in Lebanon is often considered to be the most severe. The relatively recent establishment of a Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee to address protection gaps in Lebanon, however, provides a potential model for collaborative efforts to improve the situation of refugees in other host countries.



The positions of the parties

Since 1948 Israel has generally held that the 1948 refugees should be resettled in the region or, more recently, in a future Palestinian state. Israeli officials have expressed a willingness to allow a small

number of refugees to enter Israel through family reunification and to compensate remaining refugees for some of their material losses, namely private immovable property, but they reject restitution. Israel also refuses to acknowledge moral and legal responsibility for the displacement of Palestinians over the past 60 years. In the last decade, Israeli officials have also begun to press for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. According to Israel's self-definition, this would include, among others, recognition of Israel as a state with a permanent Jewish majority, which grants special privileges to Jews (most notably rights of return and property), and maintains a special relationship with the Jewish diaspora. This is commonly seen as an effort to block the return of refugees to their homes of origin inside Israel. While Israel is no longer opposed, in principle, to the return of 1967 refugees to the occupied Palestinian territories, the failure to find a solution to its 40-plus-year military occupation blocks a solution for this group of refugees. Moreover, discussion of restitution and compensation for this group of refugees has been oddly absent from much of the policy-oriented research generated in the past two decades. Israel has also been unwilling to redress the claims of its internally displaced population to avoid setting precedent with regard to the larger body of claims by 1948 refugees. In contrast, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has historically called for a solution to the refugee question based on General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948 refugees), Security Council Resolution 237 (1967 refugees), and international law. This would allow those refugees wishing to do so, to voluntarily return to their homes of origin, to be restituted of their properties (movable and immovable), and to receive compensation for damages and for losses (material and immaterial) in cases where restitution is factually impossible. The PLO has also called upon Israel to acknowledge moral and legal responsibility for Palestinian displacement. While some officials on both sides have expressed variations or departures, in varying degrees, from these positions, they nonetheless reflect the official preferences of either side.

The lack of an effective remedy to displacement and dispossession

There have been two major and one minor effort to find a negotiated solution to the Palestinian refugee question. Between 1949 and 1952 the UN facilitated a series of meetings and conferences between Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Israel to find a solution to the conflict, including the refugee question, based on Resolution 194. Efforts to facilitate a de facto solution through economic reintegration following the collapse of these talks also failed. Bilateral talks between Jordan and Israel, facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, resulted in the first and only «repatriation agreement» that provided for a small number of 1967 refugees to return to the West Bank in the autumn of that year. Since 1991, the United States (initially co-sponsored by the former Soviet Union) has tried to facilitate a negotiated solution on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for a «just settlement» of the refugee question and was adopted in the aftermath of the 1967 war. The ongoing process finds its roots in a number of official and unofficial proposals from the 1970s, most notably, the 1978 Camp David Framework for Peace in the Middle East, which provided for the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority in the OPT and a phased solution to the conflict. In its contemporary format, the US-led process, as set out in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference letter of invitation and in the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, provided for multi-lateral talks to address regional (primarily humanitarian) aspects of the refugee question, a four-party committee (Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the PLO) to discuss «modalities for the admission» of 1967 refugees to the occupied territories, and bilateral talks (Israel, PLO) to decide on the future 1948 refugees. The process did not address the status of other groups of refugees or the situation of internally displaced Palestinians as discussed above. By 2000-2001 all of the above forums aiming to resolve the refugee question had collapsed. Efforts to restart negotiations through an

internationally- sponsored framework (the 2003 'Road Map') and international conferences in 2007 (Annapolis) and 2010 (Washington, DC) have thus far failed to advance a solution to the refugee question and the conflict in general. While each refugee situation is, in varying degrees and ways, unique, one of the major differences between the Palestinian case and other refugee situations is the long-standing failure to apply the international principles and practices that have facilitated permanent solutions for millions of refugees elsewhere.

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Syria's Palestinian Refugees: a Brief Overview

Syria has served as a host country to Palestinians fleeing Apartheid Israel's policies of expulsion, extermination, murder and occupation of Palestinian land since 1948. In fact, 85 percent of Syria's Palestinians fled their homes in 1948. Another influx came in 1967, when more than 100,000 fled the Golan Heights. Then, in 1982, the Lebanese conflict led more to seek refuge. The last significant migration occurred during the 1991 Gulf War. A majority of what Syria's Palestinians call home is now recognized by the International community as the northern part of Apartheid Israel. There are approximately 460,000 Palestinian refugees living in Syria, representing three percent of the country's total population⁽¹⁾.

Despite the large number of refugees living in Syria, relatively little scholarship on the subject exists⁽²⁾. The most comprehensive work was survey research conducted and implemented by FAFO and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources, which was published in FAFO-Report 514. The definitive report provides statistical and survey data on the conditions of the Palestinian refugees living in Syria⁽³⁾. The lack of additional scholarship is problematic for two reasons. First, the Syrian model is ideal in comparison to what has been implemented by other host countries⁽⁴⁾. Second, more studies and scholarship are needed for Palestinian and international activists working toward the creation of an International Movement for the Palestinian Right of Return; a movement that is desperately needed given that the right of return has not played an important role in international political dialogue. This article seeks to provide readers with a brief overview of conditions and situation of Syria's Palestinian refugees, the role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Syrian government, and makes an argument for the need of an International Movement for the Right of Return.

Syria and the International Community

Refugees in the international community are often disadvantaged when it comes to the protection of their rights, and Palestinians are no different. The presence of millions of Palestinians living as refugees is a constant reminder of Zionist imperialism and neo-imperialist occupations and policies that continue to plague the world and hinder the progress of humanity. The plight of the Palestinian Diaspora has beset the international community and the Middle East since the recognition of the Apartheid State of Israel in 1948. Despite this, the issue of Palestinian refugees and their right of return continues to be unsolved and pushed aside by the United States, Apartheid Israel and the international community-at-large.

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Interest among the international community in the Palestinian refugee problem waned in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and as Palestinians were never part of the talks they were powerless to stop this⁽⁵⁾.

The US abandoned any serious discussion in 1949. From 1949 to the collapse of the former Soviet Union, US policy was occupied with its war of communist containment. US policy toward the Palestinians and countries such as Syria who defended the Palestinian cause, interests, and right of return were seen through this ideological lens. Many of the Arabs and Apartheid Israel were insincere and used the Palestinian refugee issue as a bargaining tool⁽⁶⁾ for their own domestic, regional and international interests⁽⁷⁾.

Syria has always remained steadfast in support for Palestine and advocated the right of return⁽⁸⁾. It has consistently argued that there will be no security in the region until the Palestinian refugee issue has been resolved⁽⁹⁾. Syria sees itself as part of any solution, especially given the role that Palestine has played in its policy⁽¹⁰⁾ and interests since 1948⁽¹¹⁾. The historical connection between both Syrians and Palestinians has also played a role⁽¹²⁾. Under Hafez Al-Assad, there was an ideological commitment by Syria to the Palestinian cause and the right of return⁽¹³⁾, which was understood in terms of Arab nationalism and the need for greater Arab unity⁽¹⁴⁾. When Bashar Al-Assad replaced his father, he openly linked Syria's policy to Palestine. The difference between father and son, however, has been the latter's pragmatic approach and the government's avoidance of any ideologically-bound strategy.

Given the central roles of Palestine and the right of return in Syrian policy, it should come as no surprise to the reader that Palestinians living in Syria are treated as equal to their Syrian counterparts. They are granted the right to education, employment, healthcare, freedom of movement, and ownership of one piece of non-arable property. A 1956 Syrian law provided that Palestinians are considered Syrian by origin in all matters pertaining to laws and regulations, with the exception of the right to naturalisation and voting⁽¹⁵⁾. While seen as equal in terms of laws and regulations, Syria views the Palestinians as a distinct nationality. Palestinians in Syria also see themselves as separate and distinct from Syrians⁽¹⁶⁾. Separate identities, equal in the eyes of the law and living harmoniously, Syrians and Palestinians are united in their quest and struggle for Palestine. Syria's treatment of Palestinian refugees could provide a basis for an international framework for the treatment of all Palestinian refugees.

Conditions of Syria's Palestinian Refugees

There are a total of 13 refugee camps inside Syria, only 10 of which are officially recognized by UNRWA. There are seven camps in Damascus, two in Aleppo, and one in each of the Homs, Hama, Dar'a and Latakia governorates. Despite only ten being recognised, the agency provides a lower level of services to the "unofficial" camps. For example, in the largest "unofficial" Yarmouk camp, UNRWA runs a large number of schools and health centers. The overwhelming majority of the camps are urban in character. There is variance, however, in the conditions of Palestinians living in the urban and rural areas. Data on the conditions of Syria's Palestinian refugees comes from FAFO-Report 514.

Housing Conditions. The image in an outsider's mind of refugee housing conditions is that of tents and barracks. Tents in Syria were replaced by concrete, block, and brick housing structures between 1955 and 1965. The majority of Syria's Palestinians live in their own home, while a smaller percentage (8%) rent from either the Syrian government or UNRWA. It should be noted that the majority rent from the former rather than the latter. Very few Palestinians remain living in the barrack-style houses. The majority

of the barrack-style houses are found in the camps bordering Iraq, which are inhabited by those fleeing the 1991 Gulf War and the US occupation of Iraq. Palestinian refugees in Iraq faced growing hostility, threats from sections of the Iraqi population, and were targets of violence by some Iraqi militias⁽¹⁷⁾. Syria, following Jordan's refusal, agreed to take them in after they were stranded in no-man's land for several months.

Palestinians are not confined to living in camps; they can live and move freely throughout Syria. Given this, the crowding plaguing camps in Jordan and Lebanon is not a serious problem. There are of course regional variations. For example, crowding is cited by 36 percent of the refugees living in the Aleppo and the Dar'a governorates; and, 15 percent in the Homs and Hama governorates. There are also camp specific variations. Overall, complaints of crowding are 2.5 times higher from refugees living in the rural rather than the urban areas of Syria, with the majority living in urban centers. To deal with some of the crowding issues, UNRWA has implemented some rehabilitation projects, in conjunction with the General Authority Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR)⁽¹⁸⁾. GAPAR and UNRWA jointly administer Syria's Palestinian refugee camps. For example, the Neirab Rehabilitation Project located in the Aleppo governorate was launched in 2002⁽¹⁹⁾.

Conditions in the camps differ along the urban-rural variation. The rural areas have poor access to piped drinking and regular water, inadequate (if any) garbage and waste disposal, and poor infrastructure. UNRWA is responsible for sewage and solid waste disposal and control of infestations in the camps, while the Syrian government is responsible for providing basic utilities⁽²⁰⁾. The problems cited by Palestinian refugees are not specific to them, however. They are shared by all Syrians living in the rural areas of the country. The urban-rural divide is a common theme when looking at not only housing and housing conditions, but also education, employment, health and poverty.

Education Conditions. Palestinians with permanent residence in Syria and Palestinian refugees registered with GAPAR have full and free access to education facilities. While the Syrian government provides secondary education, UNRWA operates 61 elementary schools and 50 preparatory schools, which operate on double shifts⁽²¹⁾. Most Palestinians attend UNRWA schools (95 percent), while the remainder attends government (4 percent) and private institutions (1 percent). Only ten percent of the Syrian government schools operate on double shifts. Despite running on double shifts, there is a widespread perception that UNRWA schools are better than those run by the Syrian government. This perception may change over time with the continued reduction of teacher's salaries due to UNRWA's continuing budget issues. The curricula in UNRWA schools are similar to those used by the Syrian government⁽²²⁾. In addition to elementary and preparatory schools, UNRWA also offers vocation and education training. The Syrian National Information Center administers nurseries, computer training and information centres⁽²³⁾. Overall, education accomplishments vary according to the urban-rural divide. Lower attainment in the rural areas is due mainly to Palestinians' lack of access to secondary schools and health-related issues. Again, these problems are not limited to Palestinians. They plague all rural inhabitants.

Health Conditions. Like the education benefits granted by the Syrian government, Palestinian refugees also have access to primary and secondary health care. Primary care is provided free of charge and hospital care is subsidised for all Palestinians and Syrians alike. The economic situation in Syria, however, has led to a reduction in hospital care. UNRWA has also cut its provision of hospital care due to its own budgetary problems. UNRWA provides 23 health clinics, which provide primary healthcare to refugees registered with them and living in the camps. The Syrian branch of the Palestinian Red Crescent

Society also provides medical and health services in some of the camps. While the majority of Palestinian refugees surveyed rank their own health as satisfactory, satisfaction with the UNRWA healthcare services ranked lower than that provided for by the Syrian government. The availability, access and quality of healthcare also suffer from the urban-rural variation.

Employment Conditions. Unlike Palestinians living in other host countries, the employment rate of Palestinian refugees in Syria is high and unemployment low. The character of the Palestinian employment workforce is comparable to Syrians, with thirty percent of Palestinians working in the public sector. Specifically, 80 percent are waged employees, 14 percent are self-employed, and five percent are employers. Highly-educated Palestinians are found to be employed mostly in the public sector-government, education, health and the social service sectors. Palestinians do not have the right to vote or run for public office, but some hold positions in the Syrian government⁽²⁴⁾. In all of sectors, the most underrepresented by the Palestinian workforce is in the agricultural sector, which is largely due to the fact that Palestinians are prohibited by Syrian law from owning a piece of arable land. Lack of participation by Palestinians in the overall workforce is explained by refugees as being due to their health conditions. Underemployment of Palestinian refugees is only reported at five percent of the total workforce. Given the high rate of employment, the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian poor are not materially deprived and do not suffer from a lack of basic necessities. 26 percent of Palestinian refugees are reported to be living below, and 22 percent at, the poverty level according to international standards. The high levels of poverty are associated with high dependency rates, support burden, age, and health conditions. There is also a geographical correlation in the concentration of poverty, with the rural areas having higher levels.

Conditions of Palestinian refugees are good overall. The most notable distinction and variance in the conditions fall along the urban-rural divide, which corresponds to a larger development problem faced by Syria and many developing countries. Geographically uneven development is a common problem faced by many developing countries that are forced to or voluntarily adopt the neoliberal development paradigm. This is even the case for those that adopt the neoliberal variation of the sustainable development model. It is likely that development will continue to be a problem for UNRWA and Syria in the future due to the models employed.

