

**An Unsustainable Water Occupation  
and the Sustainable Development  
Goals: A Failing Match**

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**Discrepancies in Applying UN  
Sustainable Development Goal 16 in  
the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

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**The Loss of Education: Palestinian  
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1 and 8**

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(SDGs) and the Palestinian People:  
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**PRC's Policy Brief: Israel's Policies  
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Research Dept. at PRC

**Discriminatory Access to Water in the  
Occupied Palestinian Territories**

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# Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies

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Majed Al Zeer

## From the Director

I'm honored to introduce this edition of the Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies (JPRS). The Journal is a key part of our work and is instrumental in providing detailed analysis of the various challenges faced by Palestinians around the world.

This 2016 Spring issue will look through the lenses of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to evaluate numerous urgent challenges Palestinian refugees face. This new global developmental agenda set out by the United Nations and signed by its member states is an attempt to guide the world to solve its most pressing challenges.

The relationship between the United Nations and the Palestinian people is a significant one. The UN has given legitimacy to the creation of a settler colonial nation-state in Palestine. On 29 November 1947, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Partition Plan as Resolution 181(II), assigning almost 80 percent of Palestine to a foreign entity. This sparked the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in Zionist militias ethnically cleansing 750'000 Palestinians from their homeland. This is what Palestinians call the Nakba (catastrophe).

The UN General assembly has also recommended resolution 194, which grants Palestinian refugees, and their descendants, the right to return to the land from which they were dispossessed. The immediate denial of the right of return of Palestinian refugees prompted the United Nations to find a temporary solution. Hence the creation of the United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was tasked to provide momentary support to refugees in exile, since they lacked the protection of a state. Unfortunately, UNRWA has become a permanent institution providing for over 5 millions Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA is tasked with the protection and promotion of all the needs and rights of Palestinians apart from the most important: their political rights.

Nonetheless, UNRWA still plays a key role in the lives of Palestinian refugees by providing them with education, shelter, health care and protection. Though, its mandate which covers only 5 geographic areas, mentioned above, is creating further difficulties for Palestinian refugees to access aid outside of these areas. For instance, Palestinian refugees from Syria which due to the ongoing conflict have fled to Turkey or Egypt, countries where UNRWA does not operate, are not being allowed access to aid and protection from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It is true that the mandate of UNHCR stipulates through article 1D that it's



responsible to protect all refugees apart from Palestinians but the article also affirms that when Palestinian do end up in areas outside of UNRWA's mandate UNCHR should incorporate them. This unfortunately has not been happening and is become known as the 'protection gap'.

Adding to the challenges that UNRWA already faces is its chronic funding crisis. In 2016 UNRWA is estimated to face a 100 million US\$ funding gap. The aid needed to support refugees suffering from the Syrian conflict as well as Israel's continual settler colonial violence in the Occupied Palestinian territories is proving too costly for UNRWA's capabilities. However, the real crisis is not an economic one but rather a political one. Israel domination and subjugation of Palestinians is costing them their most wanted aspiration: the right to self-determination in their homeland.

As I've described, the United Nations has been central to the question of Palestinian refugees from the early days. Therefore we welcome the UN SDGs, although at this stage they might be an unattainable dream for Palestinian refugees facing conflict, further displacement and discrimination in host countries. We would most welcome any mechanism supported by the United Nations that would help Palestinians obtain their rights enshrined in international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recently celebrated our achievement of obtaining the prestigious UN ECOSOC status as a sign that the international community has not forgotten about the rights of Palestinian refugees, especially their right of return. In fact, we have been providing our important contribution to the UN Human Rights Council as well as other UN mechanisms, and will continue to do so until a just solution is found.



## From the Editor



Sameh Habeeb

This edition of the Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies (JPRS) provides unique perspective on an essential matter that's related to the global development agenda set by the United Nations. After almost two decades, United Nations in 2015 changed the title of its development agenda from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs have 17 goals that if achieved, the development of humanity and vulnerability of people would be alleviated and in some places end.

By 2030 SDGs goals aim at ending poverty, hunger and achieve good health/wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water, decent economic growth, industry innovation, clean energy, reduced Inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production. It also aims at fighting climate change, sea life pollution in addition to protecting life and land. Most importantly, the SDGs undertake the responsibility of promoting peace, justice and strong institutions.

Whilst the SDGs are gradually achieved in many parts of the world; they seem to be absent practicality in the occupied Palestinian territories and the host countries of many millions of Palestinian refugees. This edition of JPRS provides an insight on some of the SDGs and the potential of their application on the Palestinian people worldwide.

First part of the JPRS exhibits analytical articles of the SDGs and their application on the Palestinian context.

An article by Camilla Corradin explains the failure of Oslo peace process in securing clear and sufficient water supplies for the Palestinian people in occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. The writer argues that Israeli occupation is the actual obstacle to achieving universal access to safe drinkable water. She also notes that Palestinian Authority must exert more efforts to improve the management of localities.

Writer Ramona Wadi, discusses the discrepancies in applying UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which is "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions". Wadi notes that the UN has failed over the years to implement this goal where peace seems to be far from achievable in the region. She also suggests that the UN has failed in protecting the Palestinian people at the time of conflicts and the Israeli attacks. She also highlights that the UN failed in promoting the real independent political development within the PA institutions.

UN SDG (4), education has been discussed through this edition by writer and researcher Anne Irfan who wrote under the title, "The Loss of Education: Palestinian Refugees from Syria & UN SDG 4". Her article focused on the



education of Palestinian refugees in Syria and how it was affected by the 2011 war in the country which resulted in more than 100,000 of the 560,000 Palestinians registered in Syria have fled the country in addition to the internal displacement of tens of thousands. She concludes that, 'inclusive and quality education for all', is little more than a dream for Syria's Palestinian population.

Diana Marie Naoum's article looks at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 8 in the context of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Still considered as foreigners under Lebanese law despite their longstanding presence, Palestinian refugees are denied fundamental civil rights. Up against discriminatory laws, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face one of the harshest socioeconomic conditions in the region. Until Palestinians are granted wider access to the labour market, and in turn are able to improve their standard of living, Diana concludes that the realisation of SDGs 1 and 8 and their targets will not be met in Lebanon.

Jonathan Fryer wrote in the JPRS discussing poverty and its implications on the lives of Palestinian refugees in OPT and the Diaspora. He concluded that "without a just settlement for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and recognition of the implications of the right of return for Palestinian refugees there is unlikely to be a significant improvement in their economic condition. Indeed, what has happened over the past three years suggests that things may even get worse."

The second part of the JPRS provides summaries of the most recent reports and studies issued by the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC).

The first article includes a brief of a comprehensive report by Yasmin Nour the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) discussing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their application on the Palestinian People in occupied Palestine and the Diaspora. Her analytical report concluded, "taking steps to immediately mitigate the hardship of the Palestinian population by ensuring UNRWA obtains stable funding; an immediate and permanent end to the blockade of Gaza; the right to return of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with UN resolution 194; and for the oPt to become a 'party' member of the UNFCCC."

The second article in this part is a brief summary of a report researched by Pietro Stefanini, he's the Researcher / Advocacy Coordinator at the PRC. His report focuses on Israel's policy of house demolition and its repercussions on the daily lives of Palestinians.

The Journal also includes a policy brief presented by the centre in Geneva as part of its work with UN Human Rights Council. The paper highlights on the situation in the Gaza Strip following the decade long Israeli siege and 2014 Israeli war.

The third part of JPRS provides key information and facts on the issue of water in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Israeli policy of seizing water resources in Gaza Strip and West Bank. Another factsheet provides information on the policy of ongoing internal displacement of Palestinians through practices of forcible evictions, house demolitions and land dispossession.

The fourth part presents a book review by Andy Simon on the most recent book by PRC "Britain's Legacy in Palestine". The book discusses in depth the historical and political background of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate.



# ARTICLES







Camilla Corradin\*

## An Unsustainable Water Occupation and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Failing Match

Over two decades since water-sharing arrangements between Palestinians and Israeli occupation government were negotiated as part of the Oslo II agreements of 1995, Palestinians' access and right to water have kept deteriorating. The imbalance of power in terms of control of the water resources started with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and is still in place. It keeps fostering the domination of Israel over Palestinians through the control of the most basic of needs—water. It is in this context asymmetric power over water in Palestine and more generally of occupation, that the Sustainable Development Goals were agreed upon by world leaders in 2015.

Among the 17 goals, one specifically tackles the need for universal access to safe drinking water by 2030. Already included in the previous Millennium Development Goals which expired in 2015, water and sanitation could not go missing among a set of integrated goals meant to develop and protect in the years to come humanity and the environment, both very much dependent on this primary resource.

All countries, including Palestine, will hold each other accountable for the realization of those goals and the development and implementation of programs meant to achieve them.

Yet how can it be expected that a country that is occupied and that does not have sovereignty over its natural resources, including water, can be fully responsible and held accountable for the realization of such an ambitious objective?

Water issues in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are largely different, yet both exemplify how - by controlling the land and natural resources of the occupied people - Israel has secured a virtually total sovereignty over Palestinians. They also bring evidence of the reasons why it is impossible that Palestine achieves this goal as long as it remains occupied.

### The West Bank: direct Israeli control over Palestinian water

Water resources which Palestinians should have access to in the West Bank are the Jordan River and the underground Mountain Aquifer. Both are trans-boundary thus shared with Israel. According to accepted principles of international law, they should be shared in an equitable and reasonable

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\* Camilla Corradin has been working on Human Rights and humanitarian policy and advocacy in Palestine for the past five years - most recently on Palestinians' right to water for a coalition of local and international NGOs working on this topic. She has a background in Middle Eastern studies, Human Rights and international humanitarian law, and several experiences in the Arab world.



manner, yet Palestinians are being denied their rightful share of this water as a result of a burdensome and discriminatory permit regime, and a distribution of resources which is unequal at its basis.

Historically, it is worth noting that Israel - as soon as it occupied the West Bank in 1967 - issued one of its first military orders to take control over all water resources in Palestinian territory, thus proving the importance it gave to this precious resource in a land which was partially deserts yet deemed to bloom. Until 1982, water was under full control of the Israeli military. Palestinians had to ask the army for permits to repair, maintain or develop water infrastructure - a very unique case of water management.

Decades later, while Palestinian authorities were created and are running thanks to the generous contributions of the international community to foster - or save - the two-state solution, Israel remains in effective control and Palestine has no sovereignty.

The Jordan River is off-limits to Palestinians and even if they could access it, little is left but a stream.<sup>1</sup> For decades, Israel has diverted for decades the Sea of Galilee water that would naturally flow into the river towards the Israeli national water carrier that runs through all the country, North to South. As a result, the river is now reduced to a stream of wastewater discharged by illegal Israeli settlements located along its bank.

Besides, Palestinians are anyway also prevented by Israel from physically accessing the river and using its water. The Jordan Valley is by 85% designated as Area C, under full Israeli control. Recently, plans to sustainably develop the Jordan River have been under consideration with the support of Jordan and Israel.<sup>2</sup> Palestinian authorities were asked to participate in the planning stages despite their actual impossibility of having any access to this water and the river. This has sparked sharp criticism by the Palestinian civil society, which believes this would represent yet another way for Israel to exert domination over Palestinian resources under the guise of imbalanced water cooperation.

As for the other water resource that Palestinians are entitled to according to international law, like the underground Mountain Aquifer in the West Bank, Article 40 of the 1995 Oslo II interim agreement came to reinforce an already existing Israeli hegemony.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, water shares were allocated in a discriminatory manner, as the weaker actor sitting at the table (Palestinians) was granted as little as 20 percent of the total share. On the other hand, as Professor Jan Selby describes it, Oslo II created a range of joint committees and structures which served the purpose of dressing up water domination as cooperation.<sup>4</sup> A Joint Water Committee (JWC) meant to approve all water projects in the West Bank was established. While both Israelis and Palestinians were sitting on the JWC, Israel had a de-facto veto power. As a result, while all Israeli settlement projects were approved but one, Palestinian projects acceptance rate was as low as 56 percent, with Israel conditioning the green light for Palestinian projects over Palestinian approval of projects for settlements. In 2010, given this clear imbalance of power and the condition of legitimizing the settlement enterprise by approving water and sanitation projects there, Palestinians decided to stop sitting in the committee, which is to date not meeting.

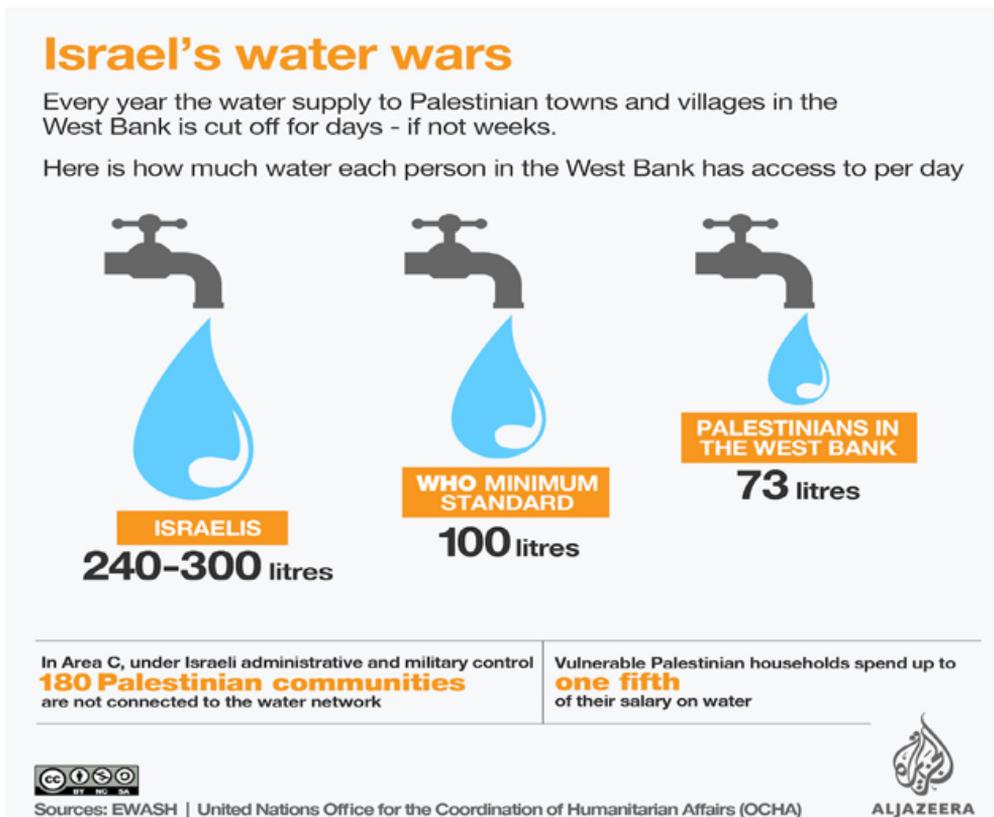
Besides the JWC permit for water structures, nowadays virtually impossible to obtain, Palestinians also need a further approval by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) for all structures in Area C - 62 percent of the West Bank. The approval rate for Palestinian buildings in Area C is notoriously low though: 98.5 percent of the Palestinian applications were rejected by the Israeli authorities in the past few years as reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.<sup>5</sup> Many are left with no choice but to build without a permit, which results in the constant threat of demolitions for cisterns, water networks, and wells.