Conclusion: An International Movement?

Palestinians living in Syria are integrated into society at all levels and rarely suffer from discrimination in employment, ownership or political activity⁽²⁵⁾. Many of the problems faced by Palestinian refugees are similar to those faced by all Syrians, especially those living in rural areas⁽²⁶⁾. As the above discussion on the conditions of Palestinian refugees indicated, there is an urban-rural divide that hinders further advancement and development. This divide continues to persist despite UNRWA's shift in the 1990s to a more sustainable development approach that many neoliberal economic development institutions and agencies began to adopt.

Although this article's focus is not on development, it is necessary to diverge somewhat to provide a better understanding of development policy debates because of their impact on development in the Syrian Palestinian refugee camps. Older models of development based on the neoliberal paradigm were top-down and relied on coercive incentives to implement development policies in developing countries. If funds were allocated, then the reforms implemented were dictated by the neoliberal world economic institutions. The problem was they failed to taken into consideration local variations in development and



were not grassroots oriented.

With the increasing failure and further decline of developing countries, some neoliberal institutions began to implement aspects of the sustainable development model that have kept development circles buzzing. It is the new neoliberal development model that incorporates aspects of the sustainable development model that UNRWA has begun to implement. What makes the approach new is that rather than being top-down as before, grassroots or community centres are created (after being trained and indoctrinated in the neoliberal approach) to foster development from the bottom-up. The problem is that a failed model, regardless of whether it is imposed top-down or bottom-up will not create sustainable development in the refugee camps or in Syria more generally. The sustainable development model, and not the one hijacked by neo-liberalism advocates, is needed for the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and the camps in other host countries.

Development is not the only problem facing Syria's Palestinian refugees. They also suffer from a protection gap, where politics, identity and the concept of international human rights have colluded to prevent adequate protection of their rights and resolution of the issue⁽²⁷⁾. Aid agencies and those designed specifically for Palestinian refugees such as UNRWA and GAPAR in Syria were created to focus only on humanitarian needs rather than also focusing on civil and political rights. It is the limited scope and a lack of coordination among humanitarian aid, civil and political institutions that cause the protection gap.

There is coordination between UNRWA and GAPAR, as well as their cooperation with other aid agencies inside Syria that look to the humanitarian needs of Palestinians. There is not, however, systematic, widespread and transnational coordination of those agencies with other civil and political organisations. This is a similar problem faced in the other host countries. In the absence of more effective coordination and better policies of mobilisation, there will continue to be a lack of development and political success in the area of Palestinian refugees.

What is needed is a transnational coalition of aid agencies that work in tandem with an international movement for Palestinian refugees. A movement that encompasses organisations, political movements and activists that are working on not just aid, but also the civil and political rights of Palestinian refugees; the creation of an international movement for Palestinian refugees is needed. Transnational, regional and local coordination will strengthen the social, civil and political rights of Palestinian refugees living inside and outside of Palestine, especially the right of return. As a whole, there is an absence of grassroots organisation and mobilisation; and, a lack of organisation and institutions dealing specifically with the right of return. Those that do exist specifically for promoting awareness of the right of return fail to coordinate, cooperate and expand their target areas. Given the lack of success and willingness of states in the International Community to deal with and tackle the right of return, which is at the heart of any peace in the Middle East, it is time for concerned humanitarians and activists to take the reins to build a transnational movement for the right of return.

Endnote:

- 1- The reported number of Palestinian refugees ranges in the existing scholarship. The number used here is reported by UNRWA.
- 2- Tiltnes, A. (2006). "Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Human Capital, Economic Resources, and Living Conditions," FAFO-Report 514: 1-248.
- 3- Given the lack of available resources and time constraints imposed, this section of the article relies heavily on

the data provided by FAFO to present the readers with a brief overview and understanding of the conditions. Interviews and other scholarly sources were also used and are noted accordingly.

- 4- It should be noted that the model referred to here is specifically limited to Syria's treatment of Palestinian refugees. Syria has been criticized for its treatment of other refugees living the country.
- 5- Tovy, J. (2003). "Negotiating the Palestinian Refugees." *Middle East Quarterly* 10, no. 2: 39.
- 6- Spungen, N. (1987). *Deadlock at Lausanne: Six Months of Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Middle East*. *Jewish Social Studies*, 49(3/4), 265-274.
- 7- Liel, A. (2008). "Ten Principles for Solving the Refugee Problem." *Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture* 15/16(4/1): 80-82.
- 8- Talhami, G. (2001). *Syria and the Palestinians: The Clash of Nationalisms*. Florida: University Press of Florida.
- 9- Yost, C.W. (1968). "How it Began," *Foreign Affairs* 46(2): 304-320.
- 10- Byman, D. (2005). "Confronting Syrian-Backed Terrorism," *Washington Quarterly*, 28(3), 99-114.
- 11- Pedatzur, R. (2008). "The Rescue of King Hussein's Regime." *Civil Wars* 10(3): 294-318.
- 12- Interview conducted on October 25, 2010.
- 13- Hafez Al-Assad never made preferences to one political party over another, and disputed the PLO's claim to be the "sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Scholars argue that Hafez Al-Assad's refusal to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people was due to the rocky relationship between himself and Arafat. The rough period of PLO-Syrian relations is not in the purview of this article and there does not appear to be any correlation between it and the Syrian government's relationship with and treatment of Palestinian refugees in Syria. The tension and problems between the Syrian government and the PLO, specifically with Fatah, are political in nature.
- 14- Interview conducted on October 24, 2010.
- 15- Interview supra note 14.
- 16- Nehme, Michel G. 1995. "Identity and fear: A survey study of the Arab East." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 30(4): 3.
- 17- Gabiam, N. (2006). "Negotiating Rights: Palestinian Refugees and the Protection Gap," *Anthropological Quarterly*
- 18- GAPAR is the General Authority Palestinian Arab Refugees and is headed by Mr. Ali Mustafa. It replaced the Palestinian Arab Refugee Institution (PARI), which was established by the Syrian government in 1949. The agency is responsible for registration, relief assistance, finding employment opportunities, and managing funds.
- 19- UNRWA-Syria 2010
- 20- UNRWA-Syria supra note 19.
- 21- UNRWA-Syria supra note 19.
- 22- UNRWA-Syria supra note 19.
- 23- Interview conducted on October 15, 2010.
- 24- Interview conducted on October 23, 2010.
- 25- Haddad, S. (2000). "The Palestinian Predicament in Lebanon." *Middle East Quarterly* 7(3): 29.
- 26- Interview conducted on October 14, 2010.
- 27- Gabiam, N. (2006). "Negotiating Rights: Palestinian Refugees and the Protection Gap." *Anthropological Quarterly* 79(4): 717-730.





Tom Charles*

An Introduction to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

No way out?

Background Information

It is important to bear in mind that the problems being considered here are primarily the fault of Israel, whose ethnic cleansing and colonisation led to the expulsion of much of the indigenous Palestinian population. Israel's defiance of international law and the overwhelming majority of the international community blocks a straight forward resolution to the refugee crisis: the return of the refugees to their land. However, more than 60 years of Israeli dispossession, human rights abuses, and intransigence should never be used as an excuse by host countries or the international community for not fulfilling their obligations to protect and ensure the basic human rights of the refugees.

For the past 63 years, millions of Palestinians have been living as refugees in areas of the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) and in surrounding countries. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) describes their plight as "by far the most protracted and largest of all refugee problems in the world today"⁽¹⁾.

Three quarters of Palestinians from a global population 11 million are refugees. Their plight is at the core of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. All other issues, political and humanitarian, arose as a consequence of Israel's denial of the right of refugees to return to their land.

Multiple international treaties and conventions recognise the inviolable characteristic of the right to return including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. The Right of Return for refugees is guaranteed under Humanitarian and Human Rights Law and countless UN resolutions.

Uniquely to the Palestinians, the UN has affirmed the right of return through Resolution 194 122 times. The UN also, after recognising the growing humanitarian disaster as Palestinians were expelled from their land in 1948, set up two different institutions to deal with the humanitarian challenges and implement the right of return. Six decades on, the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) remains the sole provision while the United Nations Conciliatory Committee for Palestine (UNCCP) has been disbanded because of the Israeli refusal to allow refugees to return to their land.

Over 400,000 Palestinians live in Lebanon's 12 'official' (UNRWA-run) and its many 'unofficial' refugee camps, amounting to approximately 10 per cent of Lebanon's population.

Lebanon is the host country in which history and politics have most exacerbated the difficulties faced by Palestinian refugees. Politically marginalised, without basic social and economic rights, trapped in often squalid camps, and without hopes for the future, Palestinian refugees suffer more in Lebanon than in any of the other countries that host Palestinian refugees.

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Denial of basic civil freedoms

Socio-economic deprivation in the camps is worsened by the fact that refugees are barred from owning property, working, travelling overseas and receiving basic social services from the government.

Army checkpoints exist at many camps and a dignified standard of living is hard to come by. Many refugees see what is happening as a form of collective punishment for the Palestinian role in the civil war⁽²⁾.

Government policy has been a main reason for the continued dire conditions. Particularly hard hit have been the unofficial refugee camps. Despite this the Lebanese government agree with UNRWA that the living standards of the refugees are catastrophic.

A brief history

In the 1970s the refugee camps were a key source of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) resistance to Israel's occupation. This served as an excuse to delay political dialogue about refugees. Lebanese – Palestinian relations stagnated until 2004.

Since then, progress has come in the form of the PLO offering to decrease the amount of weapons held in the camps in return for increased rights for residents. Hamas and other groups have opposed any such deal stating that the vulnerable refugees gain a sense of security through having weapons.

Lebanon's Palestinian refugees live in appalling social and economic conditions - most of them in crowded camps that lack essential infrastructure. In 2001, Parliament passed a law prohibiting Palestinians from owning property, a right they had enjoyed for decades.

The 2005 withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon paved the way for improved PLO – Lebanese relations and the creation of an inter-ministerial consultative body: the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee.

Political Situation

The Palestinian refugee issue has long been at the heart of Lebanese politics, often a trigger for violence. Currently it is the source of much debate.

While all Lebanon's political parties offer rhetorical support to improving refugee living conditions. This has not yet translated in to tangible changes.

Lebanon's delicate religious balance dictates that the Palestinian refugee issue is handled carefully by politicians. Lebanon's population of just over four million is made up of Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and Maronite Christians, all constituting roughly the same proportion of the population. Smaller but nevertheless significant groups include Greek Orthodox and Druze. There are 18 religious groups in Lebanon.

Predominantly, but not exclusively, Muslims have joined to support allowing Palestinians an improved standard of living.

Predominantly, but also not exclusively, Christians have opposed the increase in Palestinian human rights.

The Christian leadership in particular has taken advantage of concerns that the Palestinian refugees will become naturalized (Tawtin) citizens and tip Lebanon's demographic balance in favour of Muslims. One MP told the International Crisis Group in 2008: "Our official policy is to maintain Palestinians in a vulnerable, precarious situation to diminish prospects for their naturalization or permanent settlement"⁽³⁾.

Christian fear appears to be fabricated as neither the Lebanese nor the refugees themselves want Tawtin, as that would entail giving up the right to return to Palestine.

Another argument made by opponents to improving conditions is that the Palestinians would negatively impact the Lebanese economy. This also appears exaggerated as analysis reveals that the number of working age Palestinian refugees would constitute only around five per cent of the country's population.

In 2005, Lebanon eliminated a ban on Palestinians holding most clerical and technical positions, provided they obtain a temporary work permit from the Labour Ministry, but more than 20 skilled professions remain off-limits to Palestinians.

In Summer 2010 a proposal was put before the Lebanese parliament to significantly improve the rights and conditions of the Palestinian refugees. "Should we deprive Palestinian refugees in Palestinian camps of their rights, so that they become terrorists in the future?" Prime Minister Saad Hariri asked during a parliamentary debate. "We have a historic opportunity to vote on this proposal"⁽⁴⁾.

The outcome in August 2010 was a slight improvement for the refugees. They are now able to claim free work permits for private sector work and can claim for work-related accidents and retirement. No overall change in their economic position was secured and the law was effectively watered down by opponents who campaigned against it.

Role of UNRWA

The international community has offered insufficient assistance to the refugees, reducing its support of UNRWA.

UNRWA is vital to the refugees, not just as a lifeline, but also as a reminder to the international community that the Palestinian refugee issue has shamefully not been resolved.

The 12 UNRWA camps have not changes in size or location since 1948. However, their populations have grown and families suffer from overcrowding and are often forced to live with many people to a room.



The destroyed Nahr el-Bared camp

The destruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp

In May 2007, clashes began in the North of the country between the Lebanese army and the Fatah el-Islam terrorist group revealing the fragility of the situation in Lebanon. Over the course of the three month battle, fighting became concentrated in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp.

For the first time since the 1970s the Lebanese army entered a refugee camp, virtually destroying the camp and killing 47 civilians. Approximately 30,000 people were displaced and their situation remains extremely precarious. Most of them must now fend for themselves without any source of income and only 10,000 moved to the section of Nahr al-Bared that was only partially destroyed. In this remaining part of the camp, families live in makeshift and overcrowded dwellings and are subjected to draconian security measures.

During the destruction of Nahr al-Bared some Lebanese troops engaged in theft and vandalism, generating great resentment in the local population. For Palestinian refugees in Lebanon the events at Nahr al-Bared in 2007 brought back painful memories and old fears. Many feel that they are again, as in the 1970s, made to pay a terrible price for the acts of others.

On the Lebanese side, many saw the events as confirmation that the Palestinian camps are havens for extremism and instability. Ironically, prior to the events of 2007, Nahr al-Bared, had enjoyed positive economic and social relations with its surrounding area.

Conclusion

The lives of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are dominated by economic stagnation, social exclusion and an absence of hope. These factors generate anger towards the state and lead to militancy and radicalisation in the camps. This situation must change to ensure peace, dignity and human rights for all in Lebanon.

While we must always remember that realisation of the right of return would ensure a just solution for all Palestinian refugees, there are urgent needs that must be addressed.

Most urgently, the Palestinian refugees need a change that improves their living conditions while maintaining the prominence of their right of return to their homeland guaranteed under UN Resolution 194.

What is needed is a comprehensive solution that clarifies the status of the Palestinians, formally excluding their permanent settlement in Lebanon but allowing their basic human rights to be met and their living standards to improve significantly.

There is already agreement on key issues amongst factions in the camps: the right of return, the rejection of tawtin, the need to rebuild Nahr al-Bared and a commitment not to harbour criminals.

The Lebanese government needs to shift from rhetoric to action to address the catastrophe of the refugees' lives, extending Palestinian employment and property rights to allow the refugees to immediately attain a decent standard of living. This should include lifting restrictions on professions available to Palestinians.

By rights, the Palestinian refugees of Lebanon, just like the refugees elsewhere in the Middle East and in the worldwide Diaspora, should be granted an immediate return to their land. Studies show that there is ample room inside what is now Israel for most refugees to return to their land and rebuild their villages. However, backed by the superpower, Israel continues to disregard international law and the overwhelming international consensus on resolving the Middle East conflict. In peace talks, Israel has achieved the removal of the refugee issue from the negotiation table. Some contend that eventually the combination of demographic factors and an international awakening to the realities of Israel's policies will lead to the realisation of the right of return and justice for Palestinians. Perhaps this is so, but in the meantime it is unacceptable for the Lebanese authorities and the international community to sit back and wait. Lebanon needs to act urgently to raise standards of living in refugee camps to basic human standards. Simultaneously the international community and solidarity groups must ensure that the refugee issue returns to the agenda.



Refugees living in prefabricated temporary accommodation at Nahr el-Bared. Cold temperatures exacerbate health problems and UNRWA is often unable to provide the care needed

Endnote:

- 1) The State of the World's Refugees 2006, UNHCR Chapter 51
- 2) Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps, International Crisis Group, 19 February 2009, p.18
- 3) Ibid p.16
- 4) Hariri, Saad quoted in 'Lebanon MPs Debate Refugees'
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Internal Displacement in the Occupied Palestine Territories

Karim Khalil*

Causes of arbitrary displacement in OPT

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), internal displacement has resulted from the continuing Israeli policies of occupation since 1967, including intermittent violence⁽¹⁾. The denial of human rights and the severity and consistency of Israeli government activities attest to a systematic and calculated state policy of forced displacement for the purpose of acquiring land, redefining demographic boundaries, and divesting Palestinians of ownership rights guaranteed under international law⁽²⁾.

Palestinians who have been forcibly and arbitrarily displaced from their homes in Gaza and the West Bank, and who have remained in the OPT, are considered internally displaced people. Palestinian displacement also include refugees from 1948 and the 1967 war who have subsequently been displaced within the OPT from their habitual residence in their place of refuge. Though not IDPs, displaced refugees are defined as “secondary displaced refugees” to whom relevant human rights law applies by way of analogy⁽³⁾.

The Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs in 2009 would underline the various causes of forced displacement in the OPT including Israeli incursions and military clearing operations, evictions, land appropriations and house demolitions, illegal establishment and expansion of settlements and related infrastructure, the construction of the Separation Wall, violence by Israeli settlers, discriminatory denial of building permits for Palestinians, and the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in East Jerusalem⁽⁴⁾.

Internal displacement in the OPT has both shown to be a gradual process entailing displacement of individual households over extended period of time, to a sudden and violent phenomena affecting thousands of households during violent clashes such as in Gaza in late 2008/early 2009. Displacement has also been attributed to restrictions on freedom of movement and a system of closures that makes life untenable for many residents in Palestinian enclaves⁽⁵⁾.

The arbitrary displacement by Israel of Palestinians in the OPT, akin to population transfer, is in complete disregard and violation of relevant human rights and international humanitarian law. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the OPT in 2006, in referring to displacement arising from the construction of the Separation Wall, would comment that the situation in the OPT was analogous to what has been described as ethnic cleansing in other contexts, but “political correctness forbade such language where Israel was concerned”⁽⁶⁾. Such political correctness continues to be an evidence.

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Lack of certainty on figures of displacement

There are no confirmed statistics on the number of IDPs in the OPT and the numbers provided by various sources are only estimates. Only in the last few years has there been a systematic attempt to address internal displacement by the humanitarian community following advocacy of Palestinian and Israeli NGOs. Badil, a Palestinian NGO, has reported that between 1967 and 2008 over 129,000 people were displaced in all of the OPT⁽⁷⁾. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) estimates that over 24,000 Palestinian houses have been destroyed since 1967 as a result of conflict, punitive demolitions and administrative demolitions of houses without building permits.



A Palestinian boy standing on the ruins of his demolished home.

Palestinians are generally forced to relocate away from Area C and East Jerusalem in the West Bank, and from the buffer zones in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Palestinians have been displaced away from the vicinity of Israeli settlements, related infrastructure, military zones, and the Separation Wall. In the Gaza Strip, repeated military incursions have displaced tens of thousands within Gaza and forced Palestinians away from buffer zones bordering Israel. Between 2000 and 2007, more than 30,000 Palestinians were displaced due to Israeli incursions and house demolitions in Gaza. In the latest Israeli large scale incursion in 2008/2009, over 100,000 were displaced, many temporarily, at the height of the conflict with over 4,000 houses demolished, close to 3,000 seriously damaged and nearly 53,000 suffering minor damage⁽⁸⁾.

The total number currently displaced in the OPT, many of whom may have been displaced repeatedly, remains unclear. Lack of clear monitoring does not provide information as to the extent to which Palestinians have either sought resettlement elsewhere or integrated in their place of displacement. The number of displaced may well be in excess of 160,000 as documented by some NGOs. There remain tens of thousands displaced in Gaza as reconstruction projects since 2005 have remained at a standstill because of the Israeli refusal to permit the transit of construction materials. The figures for the West Bank remain equally undefined with possibly close to 100,000 or more having been displaced due to settlement expansion, settler violence, revocation of residency rights in East Jerusalem, construction of the Separation Wall, and other related Israeli infrastructure.

Estimates of persons at risk of displacement are equally difficult to define. 90,000 people are reportedly at risk, including according to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs an estimated 60,000 in Jerusalem alone⁽⁹⁾, and several thousand Palestinian households facing eviction and house demolition orders across Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This also excludes large number of communities whose access to services are limited or circumscribed due to Israeli infrastructure and restrictive policies. Palestinian communities at particular risk of displacement include those in East Jerusalem, in Area C of the West Bank (particularly Bedouins and others living close to the Separation Wall, settlements, and other Israeli infrastructure) and those living near or in the extended buffer zone along Gaza's border with Israel⁽¹⁰⁾.

Lack of protection of displaced people and access to basic needs

Palestinians face a continuous protection crisis of intermittent cycles of violence, pervasive restrictions

on their movement, and discriminatory policies and regulations. The latest Israeli offensive in Gaza, the most violent incursion in the OPT since 1967 left the territory devastated, where civilians displaced or not bore the brunt of the violence including displaced sheltering in UN-designated shelters who fell victims to Israel's indiscriminate targeting⁽¹¹⁾.

Thousands of Palestinians continue to be displaced in Gaza because of the continuing blockade and near total isolation, and remain in precarious living conditions, residing in makeshift structures, or with a host community⁽¹²⁾. Equally, a number of communities in the West Bank as in the Jordan Valley, but equally so in other localities across Area C in the West Bank reside in precarious conditions victims of repeated house demolitions, settler violence and intimidation.

Those displaced or at risk of displacement face considerable difficulties. Displacement, or situations in which Palestinians have resisted displacement, has placed at risk or led to the loss of family unity, social welfare and livelihoods, and has also had wide-ranging physical and psychological impacts. Children endure the trauma of deep insecurity of having been attacked in their own homes or in a shelter and that of consequent displacement⁽¹³⁾. Israeli demolitions of houses or livelihood structures across the West Bank equally cause significant trauma and have a negative impact on child welfare, livelihood, and family unity⁽¹⁴⁾. A UNIFEM study in Gaza revealed a rise in domestic violence and risk-taking behaviour particularly among the displaced⁽¹⁵⁾.



A Palestinian man salvages a desk belonging to a school that was demolished by Israeli forces in the West Bank village of Khirbet Tana, near Nablus.

Communities in areas under threat of expulsion or eviction have equally faced heightened protection risks, including violence, harassment and intimidation. West Bank closures and the Gaza blockade severely affect access to water, sanitation, health care and education services particularly for Palestinians living in Gaza and in remote and closed parts of Area C. Those who live in areas with a high risk of displacement are more likely to be unable to realise their economic, social and cultural rights. These areas are significantly poorer, more marginalised and less protected. Assistance from local and international organisations is often not available, particularly in remote areas of the West Bank; over half of displaced families surveyed in 2009 in the West Bank reported receiving no humanitarian assistance⁽¹⁶⁾.

Lack of international will and foregone durable solutions to displacement

Israel is bound as the occupying power by obligations derived from international humanitarian law and applicable human rights law⁽¹⁷⁾. Yet the Israeli state remains the primary perpetrator of arbitrary displacement in violation of international law, and generally does not recognise displacement or provide remedy for situations of displacement⁽¹⁸⁾. The limited instances of restitution or return in the West Bank have largely been confined to Areas A and B under jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority, whereas most displacement is in Area C and in East Jerusalem. In Gaza, return has been subject to reconstruction of housing and access to land which have been impeded by the blockade and an ever-expanding Israeli imposed buffer zone.

There is no United Nations agency in the OPT mandated specifically to assist IDPs. This lack of mandated responsibility has led to gaps in response. In recent years, however, greater efforts have been made to provide a coordinated response to the situation of displacement. However Palestinians displaced or at risk of displacement continue to face significant challenges⁽¹⁹⁾. The operational environment remains

constrained by the legal and administrative practices of the Israeli occupation authorities. Agencies trying to respond to forced displacement face considerable constraints caused by lack of resources, restrictions in access, the magnitude of displacement and the reluctance of international community to address central issues.

International NGOs and experts have reported that the persistent failure of the international community to address the underlying sources of forced displacement render any prospect of a viable two-state solution more remote by the day⁽²⁰⁾. The international community's continued lack of will to address the situation enables continuing violations of law, including arbitrary displacement, to be perpetrated with impunity. In the OPT, durable solutions for the vast majority of forcibly displaced Palestinians remains largely dependent on end to Israeli policies of occupation which have systematically been at the root of displacement under the complicity by default of the international community⁽²¹⁾.

Endnote:

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- 13- UN HRC, 15 September 2009.
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Palestinian Return Centre and CEPR Delegation to Lebanon 6th – 9th February 2011*

2011 has seen seismic changes taking place across the Middle East. The revolutionary upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia have inspired demands for freedom and democracy across the region. The ‘Palestine Papers’ released by al-Jazeera and the Guardian heightened the atmosphere further by revealing that the Palestinian Authority had offered to virtually give up the right of return of Palestinian refugees. It was an apt moment for the Palestinian Return Centre in partnership with the Council for European Palestinian Relations to take a delegation of seven parliamentarians to Lebanon to look at the dire conditions in the country’s refugee camps.

The delegation was led by former British government minister Sir Gerald Kaufman MP and included four members of the European and three members of the British Parliaments. During an intensive two days that included 18 meetings and visits to three refugee camps: Bourj al-Barajneh, Nahr el-Bared and Sabra / Shatila, delegates were able to identify common themes and recommendations for resolving the crisis.

Lebanon’s Official Position

All parties, from the Lebanese President to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to the refugees themselves were absolute in their commitment to the right of return. And all parties were able to identify Israel’s occupation and rejectionist policies as the most obvious obstacle to achieving justice. Despite the unanimity of rhetoric supporting the improving of Palestinian rights, the delegation also heard that for a combination of political and economic reasons, the Lebanese government, whoever it is led by, is unlikely to implement the radical changes necessary to transform the lives of the



Meeting with Lebanese President Michel Suleiman



Meeting with Prime Minister Saad Harii

* The full report is available at www.prc.org.uk.

refugees. A crippling budget deficit and a fear that improving Palestinian rights would lead to attack from political opponents leave very little hope for an imminent change in Lebanon's policies on refugees.

Europe's Role

Although more pressure could and should be applied to the Lebanese authorities, this political pressure and the finances that must accompany it have to come from the international community.

While little faith in the role of the United States was expressed, at meetings with President Suleiman, Deputy Speaker of the House Al Zain, Prime Minister Hariri and Prime Minister designate Mikati, the delegates heard real optimism that European states and the European Union could make a significant and tangible contribution to improving the refugees' standard of living.



Briefing at UNRWA's Lebanon headquarters with Director Salvatore Lombardo

UNRWA and the Camps

The delegation held numerous meetings with UNRWA officials to learn about the valuable and noble work undertaken by the agency in Lebanon. But, it was clear that without serious funding, the crisis in Lebanon's camps would deepen. This was most stark at the Nahr el-Bared camp, destroyed by the Lebanese army in 2007, where progress towards reconstruction is painfully slow.



Dangerous electrical wiring is everywhere in Bourj al-Barajneh

Visiting Bourj al-Barajneh, the delegation saw the appalling conditions in which Palestinians live every day. Open sewers, piles of rubble and electricity wiring that hangs in bunches through every alleyway and street (13 were killed as a direct result in 2010) led Sir Gerald Kaufman to inform the British Foreign Secretary William Hague that he had visited "hell on earth" on his return to the House of Commons.

At the Shatila camp the delegation had the honour of laying a wreath at the Sabra-Shatila massacre memorial, as well as to meet a survivor of the most notorious single episode in modern Middle East history.



Visiting Mohammed Omar Deeb, a survivor of the 1982 Sabra-Shatila massacre accompanied by Mohammed Khaled Khaled, UNRWA Chief Area Officer for Beirut and the Bekaa

The Right of Return

While in peace talks the right of return has been marginalised, in Lebanon it is at the centre of all discussions of Palestine, Israel and refugees. The delegation heard the same message all over Lebanon, from the palatial residence of the Prime Minister to the squalid Bourj al-Barajneh camp: the refugees will return. Aside from the issue of justice, the return of the refugees is a strategic imperative. As President Suleiman said "The truth is that we will not see peace in the Middle East without the implementation of the refugees' right of return".