Concretely, this double permit regime means that the infrastructure to abstract and distribute water cannot be adequately developed or maintained, and remains faulty. The amount of water abstracted from



the aquifer by Palestinians is therefore nowadays less than the already discriminatory amount that was allocated to them with Oslo II (13 percent of the total against 20), while the population has nearly doubled.

The impact of the Israeli policies and practices on people's access to water is catastrophic. In the West Bank, Palestinians have access to as little as 73 liters of water per day, while the minimum standard according to the World Health Organization amounts to 100.<sup>6</sup> Where it is impossible to develop the infrastructure because of the Israeli restrictions, people buy trucked water from private vendors for a cost as high as five to ten times more than network water. Some vulnerable communities in Area C spend one fifth of their income in water and in order to reduce costs, they minimize consumption and use as little as 20 liters of water per capita per day. Israelis do not suffer such water shortages. Their water consumption amounts to over 250 liters of water per day, and is even higher in settlements. Next to a deprived Bedouin community is often located a green agricultural settlement featuring a fresh swimming pool, as is the case in Al Hadidiya and Ro'i, in the Northern Jordan Valley.



Sources: Israel: Water as a tool to dominate Palestinians by Camilla Corradin <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/israel-water-tool-dominate-palestinians-160619062531348.html>

### The Gaza Strip: A policy of separation and denial of basic needs

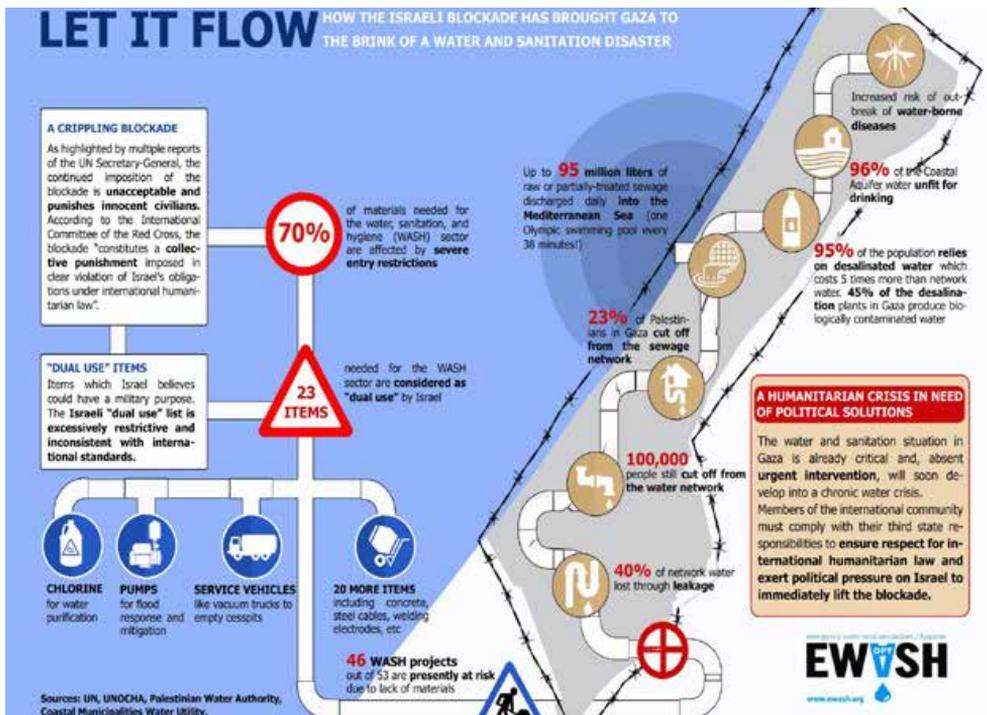
In the Gaza Strip, the situation is all of the more dramatic, mainly as a result of the Nakba (historically), and the blockade (more recently). Gaza - as a result of its separation from the rest of Palestine and its neighbors - relies on only one source of water, the Coastal Aquifer. Yet this aquifer is 96.4 percent unfit for human consumption.<sup>7</sup> In Gaza's case, the underground water is not under Israeli control, as Israel is the upstream riparian and is not affected by the amounts abstracted in Gaza - contrary to the Mountain aquifer, which is located under and recharged mainly in the West Bank.



The Nakba, as hydrologist Clemens Messerschmid explains, resulted in the expropriation of land and water wells from the Gaza district (whose surface was reduced), as well as the dramatic population increase resulting from the influx of Palestinian refugees from what was becoming Israel.<sup>8</sup> Given the impossibility to diversify the water wells within Gaza, the Coastal Aquifer has ever since been over abstracted. As the water table lowered, saline water infiltrated from the Eastern side of the aquifer and from the sea, polluting the water with excessive levels of chlorides. Tap water in Gaza is salty.

Besides saline water, nitrates have also massively infiltrated the aquifer. Since Hamas won the elections in Palestine in 2006, Israel has reinforced its blockade on the Gaza Strip. This has meant that for the last decade people there have been unable to move and to import and export goods freely. The Strip has therefore been unable to develop an appropriate infrastructure for the water and sanitation sector due to the severe Israeli restrictions on the import of materials needed for the projects, and the destruction resulting from recurrent conflict.

One of the main features of the blockade in terms of import of materials is the imposition by Israel of the so-called “dual use list”, which enlists a number of items or categories of items that Israel considers could be used for purposes other than civilian, and therefore cannot normally enter Gaza unless under thorough Israeli control. Yet this list - which extent goes well beyond international standards - is extremely comprehensive, and categories are excessively broad. It includes materials as varied as concrete, steel bars, chemicals for water purifications, mechanical equipment (which also means certain kinds of water pumps), vehicles (including vacuum trucks for emptying cesspits), and so on. 70 percent of the materials and equipment needed for the water and sanitation sector are included in this dual use list. This means that the implementation of any project for which those items are required needs to undergo heavy, time-consuming and non-transparent procedures whereby Israel has the power to approve (or not) a project. This results in delays of weeks, months or years, during which much needed projects for the sector keep being postponed.



Sources: <http://www.ewash.org>



In some cases, even when materials eventually make it into Gaza and projects can be completed, electricity is then lacking. Gaza is not self-sustainable electricity-wise, and its sole power-plant has been repetitively damaged during the wars in past years. Electricity, needed to run the water and sanitation infrastructure such as water pumps and wastewater treatment stations, has to be bought from Israel. To compound the fact that Israel can stop providing electricity at its own discretion, internal Palestinian politics also play a role. Hamas authorities in Gaza are unable to collect taxes from a population living in harsh poverty to pay electricity bills, while the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank is unable or unwilling to make up for these debts with Israel, which in return systematically cuts electricity to the Strip. Waste water overflows and filtrates into the aquifer, further polluting it, while people struggle to get water to their tanks if they are lucky enough to get water from the municipality and electricity at the same time - a few hours each per week.

With only 3.6 percent of the aquifer fit for human consumption according to WHO standards as a result of the chloride and nitrate pollution, the only option for 95 percent of Palestinians in Gaza is to rely on desalinated water bought from private vendors, which costs ten times more than network water. Most vulnerable households in Gaza spend up to one third of their income in water. They also reduce consumption, thus exposing themselves to health hazards, and suffer the negative impact in terms of livelihoods.<sup>9</sup>

### **The need for a new paradigm**

This set of discriminatory Israeli policies and practices towards Palestinians' right to water - both in the West Bank and Gaza - is a clear representation of Israel's strategy to use this basic need as a tool to dominate Palestinians.

To add insult to injury, Palestinians, whose water production is insufficient as a result of the allocations and of Israel's permit regime, are forced to buy water (18.5 percent in 2014) of their own rightful share from the Israeli national water company, Mekorot, which in warmer months privileges supply to settlements rather than Palestinian communities when the demand increases. Every year, Palestinian towns and villages remain for days, weeks without water, with Israel ironically putting the blame on the faulty Palestinian infrastructure, forgetting that it is the Israeli policies which make it virtually impossible for Palestinians to develop it.<sup>10</sup>

With this lack of sovereignty over resources and borders, and recurrent conflict resulting in the destruction of infrastructure, all at the basis of Palestinians' access to water, it is simply impossible that SDG number six on access to water be achieved no matter how much effort the State of Palestine puts into it nor how much commitment the international community fulfills.

The Palestinian Authority surely has a role to play by ensuring that adequate legislation is in place, water governance improved, and the prioritization of investments and national planning based on actual needs.

However, without sovereignty over its water resources, such efforts will be vain, as they will not, alone, be sufficient to realize SDG number 6.

The occupation is the actual obstacle, and the one that needs to be solved if Palestinians are to achieve universal access to safe drinkable water. People and the environment cannot wait any longer.

Only with a renegotiation of the water agreements, which is now being left to long-awaited final status negotiations despite the emergency of lack of water in the West Bank and the incumbent water crisis in Gaza, will Palestinians be able to access their water rights and achieve SDG number six.

What is needed for this to happen is also the support of the international community and donors in challenging the status quo and looking for alternatives which are sustainable and go to the roots of the problems, rather than investing in short-sighted projects which may do more harm than they do well. In the context of the occupation, they all bear a responsibility to end an unjust situation and to help Palestine in achieving access to water for all of its citizens. The SDGs in Palestine can be turned into an opportunity to acknowledge that only an end to the occupation can bring about sustainable development. It is with this analysis and goal in mind that third parties should tackle SDGs in the Palestinian context, and hold Israel accountable.

### (Endnotes)

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Ramona Wadi\*

# Discrepancies in Applying UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

## ABSTRACT

Promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies, which summarises Goal 16 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, is discussed within a contemporary context entirely dissociated from the historical and colonial ramifications of Palestine. As with other generalised approaches promoted by the UN, Goal 16 is exclusionary within the Palestinian context; the latter having become a topic of interminable debate coupled with lack of political will to challenge Israeli settler colonial hegemony. The unique circumstances, therefore, call for an acknowledgement of settler colonialism if Goal 16 is not to be rendered obsolete. An omission of this premise would result in isolating Palestine within the illusion of an international and accommodating framework, rather than address the specific circumstances of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt). While significant, the target is untenable given the lack of cohesion from the UN when it comes to upholding Article 1 of the UNGA Declaration on Colonialism. Given the reality of Israeli colonial expansion in Palestine, as well as the Palestinian Authority's subjugation to Israel and international impositions, sustainable development as the means to benefit Palestinians is a complex scenario that requires the dismantling of the established human rights violations as a prerequisite, rather than temporary alleviation that obliterates the already destructive policies imposed upon Palestinians by Israel.

## DISCREPANCIES IN APPLYING UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16 IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

### Generalising sustainable development, marginalising Palestine

Since its inception, the United Nations has relied upon the notion of "universal" in its charters and discourses, effectively eliminating recognition of specific circumstances in favour of a generalised approach. The approach, which has characterised the language used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup>, is also evident in the UN Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015, in which even recent history such as the Arab Spring and its consequences are simplified into a single, common phenomenon despite the various implications and ramifications.

This discrepancy is particularly evident in relation to Palestine and colonial Israel when it comes to the implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 which stipulates "Peace, justice and strong institutions".<sup>2</sup> An analysis

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of Goal 16 indicates that UN concern with regard to this area is as recent as 2015, indicating unfolding developments such as migration as the trigger, which increased by 41 per cent since 2010. A nation of refugees, such as Palestine, does not feature as one of the scenarios of Goal 16; presumably such preoccupations are perceived as the sole responsibility of the UNRWA, which has become a convenient tactic to eliminate Palestinians from other international discourse and programmes.

Of particular significance is the statement: “High levels of armed violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country’s development, affecting economic growth and often resulting in long standing grievances among communities that can last for generations.”<sup>3</sup> According to the UN, human rights violations are “prevalent where there is conflict or no rule of law, and countries must take measures to protect those who are most at risk.”<sup>4</sup>

Taking into consideration the two premises highlighted by the UN, it is clear that the organisation is expecting assimilation to its conjectures, rather than considering the historical contexts leading to particular human rights violations such as those committed by Israel against the Palestinian population. One characteristic of such an approach is the elimination of the political context from the humanitarian ramifications – a tactic that promotes dissociation, lack of accountability and impunity. There is a complete elimination of the settler colonial context, which is not an absence of law but rather an aberration, given its functioning as an entity in contempt of international law but not lacking a legal framework, albeit one that thrives upon subjugating the colonised.

It is worth noting that the generalised approach promoted by the UN is an exclusionary tactic that ignores the existence of settler colonialism and related human rights violations. Hence, the relevance of Goal 16 to the occupied Palestinian territories has already veered into hypothesis rather than implementation – the former also subjected to various contradictions that render applicability extremely remote.

If the concept of universality according to the UN is the departing point for the implementation of sustainable development goals, is it clear that specific circumstances in the case of the oPt will not be addressed. Such an admission had already been made during the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in 2016, in which Kenyan Permanent Representative to the UN Macharia Kamau declared that “It was simply inconceivable to imagine that Palestine, or any other country under occupation, could attain any of the Sustainable Development Goals.”<sup>5</sup>

The truth spoken by Kamau only portrays a fragment of reality. Both the dismissal of the settler colonial context in favour of the acceptable “occupation”, as well as the insistence that the international community should engage diplomatically with Israel to implement the two-state paradigm, are indicative of the fact that, despite criticism, there is no suggestion of an alternative approach that would facilitate the possibility of implementing Goal 16. Indeed, the two-state paradigm is also proof of the impossibility of implementing Goal 16, since it does not advocate for decolonisation and would still render Palestinians subjugated to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the latter having substituted Palestinian independence for a figment of legitimacy derived from Israel and the international community.