“When I went to Gaza in 2010 I thought I had seen the worst that could be seen of the appalling predicament of Palestinians living in conditions which no human being should be expected to endure. But, what I saw in the camps in Lebanon is far worse and far more hopeless”

Sir Gerald Kaufman MP, Leader of the Delegation

Conclusions

Refugees are barely mentioned in peace talks, where they have been relegated to an issue to be decided at a later, unspecified date. But the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and in camps around the Middle East are the key to a lasting peace. Israel and the international community, if they value long-term stability in the region, need to shift their focus to delivering justice for the refugees. Failure to do so jeopardises the future viability of the state of Israel and more immediately prolongs the unacceptable agony that the Palestinian refugees live through every day.



Delegation meets with Lebanese Foreign Minister Ali Chami

Recommendations

The international community, including Israel, is responsible for guaranteeing the rights of Palestinian refugees and providing them with protection. While Lebanon and many members of the United Nations offer appropriate rhetoric, this must be matched with concrete steps to tangibly improve the lives of the refugees in Lebanon and put an end to the catastrophic conditions in which they live. An appropriate solution is needed that restores and protects the human rights of the refugees, including their right to return to their land.



Meeting with Palestinian political factions in Beirut

In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees have a status that falls far short of even second class citizenship. This should be corrected without debate or delay.

- All parties should respect and enforce United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 which calls for the return of the refugees.
- As Israel has shown no inclination to respect the rights of Palestinian refugees under international law, it is incumbent on the international community to enforce a resolution.



The destroyed Nahr el-Bared camp



Meeting refugees in Nahr el-Bared's temporary prefabricated accommodation

- The European Union and its member states, including the United Kingdom, should significantly increase their funding to UNRWA to allow the agency to fulfil its remit.
- Negotiators, politicians and activists should ensure that Palestinian refugees remain at the centre of all peace talks
- Lebanon's position on the refugees is wilfully inadequate. The 17th August 2010 law should be implemented immediately as a first step to normalising the lives of Palestinian refugees by improving human, civil and property rights and lifting restrictions on the professions available to Palestinians. The above should be part of a comprehensive solution that formally excludes the possibility of Tawtin.
- Housing – All restrictions that limit the right to adequate housing for Palestinians should be removed, including any legislation that discriminates against Palestinians who lack official citizenship of a recognised state. A degree of security of tenure should be guaranteed and any restrictions on the entry of building materials in to refugee camps should be removed, including any fines or penalties imposed on Palestinians for attempting to make their homes habitable.
- Environment – Minimum levels of sanitation and access to clean water for all Palestinian refugees should be ensured.
- Employment – Further to the 17th August law, restrictions on Palestinian access to all professions should be lifted along with an easing of the process whereby refugees can obtain work permits.
- Education – Lebanon should ensure that all children under its jurisdiction have access to education equal to that enjoyed by Lebanese nationals
- Nahr el-Bared – this camp should be rebuilt as a matter of priority and the Lebanese army removed.
- Non-ID refugees – The status of non-ID refugees in Lebanon should be regularised and refugees provided with identification documents



Karen Koning
AbuZayd*

UNRWA, Meeting Evolving Goals in the Face of Challenges

*“Persecution does not make the just man to suffer, Nor does oppression destroy him if he is on the right side of Truth. What truly hurts is our conscience that aches when we oppose it, And dies when we betray it.”
(Khalil Gibran)*

Introduction

In the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, which forced some 800,000 persons to flee their homes in mandate Palestine, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 on 8 December 1949 with a mandate ‘to carry out direct relief and work programmes for Palestine’.

The Agency has grown and adapted over the past 62 years, from an organisation that provided relief in the form of lifesaving shelter, food, water and sanitation assistance into a human development institution responsible for basic public services and human rights protection. Primary education and health care, social services, microfinance from the early 1990s and since 2006, infrastructure and camp development are formal UNRWA programmes. UNRWA has also been called upon repeatedly to undertake emergency activities (particularly food distribution and shelter rehabilitation) in times of crisis.

Today UNRWA serves over 4.7 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank and Gaza). It renders these basic emergency, development and human rights services with a staff complement of 30,000 refugees (teachers, doctors, nurses, sanitation workers, administrators) and 150 international staff funded through a regular budget of around \$550 million a year and an emergency budget of another \$500 million.

Achievements

UNRWA's success in contributing to a self-reliant refugee population is demonstrated by the facts that 2/3 of the refugees live outside camps and only 6 per cent are dependent on social services (other than those subject to occupation and blockades in Gaza and the West Bank, therefore receiving essential food distributions). UNRWA graduates, who have a reputation as well-trained, hardworking, dependable colleagues, are in demand all around the region as teachers, administrators and medical personnel.

Over the years, UNRWA has demonstrated its dynamism and flexibility, responding to new and changing needs, while maintaining true to its basic mandate of offering direct services and opportunities to refugees. Agency management has also adapted its focus as necessary to the circumstances in

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each of the host countries, while ensuring that a common thread of assistance, development and refugee rights are accorded appropriate attention in each location.

Change and Adaptation

A particular moment provoking new thinking and approaches occurred in 1967 with the occupation of Palestine, necessitating that UNRWA take on a more conscious 'protection' and rights-based approach. The impact of the occupation on the refugees and how UNRWA reacted is well documented in UNRWA's Annual Reports to the General Assembly, beginning in the years after 1967. Carrying out its basic public service tasks raised new challenges in the West Bank and Gaza, given that a new and not entirely cooperative interlocutor had entered the operating environment.

Two decades later, responding to the situation in Palestine during the first Intifada, which broke out in December 1987, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 681 (20/12/90), which requested, *inter alia*, "...the Secretary General to monitor and observe the situation regarding Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation, making new efforts in this regard on an urgent basis, . . . and to keep the Security Council regularly informed." A progress report was expected by March, 1991, and every four months thereafter. UNRWA was assigned this task, which led to a broader interpretation and implementation of its mandate, including the creation of a Refugee Affairs Officer (RAO) programme to offer protection to the refugees through a monitoring presence.

The second Intifada which erupted in September 2000 placed even heavier demands upon UNRWA, both in its having to continue and enhance its emergency and protection services in a war zone and, since 2006-7, to function in the context of a continuously deepening siege of Gaza. The RAO programme was revived and strengthened with a more active 'protection' regime staffed by Operation Support Officers. Through persistent, humanitarian-based negotiations, the Agency has ensured minimal life-preserving services for refugees in the occupied territory throughout these four fraught decades.

Host Country Challenges

Mention has been made of the varied environments of the host countries. A brief look at some of the internal issues follows.

Refugees in Lebanon have faced unique challenges, in the first instance arising from the particular demography of Lebanon and of the refugee population, and from the history of Palestinian activities in the country, both of which led to suspicious, if not outright hostile, relations with some local groups. In recent years, however, the government has been working to modify laws on refugee employment and property ownership, while cooperating with UNRWA and donors to improve living conditions in the refugee camps. Still, in 2007 when fundamentalist infiltrators into the Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon attacked the Lebanese army, the army's subsequent destruction of the camp left 30,000 previously fairly well-off refugees without homes and livelihoods. A major financial, logistic and political effort by all parties, Lebanese, refugees, the international community and UNRWA, is underway to completely rebuild the camp.

Another challenge from host authorities was the initial reaction to activities of the Infrastructure and Camp Development' programme. A concern of some in the host governments (particularly in Syria and Lebanon) and others in the refugee community itself was that UNRWA was working on behalf of those who want to 'settle' the refugees where they are, effectively depriving them of their right of return and compensation, as promised in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 11 December 1948. Many hours have been spent in discussions with hosts and refugees to promote the understanding that offering decent living conditions,

however temporary, is not tantamount to settlement, but a refugee right.

Finally, however, it is the refugees who live under occupation in West Bank and Gaza who endure the harshest conditions. The visible and positive (though somewhat superficial and narrowly enjoyed) economic and security developments in the West Bank, are dependent on a heavy input of external aid and resources, and do not bring much benefit to the refugees, especially those in camps, given the numerous checkpoints, house demolitions and evictions, along with relentless settlement expansion. The suffering of Gazans under siege has been thoroughly and repeatedly documented, evincing, inter alia, that 80 per cent of the population (refugees and non-refugees) is food insecure, 40 per cent unemployed and a private sector functioning at only 5 per cent of its pre-2006 capacity.

For all 4.7 million refugees the uncertainty about their political (and geographic) future and their 'invisibility' in the discussions about that future is the most unsettling and disturbing factor in their lives.

The Unpredictable Financing Factor

A refugee population that increases every year along with rising costs of providing services creates what amounts to a repetitive, structural problem for an agency that must raise voluntary funds for its budget on an annual basis.

The 1990s exaggerated these financial challenges. Following the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government, known as the Oslo Accords, donors began to focus their efforts on building the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, in preparation for the full functioning of a Palestinian state, which was expected to take over the UNRWA tasks. The long, drawn out 'peace process' and ever receding vision of a viable state of Palestine⁽⁷⁾ ensured that this particular downturn in funding was overcome, leaving re-occurrences to be more often related to the general economic downturn, competing humanitarian emergencies or questions about who are UNRWA's beneficiaries.

Current Preoccupations

Being a human development and humanitarian agency, UNRWA is not involved in 'political' activities, so has no direct role in discussions and negotiations around the peace process. However, the Agency endeavours to ensure that the political actors and parties to the negotiations are aware of 'facts on the ground,' including the views of refugees, who otherwise have little input. UNRWA firmly and repeatedly contends that the refugees have been largely absent from meaningful negotiations and that the refugee 'final status issue' is the one least seriously addressed at any of the 'peace' conferences, meetings or summits. Negotiators ignoring refugee preferences do so at peril of the sustainability of any agreement.

The Agency's relationship with Israel occupies a great deal of its time and energy, on a very basic level, simply to negotiate passage of people and goods in and out of Gaza and around the West Bank. Individual interlocutors maintain respectful contacts, ensuring a minimum flow of goods and a much less than minimally essential movement of people, particularly when it comes to Palestinian staff. UNRWA has relied at times on the support of Israeli government officials to defend its work in the occupied territory against unfair and inaccurate criticism from external parties, most often some in the United States Congress.

One of the less visible (or audible) challenges to UNRWA comes from some refugees, who echo other

critics who speak of UNRWA's perpetuation of the refugee 'problem.' It must be said that the refugees would still be refugees should UNRWA disappear. Furthermore, UNRWA's demise would be unlikely to be a deciding factor leading to refugee or Palestinian independence.

There are refugee groups, as well, who, while acknowledging the benefits of the services offered, raise the issues of dependency and the fact that the stabilising, palliative, pressure-relieving UNRWA services prevent a 'revolution' that might force a positive change in refugee circumstances. This charge is one often leveled at humanitarian agencies, and one which is difficult to deflect, containing at least partial truths. UN agencies contend that they do not have a 'withdrawal' option from their internationally-bestowed mandates, which prescribe life-saving assistance.

On the Bright Side

Having mentioned financial challenges and criticism that arises in some donor political circles, it is important to mention the very strong support that UNRWA enjoys from its major donors, foremost among them the United States and the European Union. The Population, Refugee and Migration Bureau of the U.S. State Department through its Refugee Coordinator in the field and her Washington colleagues perform a heroic task in defending UNRWA and securing its funding from Congress. Despite the literally constant attempts by some representatives and senators to decrease support, funding for UNRWA has increased over the years to meet new and growing needs, complementing the input from the second largest donor, the European Union, along with individual European countries that also figure among the top donors. From the Arab world, significant funding is offered for infrastructure and emergency projects, while inroads are being made to encourage support for basic services and administrative expenses, particularly for the large complement of Palestinian staff.

A Concluding Personal Appeal

I take the liberty of ending with a suggestion to those who are wary, skeptical or hostile and even to those who are sympathetic, supportive and friendly to consider adopting a clearer and more balanced view about both Palestine refugees, their capabilities, needs, rights and desires, and about UNRWA, its capabilities, needs, objectives and desires.

I ask readers to entertain a second thought about how the Palestine refugees would have fared--and would fare in the future--in the absence of UNRWA or that which would have to be invented to take its place.

*The issue of the moment is whether newly announced 'proximity (again?) talks' have any chance of reviving the peace process, at least in any way that might do justice to Palestinian rights or if, instead, the declaration of a state of Palestine will be accepted at the United Nations, moving the goal posts significantly and creating a new scenario for both Palestinians and Israelis to tackle.



Anicée Van Engeland*

International Refugees Law and the Palestinian Issues: A Double Standard Approach to Protection and Return?

The plight Palestinian refugees have endured since the Nakba does not seem to ease up, despite repetitive attempts to put the issue on the international agenda. Although the UN Security Council has passed resolutions and the international community has mobilised to protect these refugees with a special status, the situation remains dramatic decades later. The situation of Palestinian refugees remains extremely complex for political and legal reasons: the protection afforded is clearly incomplete; the right to return remains a debatable legal issue; and the right to reparation seems bound to remain a rhetorical question. These failures to comply with the spirit and the rules of international law do not mean that this branch of law does not address the issue. On the opposite, international law, in its doctrine but also in its case law is concerned with the well being of all refugees and offers a range of solutions to the oppressive situation in which Palestinian refugees are. This brief piece explains why and how international refugee law has failed to protect these people. It concludes by demonstrating how international law if approached in a less political fashion could grant a better protection to Palestinians.

Two institutions were created to protect and assist Palestinian refugees: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) which provides humanitarian assistance and the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) which has a mission of protection. Since the UNCCP has failed in its mission, most of the focus has been set on UNRWA. When the latter was established in 1949, two years before the Convention relating to the Status of Refugee, its mission was to bring humanitarian relief to a special category of refugees, Palestinians who had to flee when they lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. UNRWA defines a refugee as a person “whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.” The status of refugees was later extended to Palestinians who flee after 1948.

The specificity of the UNRWA refugee status is that it is granted to the initial refugees as well as their descendants: children and grand children of the first refugees are also considered as refugees. In that sense the curse continues through generations, without the international community or the States hosting these refugees living in UNRWA protected zones having to worry about their status of the refugees’ offspring. The heritage of the status of refugee is a unique in international law. Another specificity of the UNRWA definition is that the status of refugees is based on years of residency rather than nationality: this is because

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Palestinians fleeing are stateless and it was necessary to create a definition that is not based on the criteria of nationality.