Therefore, an imperative observation of the UN SDGs in general, and particularly Goal 16, is that while a humanitarian interpretation is easily gleaned, it is the underlying political, colonial violence that needs to be addressed in order to claim a successful implementation.

## **Obstacles to the implementation of Goal 16**

A brief perusal of several targets related to Goal 16 include: reducing violence, promoting rule of law at the national and international level, reducing corruption, ensuring inclusive participatory and representative decision-making, strengthening institutions to combat terror and crime and seeking enforcement of non-discriminatory laws.<sup>6</sup>



As Masalha (2012) states, “Zionism, as a European settler-colonial ideology and movement, would not have been able to achieve its goals without the overall support of the Western imperialist powers.”<sup>7</sup> It is therefore illogical for anyone even remotely interested in eliminating the repercussions of Israeli state violence, to negate or develop policies that do not address this oppression.

The whole spectrum of the fragmented Palestinian society, particularly the displaced Palestinians whose marginalisation has been accentuated since the Oslo Accords and, more recently in the draft resolutions submitted by the PA to the UN General Assembly, as well as the proposals drafted by the French government, is not a priority as regards Goal 16 for two main reasons. Since the UN is taking a generalised approach, it is also negating the unique circumstances of Palestinians which also necessitated the formation of UNRWA specifically to work with Palestinian refugees. Secondly, the illusion of autonomy under the PA has prevented a proper analysis of Palestinian isolation, in particular when dealing with internally displaced Palestinians. Therefore, the difficulties in implementing Goal 16 are also a result of ignoring the practical consequences of the Zionist settler colonial ideology and its manifestation.

Prior to pursuing the targets of Goal 16 for a peaceful society, it is important to consider legislation that is being ignored as regards Palestine, as well as the current scenarios faced by Palestinian refugees in the oPt. Article 1 of the Declaration on the granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples states: “The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.”<sup>8</sup>

At an international level, the refusal to recognise Israel as a colonial power that needs to be dismantled and Palestinians as the colonised population that requires liberation has contributed towards a situation in which the rights of Palestinians in the oPt are not discussed from within the appropriate framework. This was exacerbated by the Oslo Accords which failed to stipulate the rights of Palestinian refugees and instead focused on the propping of the PA as “an institution to which the Occupying Power has devolved limited administrative duties”.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees encounter further restrictions in part due to Israel’s Jewish nationality privilege, which has paved the way for settlement expansion as the means through which to change demography and geography.<sup>10</sup> This works in direct violation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (11) which stipulates the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In part, the resolution recommends that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest date.”<sup>11</sup> While this is routinely cited as the UN’s endorsement of the Palestinian right of return, it is equally clear that the organisation showed no intent of reversing Israel’s settler colonial project since its inception. The international imposition of returning and living at peace with neighbours, as opposed to endorsing the right of return and liberation, is evidence of the fact that the UN has displaced accountability from Israel onto Palestinians. It is also in blatant contradiction with decolonisation which renders UN declarations on the subject void, particularly when considering that in 2014 Israel was elected vice-chair of the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation.<sup>12</sup>

In concordance with Israel, PA President Mahmoud Abbas has also explicitly forfeited his right of return publicly during an interview with Israel’s Channel 2 in November 2012: “I visited Safed before once ... It’s my right to see it but not to live there ... I am a refugee, but I am living in Ramallah. I believe that the West Bank and Gaza is Palestine and the other parts are Israel.”<sup>13</sup> While having no legal bearing, Abbas’s declaration has provided the international community with another incentive to disregard the rights of Palestinian refugees and, in turn, eliminate the colonial context from discussion.

Notably as regards refugees in relation to Goal 16, the UN has eliminated reference to internally displaced people. For most Palestinians whose refugee narrative spans a whole spectrum to date, displacement is a permanent, recurring scenario. Considering Israel’s use of collective punishment

to stifle dissent, as well as settlement expansion, Palestinians have experienced on-going forced internal displacement which has been marginalised as international discourse prioritised the more visible migration as a result of the chaos ensuing from the Arab Spring.

Israeli military law, policies and restrictions imposed upon Palestinians also contribute towards the impossibility of reaching the targets specified in Goal 16. Restrictions on freedom of movement, repression of Palestinian dissent, deprivation when it comes to basic necessities such as health care and nutrition, restriction regarding the freedom of labour and exploitation of Palestinian workers, denial of the freedom to return to their homes, impediments to education by Israeli military rule, appropriation of land and settlement expansion are all oppressive policies that need to be addressed prior to any discussion of Goal 16.

What is missing from the UN narrative is the fact that Israel has created legislation that either falls within dubious loopholes as enshrined within international law, or else is blatantly in violation of international law. There is no indication that the UN has considered a halt to the oppressive policies employed against Palestinians in the oPt, or a minimal acknowledgement that such barriers need to be tackled.

### **Israel's security narrative at the local and international level**

A major impediment to the implementation of Goal 16 is the endorsement of Israel's security narrative at an international level, which is in direct confrontation with the first target that states: "Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere."<sup>14</sup>

It is also a common expression of the UN and affiliated organisations to insist upon the reduction of violence while upholding the alleged right to self-defence leading to human right violations inflicted upon an oppressed population. There has never been an instance in which Israel's retaliatory measures, including mass arrests, administrative detention and extrajudicial killings, particularly within the context of the Jerusalem Intifada which commenced in October 2015 and signified not only revolt against Israeli violence but also against PA contempt for resistance, have been discussed at an international level within a human rights violation context. On the contrary, the international community, including the UN, have absorbed Israel's narrative and pardoned Israel's actions by persistent referral to security rhetoric.

The interminable cycle of negotiations also gives prominence to Israel's security narrative, to the extent that Palestinian self-determination and autonomy becomes a secondary target. Colonial aggressions instigated by Israel are also justified under the pretext of security concerns despite the obvious discrepancies between Israel's military power and Palestinian defence which relies heavily upon Palestinian resistance factions rather than organised state defence. Mass arrests and administrative detention are also defined as security precautions. While the Israeli justifications are illogical given that settler colonialism is an instigator and perpetrator of violence, the fact that such narrative is endorsed at an international level bequeaths an undeserved legitimacy to Israel's actions.

Another endorsement of this violation comes from the Palestinian Authority whose existence is dependent upon security-coordination with Israel. As the PFLP's Khaled Barakat declared: "Security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the occupation state is also a US policy, not just as a political position but as a practical matter. Its implementation is supervised by the US; reports are sent to a US General, because this is the condition under which the PA security agencies are funded and supplied, technically and financially."<sup>15</sup>



The question of US military assistance to Israel should also be taken into consideration – the current agreement provides Israel with \$3 billion until the end of 2018.<sup>16</sup> Security companies such as G4S, which are at the helm of providing security and surveillance equipment used in Israeli prisons and checkpoints against the Palestinian population are another obstacle which is only being challenged by the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions group (BDS). Lack of outrage from the UN is also reminiscent of the fact that the international organisation uses the company's service for its own security requirements and with total impunity, as the UN Supplier Code of Conduct stipulates that companies supplying services should not engage in human rights violations.<sup>17</sup> This gives the UN full protection from accountability as responsibility is shifted upon the supplier.

As is evident, Israel's security narrative and PA security coordination, as well as international endorsement of this form of political violence, have obscured the UN General Assembly's affirmation of 1982 that "the denial of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, sovereignty, independence and return to Palestine and the repeated acts of aggression by Israel against the peoples of the region constitute a serious threat to international peace and security."<sup>18</sup> However, it is within such contradictions that Israel thrives and the same pattern can be applied to the purported efforts to implement Goal 16 in the oPt.

## **Dismantling settler colonialism prior to implementing Goal 16**

Since the main obstacle to the sustainable development goals in the oPt is Israel's settler colonial presence, it stands to reason that there is not a single target pertaining to Goal 16 that can be effectively implemented. The UN has committed the perpetual error of embarking upon ambitious human rights improvements while refusing to address the main impediments: settler colonialism, colonial violence, international complicity and accountability.

In the absence of any international recognition of Palestinian territorial fragmentation and people, the targets of Goal 16 are unreachable. Given the level of oblivion as regards the historical framework leading to the current violations in the oPt, it is impossible to successfully implement any of the targets. A reduction in violence and related deaths would require terminating PA security coordination with Israel. Promoting the rule of law would at least require the UN to acknowledge its contradictions as regards the alleged obliteration of colonialism while simultaneously supporting Israel's settler colonial existence in Palestine. The marginalisation of Palestinian refugees and incessant manipulation regarding the Palestinian right of return has ensured that Palestinians remained spectators rather than participants, in reversing the wide nature of forced displacement, including that of the internally displaced population. The strengthening of national institutions in international rhetoric has resulted in granting legitimacy to Israel and the PA as coloniser and collaborator, rather than encourage independent political development away from the impositions that have contributed to the disintegration of Palestinian political unity.

Given that the UN has promoted the disintegration of Palestine, rather than take concrete steps attempting to halt damaging practices, it is also evident that safeguarding Israel is the organisation's priority, while sustainable development goals are the humanitarian façade employed by the UN as the means to divert attention away from its political violence.

The impossibility of implementation, therefore, is an international imposition which the UN has inflicted upon Palestinians as a result of its complicity in the last colonial project. While it is easy to dismiss the impossibility of efficient implementation and attempt slivers of temporary humanitarian relief as an alternative, the UN should at least be held accountable for using the theme of universality while cognisant of the fact that political diversity exists and colonial political violence has been allowed to

flourish unhindered. Indeed, the UN has exhibited contempt for both the political and humanitarian ramifications in the oPt. Since the dire situation is proof of the UN's reticence to provide a formidable challenge to colonial violence, the sustainable development goals should be read and interpreted as a humiliating farce and an additional exercise in international oppression of the Palestinian population.

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Anne Irfan\*

## The Loss of Education: Palestinian Refugees from Syria & UN SDG 4

### Abstract:

UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning'. This article identifies and examines the barriers to the realisation of this goal for Palestinian refugees from Syria. Firstly, it places SDG 4 in the Palestinian historical context, looking at how stateless Palestinian refugees have accessed education in the decades since the Nakba. The article's second section then examines how the on-going Syrian conflict has affected the prospects of education both for Palestinians remaining inside the country and for those who have sought refuge in new host states. Finally, the article concludes by exploring the ways in which SDG 4 could be implemented in practice for Palestinian refugees from Syria today.

Education has been central to the empowerment of Palestinian refugees. Their access to schooling and training opportunities has led to them often being described as the most educated refugees in the world, and one of the most educated populations in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Palestinian refugees themselves have long prioritised the importance of education in exile. Since the 1950s, they have participated as both students and teachers in the education programme run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza (the so-called 'five fields'). Historically, Palestinian refugees in Syria were some of the greatest beneficiaries of access to education, as their host state's lack of anti-Palestinian legislation meant that they could use their qualifications to pursue a range of professional careers.<sup>2</sup>

Today of course, the situation in Syria is very different. Since the outbreak of the war in early 2011, more than 100,000 of the 560,000 Palestinians registered in Syria have fled the country, becoming twice or three-times displaced as a population.<sup>3</sup> Their Palestinian origins mean that they face additional hardships; in January 2013, the Jordanian government imposed a ban on Palestinian refugees from Syria entering the country.<sup>4</sup> The Jordanian ban drove many to travel to Lebanon instead, putting huge pressure on already-overstretched Lebanese resources. The Lebanese government subsequently followed suit and closed its doors to Palestinian refugees from Syria in May 2014.<sup>5</sup> Partly as a result of these restrictions, the majority

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of Syria's Palestinian population remain inside the country, but over two-thirds of them have been internally displaced, and 95% are dependent on aid for their basic needs.<sup>6</sup>

The continuing crisis has had a major impact on education. Today, the call in UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 for 'inclusive and quality education for all', is little more than a dream for Syria's Palestinian population. Many Palestinian refugees who have fled Syria are struggling simply to survive in new refuges and shelters, with little hope of sending their children to school. The latter now comprise some of the 50% of out-of-school children who live in conflict-affected areas.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile those remaining in Syria must contend with the ongoing impact of the war; while UNRWA's education programme continues to operate, only 42 of its 118 schools in Syria are still functioning.<sup>8</sup> To prevent a further deterioration, and to ensure that SDG 4 is meaningful, education must be treated as an essential right for even the most vulnerable groups, including the Palestinian refugees of Syria.