UNRWA decides who is eligible to benefit from the assistance provided, which encompasses education, health care, social services and emergency aid. One of the criteria to become a UNRWA protected refugee is based on gender: Palestinian refugees males are the only ones eligible to register for UNRWA services. This gender-bias approach means that some women are not covered by UNRWA. Another issue deals with the definition of beneficiaries provided by UNRWA: its specificity excludes Palestinians who took refuge in countries other than Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza. This special treatment was supposed to be a tailored-made approach to the problem of Palestinian refugees, approach that differed from the 1951 Convention's approach. The outcome is that Palestinian refugees do not benefit from the same protection as other refugees do: they are under protected. This negative difference which was originally supposed to benefit Palestinian refugees was later reinforced by Article 1D of the 1951 Convention that states: "This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance." UNRWA being a UN agency, this means that those who do not qualify as refugee by the UNRWA definition might not be regarded as refugees by the UNHCR. An outcome of the creation of a special protection status coupled the exclusion of Article 1D has led to a "protection gap" as denounced by Susan Akram.

Yet, it is clear from the debates during the creation of UNRWA and the Travaux Préparatoires to the 1951 Convention that the intention was not to have a protection gap but to grant a special protection for people in an extraordinary situation. UN delegates never intended to have refugees falling short of protection: a clear indication of this is the end of the Article 1D which states "When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitively settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of this Convention." The verb "cease" should be interpreted in a broad meaning: it does not only mean that a protection could stop being afforded by UNRWA. It could also be understood as a situation when UNRWA protection is not enough and needs to be completed. The main issue is that the UNHCR, which is the institution monitoring the implementation of the 1951 Convention, has interpreted its mandate in a restrictive fashion: it does not consider UNRWA protected Palestinian refugees as falling under the scope of the 1951 Convention. It also does not afford protection to non UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees who flee UNRWA zones.

The UNRWA specificity coupled with this UNHCR approach has dire consequences. For instance, the broadest part of the special protection granted by UNRWA relates to humanitarian relief (food, clothing and shelter) and not to basic protection and basic human rights that the 1951 Convention covers. In that regard, Palestinian refugees are granted revocable privileges but no rights. As a result, they are less protected under international law than any of their counterparts in the world. This is why in UNRWA zones Palestinian refugees can be forced to live in camp, prohibited from working or cannot benefit from family reunification. This is occurring at times when the UNHCR seems to extend its mandate to internally displaced people and has widened its understanding of the concept of refugee. UNRWA was not created to bring a solution to the refugee problem but to provide assistance. Another institution was created, the

UNCCP which was set up to provide protection. It has been unable to achieve its goal, leaving Palestinian refugees without a durable protection. The failure of the UNCCP is another reason for the involvement of the UNHCR which could have stepped in to ensure some form of protection.

The current limited status and protection do not only affect UNRWA protected refugees: States that are not in UNRWA areas and that do host Palestinian refugees are often not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention. This means that some refugees fall through the loop. This explains why Palestinian refugees' basic rights are often violated. As for refugees in Western countries, the UNHCR standard to benefit from protection is the following: they have to demonstrate that they are fleeing their place of "last habitual residence due to a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of one or more of the five required grounds. However, they cannot claim the original persecution in Israel because they do not hold Israeli citizenship. Besides, most refugees actually come from UNRWA protected zones and it is sometimes extremely difficult to prove the persecution in those zones, especially when it is the result of non state actors groups. As for unregistered Palestinians fleeing UNRWA zones, they cannot benefit from the protection of the UNHCR. Eventually, rules tend to be restricted for refugees fleeing to the EU and who are already refugees registered elsewhere, may it be with UNRWA.

Although the UNHCR adopted in 2002 a revised set of guidelines to fill some of these gaps, it remains clear that Palestinian refugees throughout the world are under protected. This is the result of a legal exceptionalism coupled with the non application of UNHCR refugee guidelines. This raises questions as to the future of Palestinian refugees and that of UNRWA, a year after its 60th year of existence: is there the need for a more specific protection for Palestinian refugees? Should UNRWA assume its ever-evolving role by becoming a protection institution? It seems that the United Nations is taking that direction and UNRWA appears more and more as a protection institution. Another strategy would be to understand the mandate of UNRWA in light of UN Resolution 194 which encourages return.

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Ghada Karmi*

The Refugee Issue and the Peace Process

The Palestinian refugees are the world's longest standing refugee community. Their plight forms the basis of the Palestinian problem, and has fuelled the conflict with Israel for over 62 years. The Palestinian dispossession that ensued on Israel's establishment in 1948 has been addressed numerous times but never resolved. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in 1948, which called on Israel to repatriate the Palestinians displaced by its creation, has been regularly re-affirmed by the UN, without result. In 1948 the displaced Palestinians numbered about 750,000, but over the decades they have increased to several million (see below). They have never been repatriated or compensated for their losses.

To the contrary, Israel has used every tactic to fight against what became known as 'the Right of Return' of refugees. It produced a new version of history, tried to erase all evidence of the Palestinian pre-1948 presence by demolishing villages, changing place names, and concealing or destroying historical archives. This was essential for a new state striving to gain legitimacy for its presence in another people's land, to which the return of the refugees would have been a mortal threat, and not in itself surprising. Much more so has been the complicity of the international community in allowing Israel to block an internationally recognised right and in effect, to perpetuate the state of refugeehood for millions of people for decades.

Various Israeli-Arab peace proposals have paid lip service to the refugee issue, aware of its importance, but more in the sense that it could not be formally omitted than with any intention of resolving it. This is extraordinary, given the causes and evolution of the conflict. The return of the refugees is integral to the issue of dispossession, which, as has been said, is at the heart of the problem between Israel and the Palestinians. Any solution to the conflict which does not cater for this fact is unlikely to endure. The Palestinian refugees – those in the camps and the millions of others who were displaced but are not officially so designated – will not evaporate, and needs a solution in line with international law and justice. Yet, since 1967 a succession of peace proposals have tried to avoid solving the issue in these terms.

The Palestinian Refugees – facts and figures⁽¹⁾

The problem of refugees is a global one. Millions of people all over the world have been repeatedly displaced through wars, famines, threats to the environment and

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political instability. What makes the Palestinian case unique is the manner of its creation -- due to the establishment of a new state, Israel -- its longevity, and the fact that the UN assigned it a special agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East UNRWA, outside the framework of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Even the term, 'refugees', is not strictly applicable to Palestinians. A refugee according to the international definition is someone unable to return to the country of origin owing to a 'well-founded fear of persecution'. In the Palestinian case, it is Israel's refusal alone that prevents that return.

The figures for the Palestinian refugee population, based on registrations with UNRWA in 2008, show a total of 4,618,141⁽²⁾. The refugees are dispersed over the Occupied Territories, as well as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. 750,000 refugees live in the West Bank and the bulk of Gaza's population, just over 1 million, are refugees. Jordan hosts the largest refugee community outside Palestine's borders with close to 2 million; and Syria and Lebanon have about 450,000 refugees each. Smaller refugee communities exist in Egypt, and until recently, Iraq and Libya. The annual rate of increase of the refugee population for 2004-8 was between 2.3 and 2.8 per cent, swelling the numbers of those already crowding the camps. These statistics do not include the Palestinians displaced since 1948 not residing in camps or registered with UNRWA. BADIL estimates these to be 3 million people. Despite the tendency to associate the right of return with camp-dwelling refugees, it applies equally to these exiles.

Thanks to UNRWA, we have more information on the demography of the refugees registered with it than has been available for the exiled Palestinians. According to UNRWA statistics, the majority of refugees are children or young adults. In 2000, those below the age of 25 formed 56 per cent of the total, and 32 per cent were aged between 26 and 55⁽³⁾. They rely predominantly on UNRWA services in education, health and social welfare, which have maintained them up till now. But, what does not appear in the UN statistics is the immaterial aspect of refugee life: the desire to return to the homeland. This desire has survived since 1948, handed on from one generation of refugees to the next. On a visit to Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut in 1998, I recall how kindergarten children recited the names of 'their' places of origin in Palestine. A large map of pre-1948 Palestine hung on the classroom wall with pins denoting these places⁽⁴⁾.

Refugees and the peace process

The tenacity with which the displaced Palestinians have clung to the right of return is remarkable. It has added vehemence to the legal character of this right, which has become an indispensable feature of the peace process since 1967. However much Israel has sought to ignore or sideline it, it has proved impossible to exclude the refugee issue from peace negotiations. UN Security Council Resolution 242 in 1967 alluded to the refugees in an ambiguous clause that a 'just solution' must be found for the 'Arab refugees'. The resolution was never implemented and, in any event, its stipulation about the refugees was too vague to be useful. The 1991 Madrid peace conference set up a Multinational Working Group on refugees, in which Israel is said to have agreed to a return of 5000 per annum, although that was never confirmed. The Working Group talked fruitlessly for several years, but was superseded by the 1993 the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

Oslo stipulated that the refugee issue would form one of the so-called Final Status Issues, to be resolved at the end of the process. Gradually the idea developed that the right of return would only apply, if at all, to the putative Palestinian state. This became the accepted line, despite there being no such state as yet, and the fact that repatriation meant a return to the place of origin (i.e. what is Israel now) and not another area. The Palestinian Authority and the World Bank discussed the logistics of a refugee return to the future state. Plans for building new towns and employment generation schemes were drawn up, with a gradual entry of refugees to take up the facilities as they became available. The World Bank estimated that an annual cost of \$613 million would be required for repatriating just 500,000 refugees⁵.

By 1999 a raft of Western ideas for resolving the refugee problem in ways that excluded a return to Israel appeared. These included settlement in the host countries where the refugees currently lived, packages of compensation for them, emigration visas for Western countries, and, as pointed out above, a limited "return" to the Palestinian state. These plans do not bear close examination, since they assume a compliance on the part of refugees and host societies that does not currently exist. Even so, in the unlikely event of Jordan and Syria accepting the full integration of Palestinian refugees, Lebanon, where Palestinians are increasingly unwelcome, has made its opposition to any such move quite clear. The resettlement of refugees in third countries is likewise problematic. The numbers of emigration visas granted to refugees will be limited and make only a small dent in the overall refugee figures. As to compensation, no local or international fund has been established to date for this purpose. And most pertinently of all, these ideas take no account of international law or of the refugees' own wishes.

The refugee issue surfaced again in the Israeli-Palestinian Camp David talks of 2000. Here Israel's prime minister, Ehud Barak, was rumoured to have accepted a return to Israel 'on humanitarian grounds' of 100,000 refugees, again this was never officially confirmed. An improved offer was apparently made at the Taba talks in 2001 for a phased return of 125, 000 refugees to Israel to take place over fifteen years⁶. The talks came to nothing, and in the Geneva Accords of 2004, the solution to the refugee issue was mainly to be through re-settlement. The Arab peace plan of 2002 spoke of a just solution for the refugees in line with UN resolutions, but this has come to nothing since Israel never accepted the plan. No further developments on this front have appeared since, and the later Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, initiated in Washington in 2010, stalled soon after over the issue of continued settlement building by Israel

Future prospects

The rights and needs of the displaced Palestinians are at the core of any meaningful long term peace settlement. Yet current orthodoxy dictates that the two-state solution must be the preferred option. However, such a solution is increasingly difficult to imagine in the light of Israel's colonisation of the post-1967 territory supposed to form the Palestinian state. Currently, approximately 54 per cent of the West Bank is left to the Palestinians, in discontinuous segments, and without a connection to Gaza. Unless Israel withdraws its settlements totally, something no one believes will happen, this situation does not allow for the creation of a Palestinian state to satisfy even minimal Palestinian aspirations. Even then, such a solution could never have resolved the refugee problem, either logistically or legally.

The only arrangement which can solve the refugee problem definitively is for the Israeli state to become a homeland for both Palestinians and Israelis, the one-state solution. Under these conditions, Israel would no longer be a Jewish state, but a state of its citizens. The obstacles in the way of this happening are legion, and beyond the remit of this article. But it will be the only way to resolve the refugee issue and definitively end the conflict. Ignoring this reality will not serve the refugees, who have suffered enough, and it will postpone a solution indefinitely.

Endnote:

- 1- For a detailed analysis of the present Palestinian refugee situation, see Mick Dumper, 'Future prospects for the Palestinian refugees', *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, 2010, vol. 28, nos. 2 & 3, pp. 561-587.
- 2- Resource Centre for Palestinian and Residency Rights (BADIL), 15 March 2009.
- 3- www.un.org/unrwa. 2009.
- 4- This visit is described in my *In Search of Fatima* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 407-8.
- 5- Cited in Mick Dumper, *op.cit.* p.583.
- 6- Akiva Eldar, *Haaretz*, 14 February 2002.





Nora Barrows-Friedman*

Palestinian Refugees and the Mainstream Media

“Media is very important for Palestinians in order to reach the international public opinion and for us as people living in the refugee camps. [D]espite that we are in the center of the conflict, we are not in the centre of the news.”⁽¹⁾ - Ziad Abbas, co-founder of the Ibdaa Cultural Center, Dheisheh refugee camp, occupied West Bank

From the narrow alleyways of refugee camps, to the ghettos of urban cities, to the expanse of the Naqab desert, ongoing displacement and ethnic cleansing continues unabated perpetrated by the Israeli government against the Palestinian people. This decades-long story, though intractable to the current news agenda, remains omitted from the daily news cycle. Yet independent international reporters are working alongside Palestinian journalists to illuminate the ongoing struggle of the refugees, and countering the deep-rooted pro-Israel bias within the Western corporate media.

In March of 2010, I reported on the situation of Dhammash, a village sandwiched between Ramle and Lydd (Lod) just minutes from the Ben Gurion airport. I was told about the village by a Palestinian friend with Israeli citizenship who has lived his whole life in Lydd -- but whose grandparents were forced out of their seaside homes in Jaffa as Zionist militias swept through Palestine in 1948. “What’s happening in Dhammash is a continuation of the Nakba,” my friend remarked, obviously distressed about the crisis in the village. “And no one talks about it.”

Dhammash, home to more than 600 Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel, is made up of approximately 70 homes -- and the villagers are trying desperately to prevent Israel’s bulldozers from razing the area to the ground in order to build a condominium complex marketed towards European Jewish immigrants.

Like dozens of other Palestinian and Bedouin villages around the state in which more than 110,000 people live, Dhammash remains officially “unrecognised” -- a term which allows the Israeli government to continue to uproot and displace the indigenous communities at whim, while providing them scant social and infrastructure services.

Even though they are citizens -- these villagers pay taxes, speak Hebrew as well as Arabic, and vote -- the Israeli government does not allow their places of residence to be found on any official map, nor does it imprint the village names on their state-issued identification cards.

“According to them, we belong to nowhere,” Ismail Arafat, a Dhammash community leader told me. “In the eyes of the state, we don’t exist here.”

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The villagers of Dhammash have gone time and time again to the municipal court, and, for now, have won temporary stays of demolition -- but they're running out of time.

Meanwhile, villagers in other areas -- mainly, Bedouin communities in the Naqab desert region -- are facing frequent and violent demolitions of their entire villages; under the radar and without much mainstream media attention.

Palestinians are being made refugees every single day -- for some, multiple times over as the Israeli state continues its 63-year-old project of displacement, depopulation and ethnic cleansing. The refugees in the camps across the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, those in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, the hundreds of thousands of internally-displaced Palestinians within Israel's borders, and the seven million in the global diaspora remain the silenced majority in the eyes of the mainstream establishment media.

This entrenched policy of under-reporting or outright omitting the Palestinian refugee issue in the Western media is not just the result of editors suggesting that the stories of refugees are non-newsworthy; but it is because of the direct integration of a policy-based bias that favors the Israeli viewpoint, as it has for decades.

Writing in a 2007 article for the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights's Arabic-language publication, Haq al-Awda, UK-based Arab Media Watch chairman Sharif Hikmat Nashashibi commented,

"In the seven years that I have been monitoring British media coverage of Arab issues, I can confidently say that Palestinian refugees constitute the most maligned, misunderstood and under-reported aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is not only unfortunate but baffling, given its centrality to a just and lasting solution.

"The refugee issue is maligned because certain proprietors, editors and journalists embrace Israel's viewpoint; it is misunderstood because it is viciously targeted by a pro-Israel lobby that does not face a similarly strong pro-Palestinian, and particularly pro-refugee lobby (sadly, the two are not synonymous); and it is under-reported because, as a problem that will be 60 (yes, 60) years old next year, it has long ceased to be 'newsworthy'.

"This has resulted in outstanding ignorance about Palestinian refugees among the British public. For example, surveys undertaken a few years ago by Professor Greg Philo of the Glasgow University Media Group revealed that just 8 % of people knew that the refugees were displaced from their homes and land when Israel was established in 1948."

Contrasted with the reporting done by most Western corporate journalists and mainstream media outlets, Palestinian journalists have risked their lives to report under constant military siege and assault. Rami al-Meghari, a refugee living in the Meghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, regularly reports for the Electronic Intifada journalistic website, and was one of many voices documenting Israel's attacks on the Gaza strip in December 2008-January 2009 when US-made warplanes and helicopter gunships killed more than 1400 Palestinians in a three-week bombing campaign.

During the attacks, the Western media, naturally, failed to present the Palestinian "side" of the story, reporting heavily on Israel's official viewpoint as the Israeli government forbade international journalists from entering the Gaza strip -- a move that strategically worked to keep the reality of the suffering censored and buried. As an independent journalist, and as a Palestinian refugee, al-Meghari broke through the barrier of such censorship, writing to the outside world and communicating the daily horrors of these times in Gaza.



He wrote,

“As Israel's attacks continue I am reporting under enormous pressure, dealing with the prolonged power outages, lack of gasoline to run my car and my small power generator, and broken recording equipment. But with the help of my friend and colleague from Free Speech Radio News, reporter Ghassan Bannoura in the West Bank, I have been able to continue filing my reports.

“The most important thing that I need is to keep up, whatever pressure I am facing. I am a Palestinian in Gaza who lives the situation minute-by-minute. Israel has denied international reporters access into Gaza, so I need to do what I can to get information out.

“Many of my own relatives are among the thousands who have fled to schools, run by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, because of continuous Israeli shelling of populated neighborhoods.

“But as I write this script, reports say Israeli shells killed dozens of civilians who were taking shelter at just such school in Jabaliya refugee camp in the north of the Gaza Strip. There are few places, if any, where we can truly be safe.

“Today I can file, I can have my voice and the voices of others heard in the US. But who knows if these voices will still be heard tomorrow.”

Outside of Palestine, independent journalists documenting the unraveling humanitarian situation for Palestinians have to remain accountable towards those whose struggle we are documenting. Those of us who report “from the ground” in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza strip, or in areas where Palestinians are currently being made refugees in their own land, or from the widening Diaspora, have to assert a consciousness based on addressing the context from which the current conflict stems -- from the historic and ongoing Nakba.

Rami al-Meghari, under siege in Gaza, ended that report in January 2009 with an emotional and salient remark -- specific to the events he was documenting, and fearful of his safety and that of his family, but it continues to reverberate on a more emblematic level when discussing the state of Palestinian voices -- especially refugees' voices -- in the media.

Endnote:

- 1- Barrows-Friedman, Nora. “Broadcasting Freedom on Radio 194, Dheisheh Refugee Camp.” *Left Turn Magazine*, 1 August, 2005. <http://www.leftturn.org/?q=node/332>
- Barrows-Friedman, Nora. “In the eyes of the state, we don't exist here,” *Electronic Intifada*, 16 April 2010. <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11213.shtml>
- 3- Nashashibi, Sharif Hikmat. “An injustice to the injustice: Palestinian refugees & the media,” *Haq al-Awda, BA-DIL*, 21 May 2007. Translated from the original Arabic. <http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw/Articles/Analysis/tabid/75/newsid395/3894/An-injustice-to-the-injustice-Palestinian-refugees--the-media/Default.aspx>
- al-Meghari, Rami. “A dad, a refugee and a reporter in Gaza,” 7 January, 2009. <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10133.shtml>





Salman Abu Sitta*

The Right of Return Is Inevitable

In the Middle Ages, they burned books on science and astronomy. In the 19th century, colonial powers promoted the super-race theory. In 1948, the Zionist narrative of the destruction of Palestine and the building of Israel on its ruins was hailed as the fulfillment of Divine Will and a victory of civilization. In all these cases the truth was not allowed to emerge, with devastating results for humanity. Now with the age of the Internet, satellites and computers, there is no excuse for anyone to say: I did not know. We do not need an innocent boy to exclaim, "But the emperor has no clothes!"

The indisputable fact is that Palestine and Palestinians experienced the largest, longest planned and still continuous ethnic cleansing operation in modern history. With British collusion during the Mandate period, European Jews were allowed to immigrate to Palestine. Their number increased from 9 percent of the population to 30 percent when the British ended the Mandate on May 15, 1948. But their land holdings never exceeded 5 percent to 6 percent of the Palestine area.

Six weeks before the British departure, Zionists expelled half of the total Palestinian refugees and declared the state of Israel on 11 percent of Palestine on May 14, 1948. On that date, Arab regular forces came to defend the Palestinians, but they failed and the Zionists (now Israelis) conquered 78 percent of Palestine. They depopulated 675 towns, villages and hamlets by expulsion, massacres, harassment and fear (Map 1). Contrary to the case in all other war situations, the refugees were not allowed to return to their homes when hostilities ceased.

Today, two-thirds of the Palestinian people do not live in their homes. If we add those displaced in the 1967 Israel occupation of the West Bank, three-quarters of the Palestinians - the largest percentage of any people - are denied the basic human right to live in their homes. The number of refugees as of mid-2008 was 6,600,000. Of these only 4,618,000 were registered with UNRWA.

In spite of this calamity, 88 percent of Palestinians live in Palestine (under Israeli rule) and in exile in countries neighboring Palestine. (Map 2). Only 12 percent now reside in faraway Arab and foreign countries. The obvious conclusion is that Palestinians are here to stay.

The Israeli policy, from its date of establishment, has been to get rid of them. All the plans devised in the last 62 years by Israel and its supporters have been aimed at getting rid of Palestinians - by attacking and bombing their refugee camps (Jenin, Rafah, Sabra, Shatila and others) and by devising plans to relocate them as far as possible from Palestine.

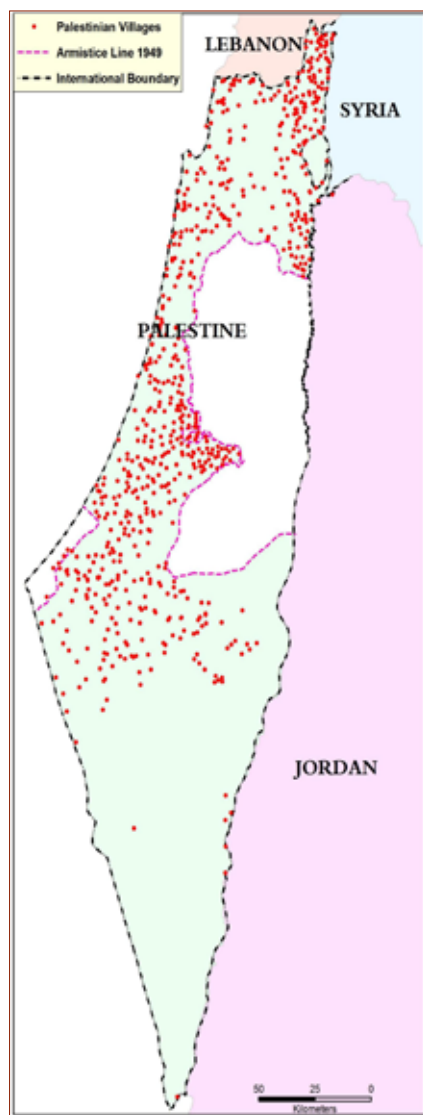
* Palestinian researcher and writes about Palestinian refugees and Palestinian right to return to Palestine. He is the author of countless books and papers most notably the Atlas of Palestine from 1917 to 1966. This is an immense book the culmination of many years of research based on Ottoman, British Mandate, and Israeli official documents.

United Nations Resolution 194, calling for the return of refugees, has been affirmed by the U.N. more than 110 times since its passage on Dec. 11, 1948. Neither it nor all the other international covenants of human rights have been implemented with regard to the Palestinians. On the other hand, none of the Israeli and Western plans to bring “peace” to the region comply with international law. Instead all aim to complete the unfinished ethnic cleansing (itself a war crime) by coercion, siege, starvation and financial promises and political pressure on Arab leaders.

Two weeks after the Declaration of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, Israel commissioned Dr. Joseph Schechtman, a Jewish expert in population movement and an associate of the extremist Vladimir Jabotinsky, to devise a plan for getting rid of the Palestinians. His plan essentially has served as the blueprint for Israeli policy since then. It was adopted by the Transfer Committee of 1948, repackaged by Gen. Shlomo Gazit of Israeli intelligence in 1994, and re-floated in President Bill Clinton’s 2002 plan, and all those in between.

In brief, Schechtman’s plan calls for:

- (1) the denial of refugees’ right to return (done);
- (2) destruction of their villages (done);
- (3) settlement of Jews in Palestinian villages (largely failed);
- (4) dividing Palestinian war spoils - land and property among Jews (done, but with no legal ownership deed);
- (5) extrication of Arab Jews to Israel (done);
- (6) launching of a propaganda campaign that it is “impossible” for the refugees to return (successful in the West); and
- (7) creating plans for the absorption of Palestinians in neighboring countries (relentlessly tried, but failed).



So here we have a stalemate: the Palestinian refugees are not allowed to return, but they do not give up and they will not disappear. The Israelis continue until today, quite openly, the ethnic cleansing in Galilee, Beer Sheba and the West Bank. Their new leaders, like the Russian Avigdor Lieberman, declare plans to oust the remainder of Palestinians, including Israeli citizens, from Palestine altogether. The Nakba is still going on.

Palestinians believe that the right of return is sacred, legal and—as I will show—feasible. It is sacred because no force or miracle will convince the Palestinians that the land they and their ancestors lived on for centuries is not theirs. The right to live in your home in freedom is the most fundamental right which cannot be bartered for anything. It is of a higher order than the sovereignty over a territory which creates a state.

It is legal because of the myriad of international resolutions and covenants which support the right of return. It is an “inalienable right” which cannot be bargained away by any leader. In fact, Israel’s admission to the U.N. was “conditional” upon its acceptance of Resolution 194.

Why must we prove it is feasible? If an armed robber attacks your house and throws out your family, why do you have to prove that the robber is not using all the house and there are two rooms in your house which you can use? The mentality in the West is such that it does not want to see “Jewish refugees” return to their homelands in Europe, but does not mind Palestinian refugees remaining in exile. On this immoral (and impractical) premise are Western plans based. Once again, however, facts do not validate this premise.

The first question to ask is: what did Israelis do with the Palestinian land, 93 percent of Israel’s area (20,500 sq. km.)? As Map 3 clearly shows, 63 percent of Israeli Jews live in 7 percent of Israel and 84 percent live in 17 percent of Israel. The 17 percent is even a bit generous: Israeli figures cite 12 percent. In fact, the urban area is only 2.5 percent of the area. Israeli Jews congregate in urban areas in and around the territory they acquired during the Mandate.

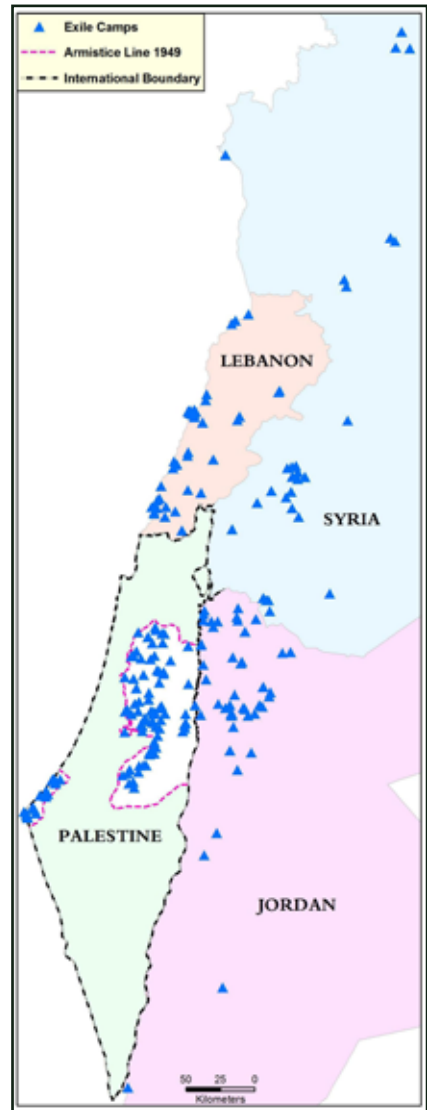
Who then uses the remainder—which is essentially the land of the expelled Palestinians? Israeli figures, as computed by 250 Israeli experts who prepared the plan for Israel in 2020, show that the remainder (88 percent) is used as follows:

27 percent for the military, 24 percent open space and 37 percent vacant. The latter includes the agricultural area (around 4000 sq. km.) cultivated by the kibbutzim. The kibbutz movement is dying ideologically and economically. Israeli Jews today are not much impressed by the old Zionist slogan, “The Jew returns to cultivating the land with a rifle slung over his shoulder.” Instead they reverted back to urban life and traditional occupations in trade and finance.