## A Brief History of Education among Palestinian Refugees

Palestinian refugees have always placed a great importance on education, making SDG 4 particularly relevant to the plight of those in Syria today. Access to education has often lain at the heart of the Palestinian refugees' struggle in exile, due to the belief that it was an essential component for future generations' empowerment and liberation. Fawaz Turki, a Palestinian from Haifa who grew up in Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp in the 1950s, notably wrote in his memoir that 'education, probably seen as the only tangible investment for the future, became to a Palestinian family [in exile] the most crucial and the most momentous accomplishment ever.'<sup>9</sup>

As Turki's comment indicates, the importance of education among the Palestinian shatat<sup>10</sup> has a long history. In the years after the Nakba, as thousands of Palestinian refugees survived in tents across the Middle East, the UN and various international aid agencies worked to provide them with food, shelter and medicine. UNRWA, which began operations in May 1950, initially prioritised the provision of the two services named in its title: Relief and Works.<sup>11</sup> In its first decade, the Agency established employment-creation schemes with the aim of facilitating the refugees' 'reintegration' into the Arab host states.<sup>12</sup> It was the refugees themselves, particularly those living in camps, who demanded that UNRWA replace these employment schemes with the full-scale education programme about which they were overwhelmingly enthusiastic.<sup>13</sup>

The reasoning behind these demands is illuminating. For many Palestinian refugees surviving in camps, education was a way out of poverty and deprivation.<sup>14</sup> The camp refugees, who were overwhelmingly of peasant origin, had lost the land that had been their main currency for generations, and now looked to education as the key to improving their prospects.<sup>15</sup> However, there was also a deeper rationale at play. Many felt that they had lost their land in 1948 because of ignorance; education was thus not only the key to better employment opportunities, but also a tool for reclaiming Palestine.<sup>16</sup> As such, it was the polar opposite of UNRWA's 'reintegration' schemes, which the refugees widely loathed as an obstacle to their return.<sup>17</sup>

The refugees' stance had an impact – not least because their reluctant response to UNRWA's works schemes rendered the latter inefficient.<sup>18</sup> From the mid-1950s, UNRWA accordingly began to focus its efforts on education instead, quietly dispensing with its 'Works' schemes by 1957.<sup>19</sup> The Agency's schools programme, previously small, was expanded and later developed into a full-scale modern education system. This included elementary and preparatory schools, vocational training centres, and an Education Institute for teacher training and development.<sup>20</sup>

The impact was significant, leading literacy rates to skyrocket among Palestinian refugees within a generation, and providing them with key assets in the job market.<sup>21</sup> As refugee communities achieved



better exam results than those in government schools, the Palestinians gained an image in the region as a well-educated population.<sup>22</sup> UNRWA's education programme also incorporated several elements that would later be laid out in the principles of SDG 4; as well as being free, it promoted the teaching of human rights and facilitated gender equity through its accessibility to both boys and girls.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Palestinian refugee women achieved higher adult literacy rates than the regional average. In pre-war Syria, 90% of Palestinian refugee women aged over 14 were literate, compared with 60% of the national population.<sup>24</sup>

The high importance that Palestinian refugees place on education has remained a constant throughout their nearly 70 years of exile, withstanding numerous political upheavals, crises and disruptions. In 2008, a Save the Children report found that Palestinian refugees considered the improvement of education as one of the most important priorities for their future.<sup>25</sup> As recently as 2015, there were protests in camps across the region when UNRWA postponed the start of the school year due to insufficient funding. Many refugees argued that education is a core right that cannot be curtailed.<sup>26</sup> The content of SDG 4 is thus perfectly aligned with the aspirations and concerns of many Palestinian refugees. It is also particularly pertinent in their case, given the UN's direct role in providing them with education through UNRWA.

## Education for Palestinian refugees in Syria: before & after 2011

Historically, Syria has provided some of the best conditions and entitlements in the region for Palestinian refugees. Unlike their counterparts in Lebanon, Palestinians in Syria were not subject to de jure discrimination preventing them from working in professions or accessing state services. Nor did the Syrian government promote naturalisation policies of the kind favoured in Jordan.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Palestinians in pre-war Syria retained their refugee status yet had many of the same rights as Syrian citizens. Palestinian-Syrian relations were relatively peaceable, in contrast to the armed clashes that occurred in Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>

Educational opportunities for Palestinian refugees in pre-war Syria encapsulated this state of affairs. While the Palestinians of Syria were still vulnerable – for instance, they lagged behind the host population when it came to school enrolment levels<sup>29</sup> – they were nevertheless comparatively better off than many of their counterparts elsewhere. Palestinian refugees were able to attend Syrian governmental schools as well as UNRWA schools and training centres. In fact, education for Palestinians in Syria before 2011 bore many of the hallmarks of SDG 4, as it was inclusive, free, and uniform for boys and girls. In 2010, 118 UNRWA schools were operating in Syria, educating 67,300 registered Palestinian refugee children.<sup>30</sup>

Since 2011, the situation has deteriorated. Many UNRWA schools are rendered vulnerable by their location in areas of serious violence; since the war began, 76 UNRWA schools in Syria have been forced to close. Through the use of a shift system and government schools, UNRWA has succeeded in keeping around 70% of pre-conflict students enrolled.<sup>31</sup> However, as the conflict continues with no end in sight, considerable problems continue to plague the provision of education. The Palestinians enrolled in government schools have also seen their education suffer, as the war has damaged or destroyed at least a quarter of Syrian schools. Many have been used for military purposes or are now providing shelter to displaced families. Moreover, many parents are keeping their children out of school entirely due to concerns for their safety.<sup>32</sup>

The situation is in many cases even worse for those Palestinians who have sought refuge outside Syria, and are struggling to establish themselves and survive in circumstances of huge insecurity. The picture is not entirely bleak - UNRWA estimates that nearly 8,000 Palestinian refugees from

Syria are attending its schools in Lebanon and Jordan, although this leaves many more thousands unaccounted for.<sup>33</sup> The Agency has pledged that all Palestinian refugee children from Syria who register at UNRWA schools will receive a formal education.<sup>34</sup> However, they face barriers in the form of unfamiliar curricula and overcrowding, as well as social prejudice against refugees from Syria. UNRWA's education system is already overstretched and suffering from cuts. With UNRWA schools operating on shift systems even before the Syrian crisis, Palestinian refugees' chances of receiving the quality education specified in SDG 4 are looking bleak.

Much of the coverage of the Syrian war has rightly looked at the crisis in terms of homelessness, hunger and healthcare. However, the loss of education is in many ways a forgotten tragedy of the ongoing conflict, now in its sixth year. 31% of the Palestinians remaining in Syria are children, as are over 40% of those who have fled to Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>35</sup> The ongoing disruption to their education risks creating a lost generation. As the text of SDG 4 notes, the impact of armed conflict on children's schooling goes far beyond the obvious. Save the Children and UNHCR both point out that education can protect children in conflict areas from the risks of early marriage, child labour and military recruitment. At the same time, it can combat psychological damage by maintaining a sense of stability in their everyday lives.<sup>36</sup> Ensuring the continuance of education is therefore vital for supporting Palestinian refugee resilience. The multi-faceted importance of education, implied in SDG 4, has long been understood by Palestinian refugees, and is particularly important for those in Syria today.

## Conclusion

In the Syrian context of total war, access to education is put at risk not only by direct and practical problems, but also by the impact of insecurity, danger and psychological trauma. In order to connect the vision laid out in SDG 4 to the reality on the ground, a comprehensive approach is needed – namely one that treats education as an essential service alongside emergency relief. Significantly, UN SDG 4 highlights not only inclusive and quality education, but also the importance of lifelong learning. It may therefore provide a framework for the long-term restoration of the educational opportunities lost to Palestinian refugees from Syria since 2011.

The plans laid out by the UN in SDG 4 have a direct route to Palestinian refugee populations via UNRWA. The Agency's Education Reform Strategy, launched in 2011 and continuing even in Syria today, draws on many of the same principles as SDG 4, including the importance of inclusivity, gender equity, and human rights.<sup>37</sup> However, UNRWA is a mixed blessing for Palestinian refugees in general, and those from Syria in particular. Its benefits include the positive impact of its education programme, detailed above, and the fact that its ongoing existence has helped keep the Palestinian refugees' plight on the international agenda.

Yet crucially, the existence of UNRWA means that Palestinian refugees are automatically excluded from UNHCR's mandate.<sup>38</sup> This distinction is hugely significant – as Palestinian refugees are not included on UNHCR's registration rolls, they have been unable to access many of the vital relief services made available to their Syrian counterparts in exile. In particular, their inability to register with UNHCR has caused problems for Palestinian refugees fleeing outside UNRWA's fields of operation. Those in Egypt cannot get residency permits, food vouchers or healthcare, while those in Turkey are stuck in legal limbo.<sup>39</sup> Nor are the problems contained to the Middle East; the UK government's resettlement programme for Syrian refugees is being implemented via UNHCR and will thus automatically exclude Palestinians.<sup>40</sup>



The situation is evidently highly complex and has no easy solution. However, the necessity of certain steps is clear. Firstly, action is urgently needed to ensure that Palestinians are included in international responses to the Syrian refugee crisis. At the moment, Palestinian refugees are the hidden victims of the Syrian war. Their suffering is exacerbated by their additional vulnerability as a stateless people, with no government to call on for protection and representation. Their situation is also worsened by their exclusion from many of the international discussions about the Syrian refugee crisis, not to mention the emergency relief efforts.

Secondly, responses to the Syrian refugee crisis must consider the need to provide education as a core service, in line with the rationale behind SDG 4. This has increasingly been highlighted in recent months, as numerous international organisations have made calls to prioritise education as an urgent need for Syrian refugees.<sup>41</sup> However, this needs to be applied to all refugees from Syria, including the stateless Palestinians. The text of SDG 4 states that quality education is the foundation to improving lives. Palestinian refugees overwhelmingly agree.

The question remains of how to establish this foundation and make its promise a reality for those suffering in Syria today. It is only by doing this that SDG 4 can take on a tangible meaning rather than remaining an abstract value. Most importantly, it is by doing this that Palestinian refugee children can retain vital hope of a positive future in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

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Diana Naoum\*

# Poverty and Unemployment: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 8

## Introduction

On 25 September 2015, all 193 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Building on the Millennium Development Goals, the Agenda's 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets seek to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions - economic, social and environmental - through collaborative partnership and commitments<sup>1</sup>. Of these universal goals, world leaders agreed to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” and to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”<sup>2</sup>. Referring to SDGs 1 and 8, respectively, this article investigates the obstacles and hurdles in realizing the eradication of poverty among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and obtaining equal access to the formal labour market. It relies heavily on recent statistics and data from the “Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015” conducted by the American University of Beirut and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In addition, it refers to the International Labour Organization and the Committee for the Employment of Palestinian Refugees 2012 “Labour Force Survey,” which assesses the employment status and conditions of Palestinian refugees. This article primarily assesses the situation of Palestinian refugees residing in the camps since 1948; their experience of prolonged displacement differs quite harshly from others in the region. As a result of discriminatory laws and practices, denial of basic civil rights and social exclusion, Palestinian refugees remain stuck in this vicious cycle of impoverishment, unable to advance their precarious socioeconomic and living conditions. In sum, the set targets of SDGs 1 and 8 prove to be unattainable in the context of Palestinians in Lebanon. Legal and institutional discrimination must be eliminated in order to alleviate general poverty levels among Palestinian refugees.

## Denial of basic civil rights

The Palestinian presence in Lebanon dates back to the 1948 Arab–Israeli War where more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or forced to flee to adjacent countries. During that time, more than 100,000 Palestinians sought refuge in neighbouring Lebanon<sup>3</sup>. Today, there are some 495,985

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Inside Bourj al-Barajneh refugees camp in Lebanon

Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Lebanon, with approximately 63 per cent residing in the 12 recognized Palestinian refugee camps<sup>4</sup>. However, these records do not accurately portray the massive emigration of Palestinians from Lebanon. Of those who remained, there are between 260,000 and 280,000 who still live in Lebanon; around 200,000 left the country, especially following the events of the 1982 Israeli invasion and the 1985-90 War of the Camps<sup>5</sup>.

Following the 1975-90 Lebanese Civil War, the socioeconomic conditions of Palestinians stayed precariously stagnant. This stagnation can be explained by institutional discrimination, social exclusion, and lingering resentment from the war years. Discriminatory laws and practices reconfinned Palestinians to the refugee camps<sup>6</sup>; the community was marked as a “convenient scapegoat for war-blame in Lebanon” and for generally any political ills or disturbances in post-civil war Lebanon<sup>7</sup>.

Despite their longstanding presence in the country, Palestinian refugees are still classified as foreigners according to Lebanese law. In consequence to holding limited legal status, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face discriminatory laws and practices, denying them of fundamental civil rights. In turn, Palestinians remain stuck in this vicious cycle of poverty, unable to improve their standard of living. The “Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015,” conducted by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, found that general poverty rates have remained at 65 per cent since 2010. It is worth noting that extreme poverty rates have dropped since 2010 from 6.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent, Palestinians from Syria sure from levels of extreme poverty<sup>8</sup>. The AUB and UNRWA survey employed two instruments for the measurement of poverty: the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which accounts for non-income related factors such as a housing, security, health, food and the household member’s level of education, and the Money-Metric Poverty Lines. In relation to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, how are non-income related factors impacted by discriminatory laws and practices? The following briefly summarizes those policies and restrictions that hinder prospects for alleviating poverty levels among Palestinians in Lebanon.

Prior to 2001, Palestinians were granted access to the housing market and entitled to property rights outside the camps. In 2001, however, the Lebanese parliament amended Presidential Decree 11614, banning persons who do not “carry a citizenship issued by a recognized state” from purchasing

property of all sizes, as well as inheriting or registering real estate acquired before 2001<sup>9</sup>. Explicitly discriminating against stateless persons, the Palestinian community in Lebanon in consequence was most impacted, having their property rights and sense of security outside the camps completely revoked. The majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were forced to settle in one of the 12 official camps across the country. According to academics and UN agencies, the housing units inside the camps have been described as “urban slums”<sup>10</sup> and socioeconomic conditions as “deplorable”<sup>11</sup>. As a result of severely overcrowded conditions in addition to dilapidated infrastructure, lack of proper maintenance and repairs services, deteriorated water and sewage treatment systems, compounded with restrictions on building materials allowed in the camps, the living conditions continue to deteriorate<sup>12</sup>. Exasperated more recently by the influx of some 40,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, housing units and infrastructural services in the UNRWA official camps have become severely overcrowded and deficient<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, Palestinians are not entitled to social services, including access to public health services and state medical facilities and must therefore depend on UNRWA for primary health care<sup>14</sup>. Palestinian refugees are also restricted from Lebanese public education, making the 67 schools and two vocational education centres in which UNRWA provides crucial for the community<sup>15</sup>. The AUB and UNRWA survey recommends that major initiatives need to be implemented “to equip the Palestinian labour force with higher educational attainment because less than one tenth . . . holds a university degree compared to 20 per cent of the Lebanese labour force”<sup>16</sup>.

Low income and lack of decent work remain one of the primary determinants of general poverty levels among Palestinians in Lebanon. In essence, Lebanese labour laws are grounded in two principles: the principle of reciprocity of treatment and the requirement to obtain a work permit prior to employment. To clarify, the principle of reciprocity of treatment stipulates that foreign workers in Lebanon cannot “obtain work permits or social security benefits unless their countries of origin granted those same benefits to Lebanese workers”<sup>17</sup>. However in 2010, amendments to Article 59 of the Labour Law and Article 9 of the Social Security Law<sup>18</sup> revoked the principle of reciprocity of treatment, eliminated work permit fees, and granted limited social security benefits<sup>19</sup>. Yet, until this day, discriminatory laws and practices are still intact despite recent amendments. The Lebanese government has proved to have failed in promoting SDG 8, which called for “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”<sup>20</sup>.

## Limited access to the labour market

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon still find themselves in precarious working conditions. For one, they are still barred from working in at least 25 liberal and syndicate professions, such as medicine, engineering, and law<sup>21</sup>. Even more troubling, the reciprocity of treatment condition has not been revoked, however the work permit fee has been waived for Palestinians born in Lebanon<sup>22</sup>. However, only 6 per cent of those employed hold work permits<sup>23</sup>. And for obvious reasons, the reciprocity of treatment condition proves impossible to fulfil for stateless refugees.

Precarious working conditions come as a consequence of low-skill occupations and job insecurity. The AUB and UNRWA survey found the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) stands at 41.8 per cent, with a majority of Palestinians engaged in informal and low-skill jobs<sup>24</sup>. More than 70 per cent of the Palestinian workforce works in elementary occupations, services, sales, craft and related trades<sup>25</sup>. Among Palestinian workers in Lebanon, 41 per cent are self-employed and 38 per cent receive their income from wage labour<sup>26</sup>. Of those employed, almost half are paid on a daily basis<sup>27</sup>. Those who are self-employed operate their own businesses in and around camps and gatherings. The potential of the Palestinian labour force has yet to be utilized; sustained and inclusive economic growth would only benefit the Lebanese economy.



With majority of the labour force working in informal job, Palestinians are left vulnerable to abuse, low wages, and poor working conditions. Around 86 per cent of Palestinian workers do not possess written contracts, forcing them to mainly rely on oral agreements<sup>28</sup>. Unlike oral agreements, written contracts provide job security, legal protection, and paid sick and annual leaves, depending on the size of the enterprise. Those working in informal jobs are unable to obtain health coverage through the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). Only 5 per cent of Palestinian employees receive health care coverage<sup>29</sup>.

More recently, following the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Syria, there is heightened competition for low-skill and elementary occupations. The unemployment rate among Palestinians in Lebanon significantly increased from 8 per cent in 2010 and 2012 to 23.2 per cent in 2015<sup>30</sup>. The unemployment rate for women stands at 32.4 per cent and that for men at 20.8 per cent. Unemployment rate also varies according to one's geographical location in Lebanon, with the unemployment in the Beqaa region reaching the highest rate at 27.9 per cent. The preexisting Palestinian community in Lebanon, already facing in discriminatory laws and practices, is most impacted by the country's weakening socioeconomic situation.

## Conclusion

The socioeconomic conditions among Palestinians in Lebanon continue to deteriorate. Palestinians are still denied access to basic civil rights, and in in turn, suffer from social exclusion, thus severely hindering any prospects for social mobility and improved living conditions. Despite their longstanding presence in the country, Palestinians are still seen as foreigners and barred from practicing a wide range of professions. The recent legal amendments that were issued contributed very little to the improvement of socioeconomic conditions. The Palestinian labour force only stands at 5 per cent of the total Lebanese and non-Lebanese labour force in Lebanon; yet, Palestinians contribute positively to the Lebanese economy. As a matter of a fact, the Lebanese government would benefit most from more inclusive and sustained economic growth. The positive economic potential of Palestinians remains unutilized in the Lebanese economy<sup>31</sup>.

In order to fulfil SDGs 1 and 8, discriminatory laws and practices must be eliminated, especially the principle of reciprocity of treatment and work permit requirement. The Lebanese government ought to encourage and grant Palestinians access to the formal labour force, not just low-skill and elementary occupations. After 68 years of prolonged displacement, Palestinians residing in Lebanon should receive priority treatment over other foreign workers in the country. There should be greater dialogue between both stakeholders to ensure the protection of employment rights and social inclusion. But until then, Palestinians remain stuck in precarious working conditions and a vicious cycle of poverty.

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# Poverty and the Palestinians

## Introduction

The first and in many ways the most ambitious of the United Nations' sustainable development goals launched on 1 January this year is to end poverty in all its forms, everywhere. Considerable progress in poverty reduction was indeed made during the period of the previous Millennium Development Goals, between 2000 and 2015, as extreme poverty rates were cut by more than half. Yet one in five people living in developing regions of the world still subsists on less than US\$1.25 a day. Millions more live on little more than that and many people are at risk of slipping back into poverty. Moreover, as the UN acknowledges, 'Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality.'<sup>1</sup>

Though the overwhelming majority of very poor people live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, certain communities in other regions have a standard of living way below that of their neighbours. As this paper will show, such is the case for many Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Gaza as well among sections of the Palestinian diaspora, not least refugees from the ongoing conflict in Syria. Furthermore, in contrast to the generally improving situation globally, poverty levels among residents of the Gaza Strip and Palestinian refugees in particular have deteriorated in recent years.

Some of the blame for that can be laid at the door of the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas administration in Gaza, but more significant has been the effect of external actors and events, notably the government of Israel (and the Israel Defense Force) and the Syrian civil war. For there to be a lasting solution to poverty among the Palestinians there needs to be a fundamental shift in the balance of power and control over resources in Israel-Palestine, as well as the achievement of lasting peace in the region. In the meantime, international aid has an important role to play in alleviating the worst consequences of Palestinian poverty but it can never be a solution in itself.

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Palestinian Iraqi IDP family near Jordanian border (www.wikipedia.org)

## Worsening Poverty in the West Bank and Gaza

According to the World Bank's Economic Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee<sup>2</sup>, presented in September 2015, real GDP per capita in the Palestinian Territories has been shrinking since 2013. Unemployment remains high, particularly in Gaza, where 43% of the working age population are said to be jobless; this is believed to be the highest unemployment rate in the world. Among Gaza's youth unemployment exceeds 60 per cent. Overall, one quarter of Palestinians live in poverty. The executive summary of the World Bank report's findings make grim reading:

'Palestinians are getting poorer on average for the third year in a row. As evidenced in previous World Bank reports, the competitiveness of the Palestinian economy has been progressively eroding since the signing of the Oslo accords, in particular its industry and agriculture. Even though donor aid had increased government-funded services and fuelled consumption-driven growth during 2007 to 2011, this growth model has proved unsustainable. Donor support has significantly declined in recent years and, in any case, aid cannot sustainably make up for inadequate private investment. Thus, growth has started to slow since 2012 and the Palestinian economy contracted in 2014 following the Gaza war. In early 2015, GDP was still lower than it was a year ago. Due to population growth, real GDP per capita has been shrinking since 2013.'<sup>3</sup>

This situation has been exacerbated by the continuing blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt as well as by illegal Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank. Conditions in Gaza are especially acute, with fishermen prevented from operating freely off the coast and supplies needed for the territory's reconstruction and development deliberately being choked off. Although about 80 per cent of Gaza's residents receive some form of external aid, somewhat alleviating their material poverty, this cannot adequately compensate for the suffering caused by factors such as poor connections to electricity, water and sanitation, as well as the psychological trauma caused by war. The World Bank's country director for the West Bank and Gaza, Steen Lau Jorgensen, believes that Gaza is on the verge of collapse: 'The ongoing blockade and the 2014 war have taken a toll on Gaza's economy and people's livelihoods. Gaza's exports virtually disappeared and the manufacturing sector has shrunk by as much as 60%. The economy cannot survive without being connected to the outside world.'<sup>4</sup>

In the West Bank, settlement encroachment and the uprooting of olive trees have contributed to the

shrinking of rural Palestinians' livelihoods, which have been further undermined by reduced access to water and restrictions on free movement. However, some of the worst examples of deprivation are to be found in East Jerusalem, which is destined in principle to become the capital of an independent Palestine, if a two-state solution is ever brought about. The impoverishment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the refusal by the Israeli occupation authorities to permit residential development for Palestinian Arabs in the city all fits into a pattern of what critics have described as ethnic cleansing, as Binyamin Netanyahu's government seems bent on realising its aim of turning Jerusalem into the unified capital of a Jewish state. In the meantime, the diminishing Palestinian enclaves inside the occupied West Bank are being cut off from the city, with a seriously detrimental effect on the economy as well as to the cohesion of Palestinian statehood.

## Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan

According to figures provided to the Ma'an news agency in Beirut in April 2013 by the Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon, Ashraf Dabour, approximately 160,000 Palestinian refugees were living in poverty in camps in Lebanon, of whom 13,000 were in a dire situation.<sup>65</sup> His statistics were in line with academic research published three years earlier concerning refugees both in the camps and outside by Jad Chaaban and colleagues for the American University of Beirut.<sup>66</sup> The AUB team adopted two poverty measurements: an extreme poverty line of \$2.17 per person per day, reflecting the cost merely of basic food, and a poverty line of \$6 a day, reflecting the cost of minimum food and livelihood requirements. On that basis, almost two-thirds (66.4%) of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were poor, and 6.6% extremely poor. The incidence of both poverty and extreme poverty inside camps was roughly twice that of refugees living in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Historically, one of the main problems for Palestinians in Lebanon has been that they have been excluded from 75 professions, thus severely limiting their work opportunities. Though the Lebanese parliament has softened some of these restrictions slightly, Palestinian refugees typically still work in low-paid and precarious jobs, which often do not match their qualifications and which provide inadequate earnings for the workers and their families. Such jobs are usually sufficient to raise people above the extreme poverty line but not above the poverty line. Their housing conditions are often poor and overcrowded and they may have less easy access to appropriate health facilities than native Lebanese, from whom they may also face various forms of discrimination.

Though in principle the situation of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is better than that of their counterparts in Lebanon, notably regarding their qualification for citizenship of the host country, according to figures provided recently by the High Committee for the Defence of the Palestinian Right of Return and refugee representatives in Jordan<sup>7</sup>, 60% of them live below the poverty line, 45% are unemployed and 75% do not own any property where they live.

Research carried out by Ibrahim Hejoj of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), published in 2006, underlined the way that historical and political legacies manifest themselves in economic hardship in the contemporary world. He found that poverty among the refugees in Jordan represented a legacy of their inability to generate sufficient income to meet their minimum basic needs. 'Therefore, poverty should be understood not only in terms of the social and economic circumstances of Palestinian camp refugees but also as a particular consequence of various policies pursued by the state over the past five decades, including the Jordanization of public and military sectors of employment, the provision of public services, and wage determination policy.'<sup>78</sup> In other words, once again, some of the root causes of poverty among Palestinian refugees in Jordan were related to matters outside their control.

## The Syrian Crisis and Palestinian Refugees

As the conflict in Syria intensified during 2015, the humanitarian and security situation of Palestinian refugees in the country deteriorated rapidly. According to UNRWA, the Palestinian refugees in Syria are particularly vulnerable and have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. This is due to their proximity to war zones inside Syria (such as Yarmouk in Damascus and Museirib in Dera'a), high rates of poverty and the uncertain legal status in which those who have fled to safety in Jordan and Lebanon now find themselves. The siege of Yarmouk, which began in July 2013, changed the dynamics of the Syrian civil war and also undermined Palestinians' attempts to remain neutral in the conflict. As Natasha Hall reported for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace<sup>9</sup>, between August and December 2013, nothing went into Yarmouk and nobody came out. People began eating weeds and boiling cacti to find some sustenance and an imam issued a fatwah saying it was permissible to eat dogs and cats. The price of foodstuffs rocketed, with a kilo of rice costing \$70 by the end of December. Thanks to social media, at least some residents were able to draw the world's attention to their plight.

UNRWA believes that about 450,000 of the 560,000 Palestinian refugees registered with the Agency in Syria still remain in the country. Two thirds of them have been internally displaced and 95% are judged to be in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. 'Of those who have been forced again into exile, around 42,000 have fled to Lebanon and more than 17,000 to Jordan. The vast majority are living a precarious, marginalized existence, unable to regularize their legal status or access civil registration procedures and basic social services. They are largely dependent on UNRWA for basic subsistence needs, including food and shelter, as well as basic education and health care.'<sup>10</sup>

Before the civil war erupted, Palestinians were often seen as an 'invisible minority' within Syria, largely integrating into the society, some of them inter-marrying with Syrians or even serving in the Syrian army. This was despite the fact that most of them did not qualify for Syrian passports. In 2015, Lebanon and Jordan closed their borders to Palestinians from Syria, so recently many Palestinian refugees – UNRWA reckons about 60,000 – have sought asylum outside the region. As UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness told Al Jazeera TV in March, 'What we are seeing is the increasing vulnerability and fragility of Palestinians. They no longer feel safe in the region, so they are bracing the life-threatening journey to Europe. They are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable.'<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

At a time when great advances are being made in poverty reduction in large swaths of the developing world, millions of Palestinians are not benefitting from this global trend. That is as true for the residents of the Occupied West Bank and Gaza as it is for refugee communities in neighbouring countries. Over the past three years, their situation has actually deteriorated, making the challenge of ending poverty in Palestine and among the refugee diaspora even harder.

Even when Palestinians are able to work, whether it be in Gaza or in Lebanon or elsewhere, often their employment is precarious and their wage levels are low, which means that even those households in which at least one person is working may not bring in enough revenue to keep the family above the poverty line. Millions of Palestinians still depend on aid handouts, not least from UNRWA, but that agency itself is under considerable financial pressure thereby limiting its ability to meet an ever-expanding need. The conflict within Syria has greatly exacerbated the situation, both for those Palestinians still in the country and for those who have sought sanctuary outside.

A common element to the situation of Palestinians whether in Palestine or in the refugee diaspora



is that their poverty is mainly the result of political and even historical factors beyond their control. However much one might legitimately criticise the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto Hamas administration in Gaza for shortcomings in the way they have handled the economy and tackled inequality, their failures pale in comparison with the brutal effects of the blockade of Gaza and the aftermath of war there, or with the impact that Israel's illegal annexation of territory and resources on the West Bank and restrictions on Palestinians' free movement have had. Accordingly, combatting poverty among Palestinians will require a political and diplomatic solution, rather than simply maintaining the flow of aid and development seed-funding.

Without a just settlement for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and recognition of the implications of the right of return for Palestinian refugees there is unlikely to be a significant improvement in their economic condition. Indeed, what has happened over the past three years suggests that things may even get worse.



Palestinian children at Refugee camp in Syria (www.calltohumanity.com)

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## PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN THE ARAB WORLD

### REALITIES & PROSPECTS

This book, *Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World: Realities and Prospects* looks at the most significant aspects of the Palestinian refugee and explores the future possibilities of their plight through studies and papers presented by a group of experts and researchers. The papers were presented during a seminar organised by Al Jazeera Centre for Studies in cooperation with the Palestinian Return Centre on 14 and 15 April 2012 in the Qatari capital of Doha.