Not only is there little renewal of the kibbutz older generation, but its contribution to Israel’s GDP is a mere 1.5 percent. Thus the symbolic welfare of some 200,000 kibbutzniks is pitted against the lives and livelihood of 6.5 million Palestinian refugees yearning to return home.

The vast Israeli military structure - including 55 airports, 3 dozen depots of WMD, military fields and factories, which gobbles up one-quarter of the country and has the authority to expand over half of it - would not be needed if peace prevails. In fact, the removal of this time-bomb, which can and did ignite wars in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt, and could conceivably extend east to Iran and Pakistan and west to Austria and Germany, is a great gift to world peace.

Thus the return of the Palestinian refugees will not bring major displacement to Jews in Israel who wish to



live in harmony with their erstwhile hosts when they landed on Palestine shores from a smuggler's ship.

The return is easily manageable. We have a huge database and we know who the refugees are, by name, by family, by village of origin, what they own, the limit of their land and where they are exiled today, in which camp or country. Their return is much less awkward and expensive than bringing Jewish immigrants to Palestine. Many can walk to their homes, literally within sight. Most can take a one-or two-hour bus ride. They can rebuild their homes at the exact spot of their destroyed village. Ninety percent of the village sites are still vacant. There are enough Palestinian engineers and skilled workers to build the needed one million dwelling units.

Our studies have shown that the total return of refugees can be achieved in phases which would take at most 6 to 8 years to complete. An added advantage is that the cost of return is much cheaper than the compensation for stolen land and property, which could reach \$500 billion. It is definitely cheaper than the subsidy paid by the U.S. for Israel's economy and military which runs into \$110 billion and counting.

So what is the problem? Is it the Palestinian "demographic bomb"? How could any civilized person consider the natural growth of a people in their country a menace to be removed? Were this racist notion applied to other people it would rightly raise a hell of a protest and condemnation.

If this racist notion is applied to Palestinians, it means that Israel has the license to expel, destroy and annihilate Palestinians whenever it sees fit. Who will stand for this? Besides, this racist notion is bound to be futile, for the Palestinians will grow to about 60 million in 50 years, and no force on earth will eliminate them (alone).

The cure is not here. The permanent cure to the ills which inflicted this holy land, and which lasted for 100 years, is to remove all vestiges of racism, apartheid, occupation and oppression, just as the world community and international law constantly call for. Feeding the machine of destruction will turn it ultimately against the feeder. There is only one road to peace: The road of justice.

Notes:

Source: "Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966"

Source: "Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966"

Map 3: Density of Jewish Population.

Source: "Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966"



Dozens of top Israeli rabbis sign ruling to forbid rental of homes to Arabs⁽¹⁾

The religious ruling comes just months after a group of 18 prominent rabbis, including the chief rabbi of Safed, signed a call to that effect.

Dozens of Israel's municipal chief rabbis have signed on to a new religious ruling that would forbid the rental of homes to gentiles in a move particularly aimed against Arabs, Haaretz has learned.

The religious ruling comes just months after a group of 18 prominent rabbis, including the chief rabbi of Safed, signed a call urging Jews to refrain from renting or selling apartments to non-Jews.

Most of the signatories to the letter are from Safed, a city that has seen an increase in its Arab student population that is enrolled at the town's local college. Safed chief rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, who has been criticized in the past for incendiary remarks against Arabs, is the most prominent figure to sign the letter.

The group to sign on to the religious ruling includes the chief rabbis of Ramat Hasharon, Ashdod, Kiryat Gat, Rishon Letzion, Carmiel, Gadera, Afula, Nahariya, Herzliya, Nahariya and Pardes Hannah, among a number of other cities⁽²⁾.

Police destroy dozens of buildings in unrecognized Bedouin village in Negev⁽³⁾

Juma al-Turi and his family sat for hours yesterday looking with disbelief at the ruins of their unrecognized village of al-Arakib, north of Be'er Sheva. The houses, the storage building and the bird cage were all destroyed, and the olive trees uprooted.

The village was destroyed after government officials determined it was built illegally on state land. Israel Police forces destroyed about 35 buildings, said residents. Confrontations broke out between the police and residents, and in the end one woman was arrested and six people were detained. Over 1,500 police came to guard the demolition.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel said they were shocked by the demolition. "Destruction of the village was a brutal act by state authorities against its citizens and residents, which destabilizes the foundations of democracy and human rights," said Rawia Abu Rabia, a lawyer with ACRI.

The Higher Arab Monitoring Committee said yesterday it would rebuild the destroyed homes. In an emergency meeting held in al-Araqib, the committee also decided to establish a fund to help the families, as well as asking the UN and international human rights organizations to look into the matter⁽⁴⁾.

New Israeli military order could increase expulsions of West Bank Palestinians⁽⁵⁾

Amnesty International has said it is concerned that a new Israeli military order could facilitate the expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank.

Military Order No. 1650, which came into force in the West Bank on 13 April, broadens the definition of the term "infiltrator" to include anyone present in the West Bank without a permit issued by the Israeli authorities.

Those considered “infiltrators” can be deported to other states or forcibly transferred to the Gaza Strip, and face criminal charges.

In a letter to Israel’s Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Tuesday, Amnesty International said that it feared this broad definition could facilitate the expansion of the Israeli authorities’ current practice of expelling individuals from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip

“This new military order is scandalous in the light of the Israeli authorities’ long-standing practice of expelling individuals from the West Bank,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa programme.

“Since 2003 Israel has forcibly relocated Palestinians living in the West Bank to the Gaza Strip on the basis that their addresses were registered in Gaza.”⁽⁶⁾

Key statements made by the UN/EU/Arab League/Major Organisations

(March – Dec 2010)

In March, The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated the goal of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement - including a Palestinian state - within two years, with Jerusalem as the shared capital.⁽⁷⁾ Israel considers areas within the Jerusalem municipality as its territory and thus not subject to the restrictions announced in its 10-month suspension of new building back in 2009.⁽⁸⁾

At the UN annual summit held in September, the Arab League chief Amr Moussa warned that the direct peace talks with Palestinians will fail unless Israel extends a partial ban on settlement building in the West Bank, territory the Palestinians want for a future state.⁽⁹⁾

In December, Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh signalled a softening of Hama’s long-standing position of prohibiting the ceding of any part of the land of what was British-mandated Palestine until 1948. “We accept a Palestinian state on the borders of 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and the resolution of the issue of refugees,” Haniyeh said. He also stated that such a truce would entail “no recognition of Israel and no concessions over any part of the land of Palestine.”⁽¹⁰⁾

The EU was urged by ex-EU leaders in December to impose sanctions on Israel for its continued settlement building. Foreign ministers were urged to reiterate that they “will not recognise any changes to the June 1967 boundaries and clarify that a Palestinian state should be in sovereign control over territory equivalent to 100% of the territory occupied in 1967, including its capital in East Jerusalem”. It also asks ministers to set the Israeli government an ultimatum that, if it has not fallen into line by April 2011, the EU will seek an end to the US-brokered peace process in favour of a UN solution.⁽¹¹⁾

Meir Margolit, A member of the NGO the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, stated that settlement expansion accelerated after the election of president Barack Obama in the US due to fears amid settlers that he will push through a peace deal including final borders.⁽¹²⁾

Meanwhile Arab foreign ministers have rejected further Palestinian-Israeli peace talks without a “serious offer” from the US on ending the Middle East conflict. They announced their decision following a briefing from Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting in Cairo.⁽¹³⁾

Statements on Refugee in Host nations (May – Dec 2010)

The Israelis have long called for the refugees to be absorbed into their Arab host countries. But most Arab nations have refused, wishing neither to capitulate to Israeli demands nor to upset the demographic balances of their own populations. Jordan has granted temporary national passports to Palestinians, whilst they are subject to strict political control in Syria.⁽¹⁴⁾

In Lebanon they are denied access to education and health services, they are also barred from working in dozens of professions and are generally paid lower wages than their Lebanese counterparts when they do find jobs.

Several thousand Palestinians and Lebanese civil activists converged on central Beirut in late June, demanding more rights for Palestinians, many of whom live in squalid and over-crowded refugee camps. Proposals for a draft law due to be debated in parliament in the very near future would give Palestinians the right to own a residential apartment and would legalise work rights. The issue of granting Palestinians more rights has raised worries it would promote ‘naturalisation’, which some politicians fear will upset Lebanon’s delicate sectarian and demographic balance.⁽¹⁵⁾

In December, The Jordanian government refused to receive any Palestinians deported by Israel from the Occupied Territories under the pretext that they do not have legal residence permits. The source reiterated the government’s stance in rejecting resolution number 1950 issued by the Israeli occupation forces in 2009 and whose implementation started on April 13, 2010. The resolution stipulates the deportation of thousands of Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Occupied Jerusalem and do not carry legal residence permits issued by the Israeli government.

In the long run, the official explained, these policies will trigger a drastic drop in the number of Palestinians in the occupied territories and will, in turn, reinforce the Israeli presence.⁽¹⁶⁾

Peace Talks (March – Dec 2010)

The Palestinians pulled out of talks in March 2010 after an announcement that Israel had approved plans for new homes in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo during a visit to Israel by US Vice-President Joe Biden. The Palestinian Authority’s formal position is that it will not enter direct talks unless Israel completely halts building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinians broke off direct peace talks after Israel launched a military offensive on Gaza in late 2008.⁽¹⁷⁾

Joe Biden, the US vice-president, condemned a plan by Israel to build 1,600 homes on occupied Palestinian land in an East Jerusalem settlement. Palestinian officials refused to hold direct talks unless Israel halted all settlement construction, in line with the demands of the US administration and of the US road map. But Netanyahu, agreed only to a temporary, partial curb to settlement building. It did not include East Jerusalem, or public buildings, or homes where construction had already started.⁽¹⁸⁾

A possibility recently surfaced that US is considering abstaining from a possible UN Security Council resolution against Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. The US usually blocks Security Council resolutions criticizing Israel and is one of five permanent members of Security Council with veto power⁽¹⁹⁾ [23] Mahmoud Abbas indicated in September that an end to a settlement freeze wouldn’t necessarily scuttle his participation in talks. Netanyahu ruled out extending the freeze, which expired in September 26th 2010.

Mahmoud Abbas was quoted as saying in September that “we accept the state of a demilitarised Palestine.” Demilitarisation has been an essential issue along with the “right of return” of Palestinian refugees, a matter that would have to be “discussed”, according to Abbas. Meanwhile, Netanyahu has maintained that Israel wants the Palestinians to recognise Israel as a Jewish state.⁽²⁰⁾

The Israeli PM was urged in November by his predecessor to agree a further halt to Jewish settlement building. Mr Olmert, made a thinly veiled criticism of Mr Netanyahu for not having yet agreed to the US request to restore the moratorium in order to restart direct peace talks with Abbas.

Mr Olmert claimed that the Palestinians led by Mr Abbas had made a “historic mistake” by not accepting his offer in late 2008. It centred on a territorial deal based on 1967 borders with Israel withdrawing from around 94% of the West Bank. It would have designated Arab districts of Jerusalem as Palestinian, and made a token and limited admission of the descendants of refugees from the 1948 war to Israel, with compensation for other refugees.⁽²¹⁾

According to a telegram published in December by Wikileaks, two weeks before Israel’s inner cabinet decided on a settlement construction freeze in Nov. 2009, a senior German government official urged the U.S to threaten Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that if he did not agree to a moratorium, Washington would withdraw its support for blocking a vote on the Goldstone Report at the UN Security council.⁽²²⁾ [26] The US recently declared that it is now abandoning efforts to persuade Israel to renew a freeze on settlement building as part of efforts to revive ME peace talks.⁽²³⁾

Recent Statements by UNRWA

In late October 2010, UNRWA official Andrew Whitley called on Palestinians to prepare refugees for near certainty that they will never return to Israel. The director, who is soon due to leave his New York office post of the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency told the National Council for US-Arab Relations’ annual conference that contacts with Hamas were commonplace.

“I think it’s fair to say that all governments, whether they admit or not, have had discrete contact with Hamas,” Whitley said.

The EU, along with other members of the Middle East Quartet – The US, Russia and the UN – adopted a policy shortly after Hamas victory in the PA elections in 2006 mandating that it would not deal with Hamas until it committed itself to nonviolence, recognized Israel, and accepted previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. While Russia does hold contacts with Hamas, the EU’s policy – along with that of the US – is that it will do so unless the organisation fulfils those three conditions.

Whitley was quoted as saying that “Palestinians must start acknowledging that the refugees will almost certainly not be returning to Israel, so that they can improve their situation”.

Palestinians have long maintained a “right of return” to Israel and the homes they – or their ancestors - fled during Israel’s 1948/49 War of Independence. The issue has been one of the most difficult to resolve in peace negotiations.⁽²⁴⁾

However amid the criticism sparked by his remarks, he quickly withdrew them and publicly apologised. Calling his statement “inappropriate and wrong. Those remarks did not represent UNRWA’s views”.⁽²⁵⁾

Statements by the United States of America (September 2010 – Present)

In late September 2010, US President Barack Obama requested that Israel extend the West Bank settlement construction moratorium by two months. In return the US “will not ask for a moratorium extension beyond sixty days,” according to David Makovsky from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. A string of assurances were given to Israel in return for a two month moratorium extension, among them the guarantee that the US would be “committed to veto any UN Security Council proposal regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict in the coming year. In addition, Washington would not object to the request of leaving Israeli forces in the Jordan Valley for a prolonged duration”.⁽²⁶⁾

Officials said Obama has offered much greater military aid should the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agree to a Palestinian state in the entire West Bank and part of Jerusalem by 2012. In a Nov. 15th interview on Army Radio, Defence Minister Ehud Barak relayed the first high-level confirmation of Israeli media reports of Obama’s defense package, Middle East Newline reported. Barak said, “The Americans are now offering to complete the deal in return for a 90 day freeze. Furthermore, if we reach an agreement they are offering us a deal six or seven times larger.” The USA has pledged to begin JSF delivery to Israel in 2015.⁽²⁷⁾

On 16th December, The United States House of Representatives unanimously approved a resolution opposing unilateral declaration of Palestinian state. The resolution introduced by Rep. Howard Berman, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, slams Palestinian efforts to push the international community to recognize a state in such a manner as “true and lasting peace between Israel and Palestinians can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties.”