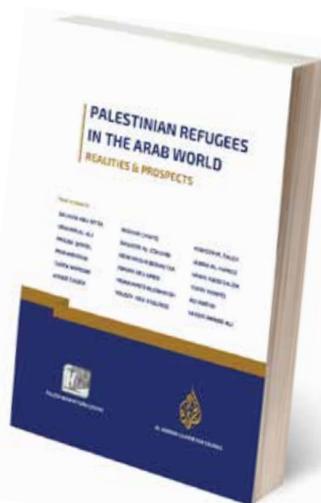
There are more than eight million Palestinian refugees in the world. The vast majority live in Arab countries, mainly neighbouring Palestine, with smaller numbers scattered in different parts of the world. They all live under extremely challenging conditions that differ according to the host country's socio-economic conditions and political climate; but include inadequate access to provisions, general treatment and attitudes and protection of human rights.

More than six decades have passed since the displacement of these refugees from their homes under Zionism. However they still continue to suffer and live under miserable conditions with no respite. So far, Arab and international efforts have failed to bring this suffering to an end due to Israel's intransigence compounded by American assistance to Israel and support for its occupation. Arab countries have also failed to address this historical injustice and take a balanced commensurate response to the severity of the refugee question, including the Palestinian cause in general.

This book, *Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World: Realities and Prospects* looks at the most significant aspects of the Palestinian refugee and explores the future possibilities of their plight through studies and papers presented by a group of experts and researchers.

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# EXCERPTS OF STUDIES







Yasmin Nour\*

## The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Palestinian People: Challenges and Prospects\*

*A comprehensive report by the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) discussing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their application on the Palestinian People in occupied Palestine and the Diaspora. Challenges and Prospects*

### Executive Summary

This report presents an informative account of the Palestinian people in relation to the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This set of 17 goals and 169 targets is the globally agreed blueprint of the development agenda for the next fifteen years. The Palestinian issue is as old as the UN itself, with the Nakba, or “Catastrophe”, of 1948 creating the world’s longest standing refugee crisis. Subsequent wars, aggression and ongoing military occupation have left the Palestinian population unable to achieve their full development ability. With a global population of 11 million people and over 5.1 million of these registered refugees, crucial steps must be taken to consider how the SDGs will apply to the biggest displaced, and longest occupied, population on earth.

By analysing the situation of the Palestinian people in relation to the SDGs, this reports aims to inform and guide progression and achievement of the Goals. The Goals have been explored in accordance with three thematic elements of economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. The themes are inextricably linked to one another and no theme would be sustainably accomplished without the fellow two. The report explores each theme by looking at Palestinians and Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Economic growth among the Palestinian population is fragile. Within the West Bank and Gaza, GDP has reached a low of -0.4%, pushing the Palestinian economy into recession.<sup>1</sup> Unemployment in Gaza is declining but still worryingly high at 42 per cent. The slow pace of reconstruction and continued limits to resources has left Gaza’s economy on the brink of collapse.<sup>2</sup> UNRWA estimates that almost 80 per cent of Gaza’s population is currently aid dependent.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, infant mortality in the oPt was 15.8 per 1,000 live births. In Gaza, infant mortality rates have risen after a continued decrease, reflecting the long term effects of the blockade.<sup>4</sup>

95 per cent of electricity in the West bank is imported from Israel, creating a huge dependency and loss of resources. Israeli policies limit development

\* This is an excerpt of the report that can be found at [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk)

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of independent energy systems or utilisation of natural gas fields off the Gaza Strip shores. Gaza has its own power generation station, but still remains considerably damaged from the military incursions of 2014 and earlier Israeli bombings starting from 2006. Limits to freedom of movement and access to opportunity have also exacerbated inequality in education, gender, poverty, climate change, and water access.

Previously home to 480,000 to 600,000 (UNRWA statistics estimate the number of 560,000, while previous Syrian official statistics estimates are 600,000) Palestinian refugees, the conflict in Syria has greatly affected Palestinian refugees. Syria's GDP is estimated to have contracted by an average of 15.4 per cent and the Syrian economy has plummeted.<sup>5</sup> Those who have fled to neighbouring countries are not afforded the same rights as Syrian refugees, and are in a declining economic situation, with the Syrian pound depreciating by 80 per cent since the start of the conflict. Food prices have also skyrocketed, with a kilogram of rice nearing US\$ 100 in some areas.<sup>6</sup>

In most parts of Syria, electricity is only available for 2-4 hours a day. The lack of reliable electricity supply has affected essential humanitarian services, such as hospitals, schools, and sewage treatment. Given its location, Syria is disproportionately affected by climate change effects. Rainfall is predicted to decrease by 11 per cent, while temperature is increasing, causing widespread drought.<sup>7</sup>

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not well integrated into Lebanese society, with restrictions on civil rights. Only 37 per cent of the working age is employed, and 60 per cent of these occupy low status employment. High levels of poverty and lack of opportunity have resulted in high school dropout rates of 39 per cent for over 10 year olds.<sup>8</sup> The influx of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) has further exacerbated existing problems for the Palestinian population in Lebanon. An estimated 42,000 PRS have entered Lebanon leading to overcrowding of camps that are already overcapacity. An estimated 89 per cent of these PRS live in poverty.<sup>9</sup> UNRWA serves the majority of the Palestinian refugee community healthcare, but is severely understaffed, with an average doctor giving 103 medical consultations every day.<sup>10</sup>

Lebanon suffers from similar issues of increasing temperatures and low precipitation. The surge in population has also led to an estimated 5 per cent increase in road traffic and air pollution, whilst the domestic water and power demand has increased by 12 and 10 per cent, respectively.

With over 2 million registered Palestine refugees, Jordan is host to the biggest population of Palestinian refugees. Most Palestinians are well integrated, with the exception of "ex-Gazans" who are not entitled to citizenship and other rights. Non-citizen Palestine Refugees Jordan (PRJ) are more than three times as likely to be amongst the very poorest, living on less than US\$ 1.25 a day.<sup>11</sup> Since the influx of 1.265 million Syrian refugees, the unemployment rate has increased from 14.5 per cent to 22.1 per cent.<sup>12</sup> Jordan imports 96 per cent of its oil and gas, making the country completely vulnerable to the global energy market. Water resources are scarce, rainfall is irregular, and groundwater is rapidly depleting due to overexploitation. Jordan is ranked among the poorest countries in the world in terms of water availability, with only 147 cubic metres per person per year in 2010.

It is clear that much needs to be done in the way of addressing the SDGs for the development of the Palestinian people in occupied Palestine or their host countries. However, it is clear that sustainable development and military occupation are mutually exclusive concepts. The reality of the occupation makes it necessary to take into account the inadequacy of many development indicators when applied to the Palestinian situation. Indicators within the SDGs are not valid with regard to this circumstance, and consequently, another kind of development measurement must be considered.

The UN SDGs have provided a comprehensive list of important factors, however accountability and realism are lacking within the goals. The SDG document lacks a focus on countries embroiled in



conflict and militarization. By scarcely mentioning refugees or internally displaced people, it neglects over half of the Palestinian population. The SDGs do not specify who is responsible for the burden of the refugees, and they are likely to be left behind, as can already be seen occurring.

UNRWA suffers from a severe lack of funding, unable to sustain the burden of the ever-growing population and continued conflict. Lack of a political solution is the main strain on UNRWA, and a lack of accountability from the SDGs leaves UNRWA as the only body to attempt to achieve the goals, which is impractical.

In conclusion, short- and long-term recommendations are suggested in order to make accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals feasible within the Palestinian circumstance. Recommendations include; taking steps to immediately mitigate the hardship of the Palestinian population by ensuring UNRWA obtains stable funding; an immediate and permanent end to the blockade of Gaza; the right to return of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with UN resolution 194; and for the oPt to become a 'party' member of the UNFCCC.

Fundamentally, the international community must recognise its responsibility in ending the occupation as a challenge to global development. The responsibility of the international community in enabling Palestine to achieve the SDGs lies in providing political support to establish and recognise an independent Palestinian state, and exert pressure on Israel to end its occupation and remove the obstacles imposed on the Palestinian economy, society and environment.

## Background and Context

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This set of 17 goals, with 169 targets forms the globally agreed blueprint for the development agenda of 2015 to 2030. The newly instated set of global goals were created to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as the world's targets for addressing extreme poverty in all its forms for the first 15 years of this century.

The MDGs were aimed at developing the most economically deprived countries. By creating a set of easy, quantifiable, and time-bound goals, a sense of greater global awareness in which accountability of development could be scrutinised, was created. With the extreme poverty rate dropping from 47 per cent to 14 per cent, and primary education net enrolment increased 8 per cent, the MDGs certainly had successes.<sup>13</sup> However, achievement of the goals was highly variable across countries and much is still to be done to achieve a developed world. This is where the SDGs come in.

The SDGs are universal for all governments and countries to achieve, with reviews being monitored by a High-Level Political forum under the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The Goals, not simply focused on development, but on sustainability, encompass and interlink the three dimensions of economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. The multi-dimensional nature of these goals presents the natural challenge given with sustainable development - achieving these three dimensions in coordination with one another.

Prior to the onset of the MDGs and during their reign, the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and the Palestinian people in the Diaspora have faced countless obstacles to development. Within the Palestinian territories, freedom of movement is restricted as a result of the eight-metre high separation wall encircling both the West Bank and Gaza. Appropriation of land and lack of international recognition further contribute and exacerbate present developmental challenges. The Gaza strip faces further challenges, with the affliction of three wars in just six years, and limited access to restoration and recovery as a result of the ongoing blockade imposed since 2007.

The plight of the Palestinian people is the longest standing obstacle to development. The Palestinian refugee crisis started with the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, which the Palestinians to this day refer to as the Nakba, or the Catastrophe. Over 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced and 418 towns and villages were destroyed. Subsequent wars and continued house demolitions have created four generations of Palestinian refugees that reside around the world, predominantly in the oPt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The majority of the Palestinian population remain in exile to this day. With over 5.1 million registered refugees with UNRWA, and an estimated 2.1 million unregistered, Palestinians are largest refugee population in the world with at least half of the 11 million global population considered refugees.<sup>1415</sup>

Analysing the situation of the Palestinian people in relation to the goals is important to ensure progress, if and where possible. The Palestinian context is as old as the UN itself, so setting these goals must involve important scrutiny, aiming to address issues in all contexts, as well as be accessible and achievable. Conclusions will be drawn upon at the end, to suggest how achieving the SDGs could be better applied to Palestinians, and how the SDGs fail in the context of the Palestinian situation.

## Methodology

This report will analyse the key issues related to sustainable development among the Palestinian population. The issues of most relevance within the constraints of reporting have been documented. Although a comprehensive account of the issues has been presented, this is not an exhaustive account.

The report is an analysis of Palestinians and Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. In the absence of systematic monitoring and reporting of refugees, it is difficult to portray accurate accounts and statistics for all refugees in each respective country. Statistics on the Palestinian refugees within, and who have fled from, Syria are particularly challenging given the current climate. With challenges to data gathering considered, the available literature has been used to give a reasoned account of current circumstances. This report aims to be informative, and help shape the development agenda in relation to the Palestinian people.

Information has been gathered by desk research with data collected from organisations such as UNDP, OCHA, UNRWA, Amnesty International, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. The issues in this report have been addressed in accordance to the key thematic elements pertaining to economic, social and environmental development. It is important to consider that none of these dimensions exist independently from one another. The themes, and goals, are inextricably linked to one other, personifying the complex nature of sustainable development. The three themes encompass several goals, with some goals falling under more than one theme.

The social aspects of development dominate the development agenda. With SDG 1 to “end poverty in all forms everywhere”, top of the agenda, it is still seen to be the greatest global challenge facing the world today. Links across the goals are most apparent with the case of poverty. Poverty in its all its dimensions is multi-faceted and features in the remaining SDGs, including SDG 2 (end hunger); SDG 3 (healthy lives); SDG 4 (education); and SDG 5 (gender equality). Also included within the social dimension are SDG 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries and SDG 11 to make cities and settlements safe and sustainable.

Economic growth is outlined in SDG 8 aiming to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, with SDG 9 “build resilient infrastructure and promote inclusive industrialisation” also explored under the umbrella of economic development.



Five of the 17 goals place a particular focus on environmental sustainability. Within this report, the three goals (6, 7 and 13) concerning water, energy and climate change, will be explored in depth. This third thematic element is crucial, and a new focus previously missing from the development agenda. Climate change has significant geopolitical impacts around the world, contributing to poverty, environmental degradation, and the further weakening of fragile governments. Climate change will contribute to food and water scarcity, will increase the spread of disease, and may spur or exacerbate mass migration. Following the COP21 Paris Summit, climate matters are top of the development agenda.

## Challenges, Conclusions & Recommendations

The data collated presents a clear example of how Palestinian people across the Middle East are in severe need of, yet highly prevented from access to, development in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Palestinian populations across the region are living in poverty, with a lack of access to health, water, infrastructure and education. Economic growth in the oPt and across Jordan, Syria and Lebanon is scarce, with Palestinians being the hardest hit with lack of access to employability and opportunity. The Syrian crisis has further exacerbated problems in the region, with Palestinian refugees from Syria facing the harshest conditions within Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Developmental challenges are also exacerbated by the effects of climate change, with higher temperatures and lower precipitation affecting agriculture, water supplies, and food security.

The complex nature of the Palestinian situation is clearly exemplified when addressed in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. The multifaceted nature of addressing sustainable development in a population riddled with displacement, conflict and occupation, is intricate. Some key issues arise when addressing the SDGs in the face of the Palestinian context; these are explored in the current chapter.

## War and Peace

A key critique of the SDGs has continually been the lack of focus on countries embroiled in conflict and militarization. Notions of peace and inclusivity are touched upon in SDG 16 (peace, justice and governance), however, civilians in conflict, and seeking refuge specifically, are not addressed in any depth. SDG 16 is likely the most aspirational, sometimes even described as “removed from reality”,<sup>16</sup> but its relevance and application is urgently needed to address the current issues of violence and state security, especially within the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The current and ongoing issue of excessive force used by the IDF and settlers are issues pertaining to this goal that should, and could be, addressed by Israeli authorities. In fact, as an occupying power, it is their legal obligation to do so.

Limiting illicit arms flows and promoting the rule of international law would also be beneficial in aiming to reduce Israel’s attacks on the oPt, but implementation and regulation of this is problematic, with Israel having not even ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, and the international community supporting the problem. The UK provided £52 million in the way of arms for Israel in the last year and the EU over £1 billion.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that without peace and security, sustainable development is unachievable. However, due to the simplicity of this goal together with states’ unlikely complicity, it is not likely to aid the Palestinian people.

The SDGs assume that states are a willing agent of change, and will be responsible custodians for the sustainable development agenda, including ratifying goal 16. The implausible nature of this



is particularly true within Syria, where Government corruption is vast.<sup>18</sup> In today's globalised and complex world, with vast flows of people, capital, weapons, and technology across borders, focusing exclusively on goals to be achieved by individual countries does not take into account powerful political and economic connections and interests of other states.

## Accountability

The plight of Palestinian refugees has been a long standing, and unaddressed, issue providing a clear barrier to achieving sustainable development. The SDGs do not specify whether the intended use of the goals by governments should apply for non-citizens as well as citizens. Ultimately, the SDGs are a set of voluntary agreements, not treaties, and so governments are accountable for their own citizens, with the UN Statistical Commission measuring the indicators. This leaves issue of Palestinian refugees in limbo.

The SDG document scarcely mentions refugees or internally displaced people, thus overlooking some of the most disenfranchised populations of the world, including three quarters of the total Palestinian population. With no one claiming responsibility, and the SDGs not specifying who is responsible for the burden of refugees, those who are not citizens, are likely to be forgotten. As seen in Lebanon, and to some extent Jordan and Syria, the denial of access to basic services, employability, citizenship, and years of isolation, are prime example of how these host governments are not prepared to invest resources in achievement of the goals for these populations, despite their obvious presence and potential value to society.

## Funding

Public finance, international aid, and tax reforms in the private sector, are said to be the driving factor in funding the SDGs. However, at a major conference on financing in Addis Ababa, failed to address income shortfalls, and it is feared that there will simply not be enough cash assistance to meet the aspirational nature of the goals. This is especially true in the Palestinian context. The main body responsible for providing aid for the Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, suffers from a severe lack of funding, that it is not enough to sustain the burden of the ever-growing population. A lack of a political solution is the main strain on UNRWA, and a lack of accountability from the SDGs leaves UNRWA as the only body to attempt to achieve the goals, which is not feasible. Continued over exertion of resources, as a result of the continuing assaults on Gaza and the Syrian crisis resulted in a predicted shortfall of US\$ 81 million for the beginning of 2016.<sup>19</sup> Fundamental issues with funding must be taken into account, but ultimately, the issue should be how to reduce people's need of UNRWA, not how the increase of demand can be met.

## Development Under Occupation

The prolonged Israeli military occupation has severely limited the prospects of Palestinian development. An occupying power naturally impacts social, economic and environmental life and the SDGs are not flexible enough for this. Sustainable development and military occupation are mutually exclusive concepts.

The direct effects of the occupation on development are clear. However, it also indirectly affects development. For example, women's groups advocating for equal rights are highly active across the



oPt, but the reality of the current occupation have led some women's rights groups to focus more on national unity, peace and security, than on equal rights. Tackling climate effects is also difficult, with most natural resources in the oPt under the control of Israel, and with little stakeholder involvement in decision making processes. The unstable political climate makes planning and harnessing resources difficult.

The reality of the occupation makes it necessary to take into account the inadequacy of many development indicators when applied to the Palestinian situation. Indicators within the SDGs are not valid with regard to this circumstance, and consequently, another kind of development measurement must be considered. Independent Palestinian development requires political will, and cannot be developed under Israel's occupation. It requires strong politicians to demand the dismantling of the occupation infrastructure, including the separation wall, settlements, settler-only roads, checkpoints, and house demolitions. International resolutions acknowledging the illegality of Israel's policies and its attempts to change the demographics of the oPt must be enforced. Until this time, sustainable development will remain fictional.

Israel cannot remain silent of the issue of the Palestinian refugee problem. The expulsion of Palestinians since 1948 remains a key issue of the occupation and security within the entire region today. The international community must also take responsibility for this longstanding unresolved issue. UN Resolution 194 adopted in 1948 states that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date". The notion of the right to return is written over again in international law, including in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 13); The International Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5d); and The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (article 12:4).

To conclude, the UN SDGs have provided a comprehensive list of factors that must be addressed in regards to the Palestinian people, however accountability and realism are lacking within the goals. Much in the light of political agreement and international accountability must be achieved before sustainable development can progress. The ongoing situation in Syria has only exacerbated the issues for the Palestinian refugees and intensified chronic underfunding. It is evident that without an end to the occupation, the legal right of the refugees to return and access to environmental development under the SDGs will not be achieved for the Palestinian people by 2030.



## Recommendations

- Take steps to immediately mitigate the hardship of the Palestinian refugee population, by ensuring UNRWA obtains stable funding to cope with its vast mandate.
- Host countries of refugees to open access to basic services, such as health and education, with extra resources and care, especially in the instance of PRS fleeing persecution. The international community must help by allocating funds and developmental support to host countries.
- An end to the illegal occupation, including an end to, and removal of, illegal settlements in the West Bank, which is fundamental to any sustainable development process on the ground.
- An immediate and permanent end to the blockade of Gaza Rehabilitation, including access to international aid, must ensue immediately in order to prevent widespread, permanent and irreversible damage to the land and people.
- A permanent end to the plight of the Palestinian refugees, by enforcing the right to return, in accordance with international law and UN resolution 194.
- The international community must recognise its responsibility in ending the occupation as a challenge to global development. The responsibility of the international community in enabling Palestine to achieve the SDGs lies in providing political support to establish and recognise an independent Palestinian state, and exert pressure on Israel to end its occupation and remove the obstacles imposed on the Palestinian economy and society.
- Issues relating to women's equality and empowerment must be addressed by the PA and host countries. Laws and practice must be brought wholly in line with CEDAW recommendations, and extra provisions must be made by UNHCR and UNRWA to ensure female PRS are protected from the effects of war.
- The oPt to become a 'party' member of the UNFCCC, and for the territories to be able to access and harness their natural resources in terms of energy and water.

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PRC prepared a set of very useful materials on the Palestinian cause.

A3 Leaflets were prepared to cover the issues of the Separation Wall, Right of Return, Palestinian Refugees, Palestinian Prisoners and Israeli "Settlements".



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Pietro Stefanini\*

## Home Demolitions: The Destruction of Palestinian Living Space\*

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) issued a inclusive report documenting the key events on the ongoing and systematic displacement of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Displacement is the essence of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, and nothing demonstrates it more graphically than Israel's policy of house demolitions. This report seeks to highlight how forced displacement through the destruction of Palestinian living spaces is severely violating Palestinian human rights.

Over the years the Israeli authorities have demolished some 48,000<sup>1</sup> Palestinian homes in the Occupied Territory since 1967 either in military incursions or because Israel has refused to grant building permits to Palestinians, who are then forced to build "illegally" and face demolition. In order to expose some of the bureaucratic, deliberately obfuscating processes that sustain these practices of home demolitions detailed statistics are presented throughout the report.

Whether the demolitions occur under the pretext of "no permits", "military purposes" or "punitive", this Israeli policy against Palestinians clearly contravenes international law. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, more than 15,000 homes have been demolished in the West Bank,<sup>2</sup> and more than 500 Palestinian-owned structures have been demolished annually in recent years by Israel.<sup>3</sup> According to B'Tselem from 2006 until 31 Aug. 2015, Israel demolished at least 927 Palestinian residential units in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem), causing 4,319 people – including at least 2,129 minors – to lose their homes.<sup>4</sup>

Between 2009 and February 2016 OCHA recorded throughout the entire West Bank including East Jerusalem a total 1,192 incidents of 4,054 structures demolished, of which 272 were donor funded, leaving 6,760 people displaced.<sup>5</sup> In the West Bank the data clearly indicates a rise in the amount of structures demolished. In the month of February 2016 there was the highest number of house demolished in a single month since OCHA began recording in 2009.

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\* This is an excerpt of the report that can be found at [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk)

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Similarly, in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians have suffered an increase in widespread and unprecedented levels of death and destruction. Between 2000 and 2004, UNRWA suggests Israel destroyed some 2,370 housing units leaving over 20,000 homeless.<sup>6</sup> Until 2006, Palestinian homes were demolished in similar manner to those in the West Bank today. With Israel's evacuation of Gaza, land occupation was replaced by aerial occupation. This also meant that military bulldozers were replaced by bomber jets for the purpose of house demolitions. The result produced successive major Israeli aerial attacks that caused massive destruction of Palestinian living space. Over 22 days in 2008-2009 approximately 4,000 homes were destroyed and 20,000 people became homeless.<sup>7</sup> In 2012, 124 homes were completely destroyed and 2,050 partially damaged.<sup>8</sup> In 2014, 11,000 were homes totally destroyed, 6,800 home suffered severe damage, 5,700 major damage and 147'500 minor damage.<sup>9</sup> Over this period, half a million Palestinians were displaced in the equivalent of less than two months.

The number of homes destroyed in the West Bank and Gaza are of incredible proportions. Whilst the international community's response is remains unnoticeable. Some argue that interventions such as the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) are not only utterly ineffective, given that still 74 percent of homes destroyed in Gaza have not been rebuilt, but might actually be reinforcing Israel's occupation on the Strip. In fact, instead of challenging Israel's siege and systematic attacks the GRM is entrenching the closure and Israel's main cement provider is profiting. Were it to abide by international law, Israel – not the EU or UN – would be taking responsibility for these families' welfare.

In this particular international law system, what characterizes Israel is neither its intent to violate international law, nor its transgression against international norms, rather the fact that it has rarely been held to account for them. While accountability remains absent, humanitarian intervention ceases to produce positive outcomes and seemingly reinforces the Israeli occupation. Home demolitions should be opposed not only because they contravene international law, but because they serve the logic of Israeli control and dispossession within the context of colonization, occupation and siege.<sup>10</sup>

### The report included the following recommendations:

- Immediately cease demolitions of Palestinian-owned homes, schools and infrastructure, which cause displacement and dispossession, until Palestinians have access to a fair and non-discriminatory planning system. This should include community participation in all levels of the planning process;
- Families that have been forcibly displaced must be allowed to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and be given compensation for any harm they have suffered, including the destruction of land, homes and property.
- The international community should take strong measures to bring to an end Israeli impunity and bring Israel to cease collective punishment of Palestinians in the OPT, including East Jerusalem.
- The closure of Gaza must be fully and unconditionally lifted. This requires applying political pressure on Israel.
- The international community should take strong measure to guarantee there are requirements on donors to ensure their money reaches the intended recipients.

## Historical context

At the beginning of the 20th century<sup>11</sup>, the majority of Palestinians lived inside the borders of Palestine. For the rest of the century the Zionist settler-colonial movement, with the crucial help of the international community, led to the forcible displacement of millions of Palestinians. First, in 1917, the British Mandate with the Balfour declaration laid the foundations for the Zionist aspiration to colonize Palestine. Then, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, European countries and the UN, through resolution 181 in 1947 (Partition Plan) conceived Israel's foundation as an appropriate type of humanitarian reparation for the crimes committed against the Jewish people. However, this reparation assumed the form of a settler nation-state (Israel) whose colonial practices led to new human rights violations. This is what Perugini and Gordon call the “paradox of human rights”, as they write “The reparation of human rights violation through settler colonialism was bound to generate a new cycle of violence”.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, in 1948 the Nakba (catastrophe), the expulsion of approximately 750,000 Palestinians during the Arab-Israeli war gave birth to the Palestinian refugee problem. That is the product of Israel's foundation as settler-colonial state that saw ethnic cleansing as a necessary precondition for its existence. During and after the 1948 War numerous villages and homes of Palestinians were destroyed. Since 1948, a systematic pattern of forcible displacement transformed Palestinians into the largest and longest-standing unresolved refugee case in the world today. By the end of 2014, an estimated 7.98 million (66 percent) of the global Palestinian population of 12.1 million are forcibly displaced persons.<sup>13</sup> It is for this reason the Nakba should not be considered an isolated event in history but as an ongoing process of expulsion and exile of Palestinians from their land.

## Israel's Illegal Occupation

Currently, what used to be Palestine is divided into the state of Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territory (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip). Since 1967, the international community recognizes Israel's occupation of Palestinian Territories as illegal and a grave breach of international law.

Short after the 1967 war, the Israeli government acknowledged that the Palestinians were now living under occupation and were therefore entitled to the protections afforded them by the Fourth Geneva Convention. The occupation was enforced through a military government, which was established over the West Bank and Gaza on June 11 1967, the day after the war ended. This military government essentially already existed; its personnel and policies simply imported from the military administration Israel had imposed on its own Palestinian citizens immediately following the 1948 war, and which had been lifted just months before the beginning of the 1967 war.<sup>14</sup>

## Israel destroys to displace: Home demolitions in the Occupied West Bank (including East Jerusalem)

In this chapter extensive evidence is presented on Palestinian living structures demolished by the Israeli authorities in the Occupied West Bank. Subsections have been used to differentiate geographical areas. Initially, to provide an overview, the Occupied West Bank is discussed as a sole entity. The implementation of house demolitions is then discussed in reference to specific geographical areas inside the West Bank. East Jerusalem and Area C are particular areas of focus as these are the areas where the vast majority of house demolitions take place. Area A and B, given their relatively small number of house demolitions have not been included. Subsequently, house demolitions are

further discussed in relation to Israel's justifications for this policy. These are numerous and include: demolitions of houses without permits; punitive house demolitions; demolitions for military purposes. It is important to note that the justifications do not exempt Israel from responsibility for these criminal acts, which clearly violate international law.

## The geography of the Oslo Accords

In 1967 East Jerusalem was annexed and came under Israeli law. During the subsequent decades, the West Bank became ever more incorporated into Israel. It is evident today that the so-called "peace process" embodied in the Oslo Accords, a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), was merely a matter of partition rather than "peace".