The resolution calls on the U.S administration to “deny recognition to any unilaterally declared Palestinian state and veto any resolution by the UN Security Council to establish or recognize a Palestinian state outside of an agreement negotiated by the two parties.”

It also urges Palestinians leaders to “cease all efforts at circumventing the negotiation process, including efforts to gain recognition of a Palestinian state from other nations, within the UN, and in other international forums prior to achievement of a final agreement between Israel and the Palestinians...and calls upon foreign governments not to extend such recognition.”⁽²⁸⁾

Researched and reviewed by: Luay Majed Zayed

On behalf of: Palestinian Return Centre

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Ian Black*

Memories and maps keep alive Palestinian hopes of return

Memories and maps feature prominently in the experience of Palestinians – a people scarred by dispossession, dispersion, occupation and profound uncertainty about their future. So amid the latest wrangling over the stalled peace talks with Israel come two sharp reminders of the depth of the conflict and how difficult it will be to resolve.

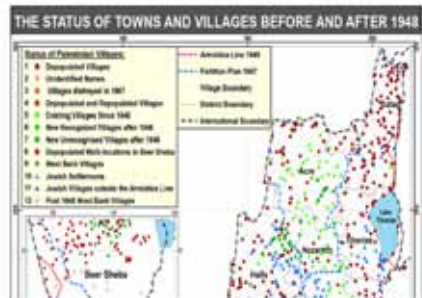
Salman Abu Sitta, a refugee from 1948, has spent years cataloguing the course and consequences of the nakbah (disaster) that Israel's "war of independence" represented for his people. Now he has published an updated version of his massive Atlas of Palestine, stuffed with tables, graphs and nearly 500 pages of maps that trace the transformation of the country starting with its conquest by the British in 1917 and the Balfour declaration's promise to create a "national home" for the Jews.

Memories and maps keep alive Palestinian hopes of return. Refugees remain the most intractable issue of the Middle East conflict.

Aerial photographs taken by first world war German pilots are combined with mandate-era and Israeli maps supplemented by digitally enhanced satellite images that record old tribal boundaries, neighbourhoods and even individual buildings. Most striking are the hundreds of Arab villages that were destroyed or ploughed under fields, as well as postwar Jewish settlements and suburbs. The Abu Sitta family lands, for example, are now owned by Kibbutz Nirim, near the border with Gaza.

Abu Sitta is a leading expert on the nakbah and what is nowadays widely described as the "ethnic cleansing" it involved. There can be no mistaking where his sympathies lie and where he stands in the febrile debate about Zionist intentions. Still, large parts of his account draw on the history of the 1948 war as rewritten by revisionist Israeli scholars in recent years as archives have opened up and old myths been demolished.

He is also a passionate advocate of the "right of return", under which Palestinian refugees must be allowed to go back to their lost lands and property. Refugees are the single toughest issue of the Middle East conflict: the Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO implied that

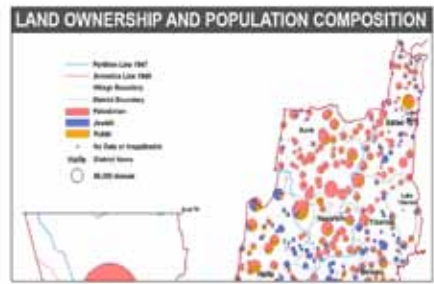


* Middle East editor guardian.co.uk, Friday 26 November 2010



the right would not be exercised inside pre-1967 Israel, but only in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and so, apart from a symbolic number of family reunifications, there would be no mass "return" to west Jerusalem, Haifa, Lydda or hundreds of now nonexistent villages.

The notion was that such an arrangement would be part of a pragmatic final peace settlement that drew a line under a painful past. Abu Sitta, like many Palestinians, fiercely opposed Oslo, and his views have not wavered. What has changed is the sense that as prospects for that elusive two-state solution fade, the only alternatives are either the status quo of Israeli occupation, cementing what some call de facto apartheid, or one single democratic state in which Israelis and Palestinians live peacefully together – and to which the refugees could finally return.



It is hard to imagine how Israel would ever voluntarily agree to surrender the Jewish majority it has within the 1967 borders – the *raison d'être* of the Zionist movement. Yet it remains taboo even to question whether that right is ever likely to be exercised. Andrew Whitley, a senior official of Unwra, the UN agency that looks after Palestinian refugees, was forced to apologise recently when he called it a "cruel illusion" to suggest that the 1948 refugees would ever be able to go home .

Abu Sitta leafs through his atlas, which includes detailed plans for refugee repatriation, and insists otherwise. "In the age of advanced technology it is quite feasible to compare the rich and meticulously recorded history of Palestine with the existing electronic Israeli record of every Palestinian house and acre of land, who owned it and to which Jewish body it is leased," he writes. "From this, both cultural and physical restoration of Palestine could take place. What remains is the wisdom, enforced by political will, to implement it."

Social scientist Dina Matar also follows "the trajectory of a continuing *nakbah*," in her fine book about "what it means to be a Palestinian in the 21st century" , but her mission is to record voices that are normally heard only in fragments and at times of crisis. This "composite biography" includes personal stories and "reconstructed experiences" from the 1936 rebellion against the British through to Oslo in 1993, and unifies the disparate worlds of Palestinians living in Israel, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria. Individual narratives of suffering, defiance and despair are linked by chapters of factual historical background, and tell of life in refugee camps, the experience of the Jordanian civil war or the first *intifada*, when the "children of the stones" took on the Israeli military but won only the brief attention of an indifferent world.

Matar, not surprisingly, identifies 1948 as the key date in Palestinian collective memory and notes "the persistent theme that the Palestinian sense of displacement was not the result of one specific event, but an ongoing process, continuing into the present."

Her telling subtitle – "stories of Palestinian peoplehood" – suggests that she too believes that the old aspiration of "statehood" is not likely to be realised any time soon.

New Publication

The Atlas of Palestine 1917-1966 (2010 Edition)

A most comprehensive record of Palestine 1917 - 1966: The British Mandate, Al-Nakba and the aftermath. This is an enlarged, extended and edited edition of the «Atlas of Palestine 1948», published in 2004.

containing information on :

1,600 towns and villages

16,000 land marks

30,000 place names

65 tables

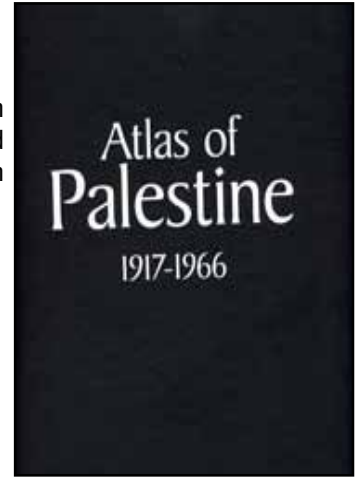
125 illustrative maps, diagrams and photos Including

150 Pages of analysis of the Mandate, Partition Plan, Palestine borders, land ownership, population composition, the 1948 war, al Nakba, Armistice Lines, war crimes, destruction of landscape, disposition and confiscation of Palestinian property, water and agriculture and retransformation of Palestine landscape.

AND 500 Atlas pages covering all Palestine.

“Just touching it makes me feel like we are that much closer to returning Palestine. The Atlas provides so many additional opportunities for more work and advocacy.”

Terry Rempel, Senior Researcher for Badil, Bethlehem

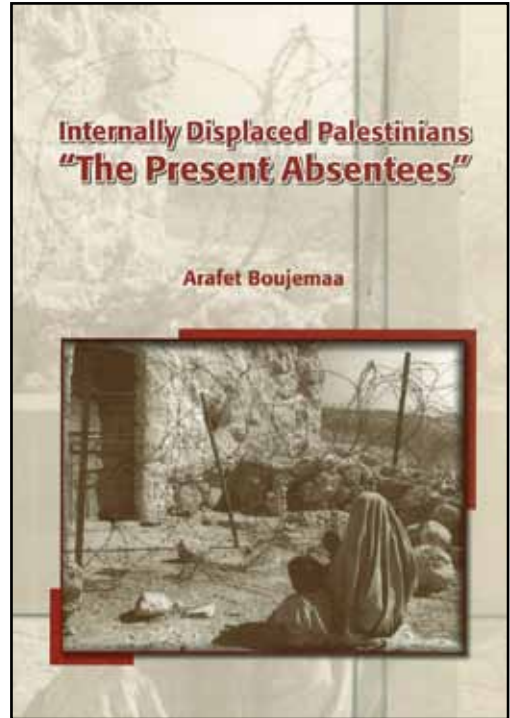


- **Title:** The Atlas of Palestine 1917-1966 (2010 Edition)
- **Author:** Salman Abu Sitta
- **Hardback:** colour pages (24 x 34 cm)
- **ISBN:** 9780954903428
- **Publisher:** Palestine Land Society 2010
- **Language:** English
- **Price:** £ 120.00 + p&p
- **Delivery Time:** Dispatch In 24 Hours



Internally Displaced Palestinian “The Present Absentees”

One of PRC's newest publication is Internally Displaced Palestinians, The Present Absentees, where Arafet Boujemaa observes, the fate of the Palestinian refugees, both those who live beyond the borders of mandate Palestine and those who have been internally displaced, lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, without a satisfactory resolution to this tragic situation, it is impossible to envisage a genuine or sustainable peace. Since 1948, Israel has consistently refused their 'right of return' and unfortunately, as so often happens where the state of Israel is concerned, the international community has adopted an ambivalent position; unlike the situation of internally displaced persons elsewhere, the displaced Palestinian community in Israel has been more or less ignored. Thus, they suffer a double injustice: deprived of their land and rights, they have also been seen their national claims delegitimized by Israel's control of the 'narrative of 1948'.



- **Title:** Internally Displaced Palestinian “The Present Absentees”
- **Author:** Arafet Boujemaa
- **Paperback:** 109 Pages
- **ISBN:** 978-1-901924-75-6
- **Publisher:** Palestinian Return Centre 2010
- **Language:** English
- **Price:** £ 5.00 + p&p

The book available at PRC

PRC prepared a set of very useful materials on the Palestinian cause. Leaflets were prepared to cover the issue of Separation Wall, Right of Return, Palestinian Refugees and Israeli "Settlements".



Free copies are available at the centre. To order hard or soft copies visit our website: www.prc.org.uk

THE PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE KEEPING THE ISSUE ALIVE



PRC was established in 1996, following the Oslo negotiations, which failed to address the plight of Palestinian refugees. Since its founding it has strived to defend the rights of Palestinian refugees, raise awareness of their plight and bring the issue of refugees back into the political agenda. It has also strived to preserve Palestinian identity and culture, especially across Europe. The work of PRC covers many arenas including academia, media and communications, consultancy, advocacy, lobbying and many more.

OUR GOALS

- 1 - Defend and Promote the Right of Return
- 2 - Raising Awareness
- 3 - Preserve Palestinian Identity
- 4 - Support Palestinian Refugees

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

UN Accredited NGO

PRC has been granted the status of an accredited NGO by the United Nations. This entitles PRC to participate in any process or events at the UN in contributing to outcomes.

supporting Palestinian refugees

The Palestinian refugees are diverse they face many different challenges. More recently 35,000 Palestinian refugees fled violence and persecution in Iraq. Many of them took refuge in camps on the borders between Syria and Iraq. PRC coordinated a cross party delegation from the UK and coordinated with UNRWA, UNHCR and Syrian government for temporary resettlement.

Putting Palestinian Refugees in the Political Agenda

PRC ensures that all relevant institutions are made aware of the plight of refugees. In addition to its accredited role in the UN, PRC guarantees that its message is delivered to the EU and other national parliaments.

PRC has sponsored seminars in the EU, lobbied MEPs in Brussels including former and current EU presidents. PRC lead a very high profile delegation to the European Parliament to meet the president at the time Javier Solano and the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan.

Nationally PRC holds public meetings in Westminster in partnership with mainstream political parties.



SERVING PALESTINIAN REFUGEES



RAISING AWARENESS

There are many misinformed about Palestinian refugees, from the birth of their plight in 1948, their status under international law, their current composition and their position within international law and the political process. PRC seeks to rectify this and address the refugee issue in its proper historical context.

Conferences

PRC organises conferences every year to highlight different aspects of the refugee issue. Our conferences draw a wide range of people including academics, politicians, ministers, human rights organisations and activists.

Publications:

The centre has conducted and sponsored a wide range of studies. Our publications include, books, documentary films, exhibitions, research papers, educational CDs, in both English and Arabic.

PRC Online

PRC's online work has grown over the years and now includes, a website, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. PRC website contains up to date news, information and studies about refugees.

Conference of Palestinians in Europe

PRC founded the European Conference which is now in its Eighth Year. This conference held in major cities in Europe, brings together up to 10 Thousand People in order to preserve Palestinian identity and to show solidarity with the people in Palestine.

Advocacy and Public Relations

The centre has developed strong relationships with MP's in UK and in Europe. We regularly hold public seminars in the Houses of Parliament select committee rooms and the European Parliament. Our strong relationship has encouraged PRC to embark many joint initiatives with British and European MPs

Exhibitions:

We have a number of exhibitions, including, Gaza, prisoners, apartheid and the Nakba. Our exhibitions are held at universities, conferences, PRC events and also offered to other organizations.

Delegations

PRC successfully coordinated a number of delegations from Europe and the UK to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Its most high profile delegation was in 2009 when over 50 European parliamentarians visited Gaza.



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