The Interim Agreements between Israel and the PLO, divided the West Bank into three categories: Area A, currently comprising about 18% of the land in the West Bank, which includes all the Palestinian cities and most of the Palestinian population of the West Bank; the Palestinian Authority (PA) was given most governmental powers on this area. Area B comprises approximately 22% of the West Bank and encompasses large rural areas; Israel retained security control of the area and transferred control of civil matters to the PA.

The division into areas was intended to be temporary in order to aid an incremental transfer of authority to the Palestinian Authority. Areas A and B were defined by drawing lines around Palestinian population centres at the time the Interim Agreement was signed. Some 2.4 million Palestinian residents live in these areas, which are subdivided into 165 separate units of land that have no territorial contiguity.<sup>15</sup>

Area C covers about 60% of the West Bank (about 330,000 hectares)<sup>16</sup> and Israel was given full control of this area. According to Article 11 3(a) of the 1995 Oslo Interim agreement "Area C" means areas of the West Bank outside Areas A and B, which, except for the issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations, will be gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction in accordance with this Agreement.<sup>17</sup> However the agreement was never fulfilled as Israel currently has total control over Area C. By 1995, with the establishment of Areas A and B, Palestinians found themselves confined to an archipelago of tiny islands, plus the Gaza strip, fenced in by Israel and isolated.

Moreover, Area C holds the most significant land reserves available for Palestinian development, as well as the bulk of Palestinian agricultural and grazing land. It is also the only contiguous territory in the West Bank; therefore, any large-scale infrastructure projects (roads, water and electricity networks, etc.) also involve work in Area C. As a result, the entire West Bank population is affected by what happens in Area C.

## West Bank - Overview

Overall, some 4.5 million<sup>18</sup> Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remain under an Israeli military occupation that prevents them from exercising many of their basic human rights. The West Bank is home to some 2.6 million Palestinians who are suffering from progressive fragmentation and isolation. An estimated 300,000 of them live in Area C, and are considered the most vulnerable people in the West Bank as they face an ever-growing pressure in terms of movement, access restrictions and potential displacement.<sup>19</sup>



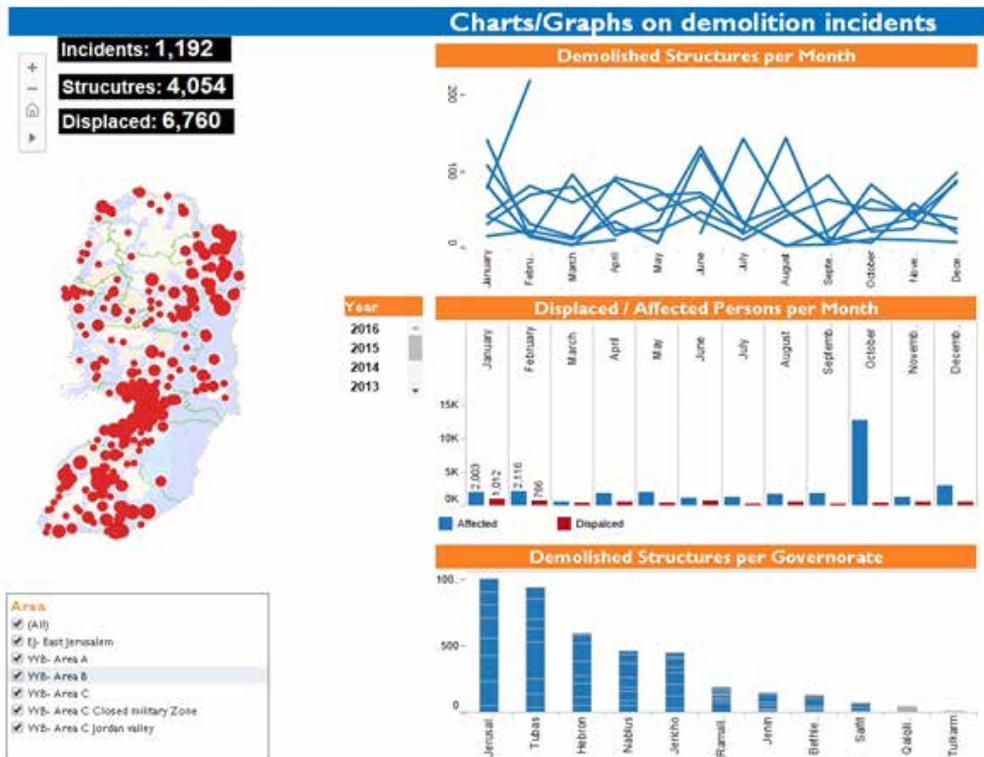
In the West Bank, forced displacement is triggered by multiple factors, including the demolition of homes and property lacking Israeli-issued building permits due to the discriminatory planning regime in Area C and East Jerusalem; evictions; the lack of secure residency status; access restrictions; settler violence; or any combination of these factors.<sup>20</sup> For the purpose of this report forced displacement that occurs as a result of home demolitions will be analysed in more depth.

Many of the people affected already live in poverty, and demolitions are a leading cause of their ongoing displacement and dispossession in the West Bank. The impact of home demolitions on children can be particularly devastating. Many children affected by demolitions show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. Their academic achievement often suffers. Demolitions also lead to a significant deterioration in living conditions. Families and communities face increased poverty and long-term instability, as well as limited access to basic services, such as education, health care, water and sanitation.<sup>21</sup>

### Statistical data on house demolitions

While it is difficult to obtain accurate statistical data on Palestinian refugees outside the OPT, OCHA and other sources seem to provide accurate and up-to-date accounts of Israel's illegal demolitions. As we can see from the image below, which was obtained from the OCHA West Bank-Online Database, it is possible to obtain wide-ranging data on house demolitions. Through this online system, statistics are available from 2009 (the year OCHA began recording) that cover the incidents caused by Israel in the entire Occupied West Bank.

From 2009 to 2016 (Feb)



The chart and map provided above are published online by OCHA OPT and covers the time period from 2009 to 2016 (February). During this period it has been recorded throughout the entire West Bank including East Jerusalem a total of 4,054 structures demolished, of which 272 were donor funded, and 6,760 people displaced.<sup>22</sup>

Through this online system it is possible obtain statistics from 2009 to present that cover the effects of Israel’s policies in the entire West Bank and describe the different governorates as well as type of incidents and the area where demolitions take place. In addition, OCHA provides a summary of the total number Palestinians affected, which also distinguishes between gender and age groups. Lastly, we can see in the image above that also donor funded structures are represented in the data.

## Homes demolished in 2016

Israel’s extrajudicial demolitions continue into 2016. In January alone, Israel destroyed 77 buildings belonging to Palestinians in the West Bank, leaving 110 people, roughly half of whom were children, homeless in the cold of the winter.<sup>23</sup>

February 2016 recorded the highest number of demolitions in a single month in the West Bank since OCHA began recording in 2009. Throughout February, Israeli forces destroyed, dismantled or confiscated 235 homes and other structures, displacing 331 Palestinians, including 174 children, and affecting another 740 Palestinians.<sup>24</sup>

Figures collected on March 4<sup>th</sup>, show that since the beginning of 2016 the Israeli forces have destroyed or dismantled 323 homes and other structures across the West Bank, the vast majority in Area C, displacing almost 440 Palestinians. More than half of those displaced were children. Almost 1,700 others lost structures related to their sources of income. Roughly one third of the structures targeted so far this year (108) were provided as humanitarian assistance to families in need. These are some of the highest levels of demolition and displacement recorded in a similar time frame since 2009.<sup>25</sup> Next, statistics from the years 2015 and 2014 are provided in order to present a better understanding of Israel’s policy of destroying Palestinian homes in the West Bank.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
Occupied Palestinian Territory

Export Dashboards Logout

### West Bank-Online Demolitions Database

Bear with us, the system is undergoing maintenance. A few filters/menus will be customized to simplify data management

From: 2009-01-01 To: 2016-03-01

Governorates:  Jenin  Nubas  Qalqilya  Nulkarm  Nablus  Salfit  
 Ramallah  Jericho  Jerusalem  Bethlehem  Hebron  
 Select All Community: - All

Incident:  Demolition  Settler Violence  Full demolition  
 Punitive  Eviction  Dismantlement and confiscation

Area:  Area A  Area B  East Jerusalem  
 Area C including Jordan valley and closed military Zone  
 Closed military Zone

**Summary:**

Disp. People: (6690)	Affected People: (31195)	Demolished Structures: (4008)
Disp. Children: (3547)	Affected children: (17522)	Donor Funded Structures: (522)
Disp. Males: (5083)	Affected Males: (24434)	
Disp. Females: (1607)	Affected Females: (2645)	

**Number of incidents: (1175)**

Note: For full report, visit our website to download your electronic copy at: [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk)

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Research Dept.  
at PRC

## PRC's Policy Brief: Israel's Policies in Gaza: Implications for Palestinian Refugees June 2016\*

### Introduction

In the last six years, the three major Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have created a worrying perception that during the attacks Gazans are in a state of crisis and emergency while the end of fighting means a return to 'normality'. This 'normality' for Gazans has become living under military occupation and siege. The structural injustices that Palestinians are facing need to be at the center of the responses of the international community. This would challenge the root causes of the conflict and thus provide a framework in which a just and durable peaceful solution could be envisaged for both Palestinians and Israelis.

As Palestinian displacement has extended over many decades, and through multiple generations, the broad trajectory of the refugee experience has gone from acute crisis to chronic need. But Palestinians have legitimate political claims, not just humanitarian needs. This paper seeks to address Israel's policies towards the Gaza Strip, which are preventing Palestinians from achieving their right to self-determination. The main Israeli policies towards the Gaza Strip since 2005 are analyzed in order to provide clearer objectives for third parties wishing to positively contribute to a just and peaceful resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community and the UN agencies should play a crucial third party role in deterring unauthorized Israeli measures and advancing just political solutions based on international law.

This paper is structured in six main parts. The first part will address key historical events that have significantly shaped the current situation. The second part will address Israel's disengagement policy. Israel has further separated the Gaza Strip from the West Bank while still controlling it as an occupied territory. The third part focuses on Israel's policy of control of the occupied population in the Gaza Strip through a calculated management of the humanitarian assistance. The fourth section provides an overview of the effects of these policies on Palestinian refugees. The fifth section evaluates some implications of Israel's major military assaults on the Gaza Strip since 2008. The shift from territorial presence to a military occupation, which relies on the strike capacity of the Air Force, has culminated in 2014 with the deadliest Israeli attack on Palestinians in almost fifty years. The last section will present recommendations and proposals aimed at bringing the issue of Gaza back on the political agenda as a top priority in order to advance a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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\* This is an excerpt of the report that can be found at [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk)



## Historical Context

The suspension of history is a well-known colonial mechanism of validation and justification of domination. Therefore, without understanding key events and processes that are affecting the current events unfolding in the Gaza Strip it is not possible to appropriately assess the present situation.

The Gaza Strip, with its 365 square kilometers, was assigned by the 1947 UN Partition Plan to the southern portion of the Arab state of Palestine. The UN Resolution 181 effectively meant that a Jewish population that amounted to only a third of the population of Palestine was to gain more than half its territory, including the most fertile lands in the coastal plain next to Lake Tiberias, as well as the Negev Desert.<sup>1</sup>

The Gaza Strip came into existence only at the behest of the State of Israel and the present borders are the result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. This war forced some 250,000 Palestinians to flee towards Gaza, increasing the population from 80,000 to over 300,000 inhabitants almost overnight.<sup>2</sup> For two-thirds of its population who were refugees, Gaza became one huge refugee camp. This prompted the UN General Assembly to adopt Resolution 194, which established that all Palestinian refugees have the right to return to their homes and lands from which they were displaced. Resolution 194 has equal weight in international law to that of Resolution 181 on the Partition of Palestine, which had established the legitimacy of the State of Israel.<sup>3</sup> However, to this day Israel has not recognized the Palestinian right of return.

From 1967 onward, following the Six-Day War, Israel occupied the West Bank and re-occupied the Gaza Strip<sup>0</sup> and thus commanded the available resources (such as water and electricity) and the economy of the Occupied Territories. The situation has created an almost complete dependence on the Israeli economy, with many of Gaza's inhabitants taking unskilled work in Israel.

By 1987, the UN estimated Gaza's population at 650,000 inhabitants. The Strip, which had seen its geography transformed by the Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948, and the establishment of refugee camps on a permanent basis, had seen its population more than double since that period. The first uprising, or Intifada, which began in 1987, lasted close to six years. Gaza became a centre of confrontation and, consequently, economic conditions in the Strip worsened.

The Oslo accords in the 1990s, seem evident today, were merely a matter of partition rather than peace. The failure of the "peace process" led to the outbreak of the second Intifada. Lasting almost five years, the second Intifada effectively strangled the economy of the Gaza Strip. A report on the food situation of the population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories prepared in 2003 by Jean Ziegler, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to the United Nations describes the situation after the second Intifada in September 2000: "The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe, largely as the result of extremely harsh security measures imposed by the occupying Israeli forces since the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000."<sup>4</sup>

The situation would further deteriorate due to a significant development in Israeli policy towards the Gaza Strip, namely the "disengagement plan".

## Disengaged Occupier

On September 12, 2005, Israel completed its disengagement plan by removing Israeli settlements and evacuating permanent military installations from Gaza. Three days later, in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared "the end of Israeli control over and responsibility for the Gaza Strip."<sup>5</sup>



In 2005, the original draft of Israel's disengagement plan intended to create a situation in which "no permanent Israeli civilian or military presence" would remain in the evacuated areas and there would "be no basis for the claim that the Gaza Strip is occupied territory."<sup>6</sup> However, none of these policies obtained any international recognition since the Strip is still considered occupied territory under international law.

In fact, since military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel has continued to exercise effective control over the area through continued control over Gaza's land crossings, airspace and territorial waters; military incursions; rocket attacks and sonic booms; and the declaration of areas inside the Strip as 'no-go' zones where anyone who enters can be shot. Israel also still has control of the Palestinian Population Registry, which has the power and authority to define who is a 'Palestinian' and who is a resident of Gaza.

## **Divide and rule**

In January 2006 Hamas received seventy-four of the Palestinian Legislative Council's 132 seats, obtaining the majority of votes in the Palestinian parliamentary elections. Since then Israel and the international community have maintained a blockade of the Gaza Strip that only tightened after Hamas's takeover of Gaza in June 2007.<sup>7</sup> As 37 per cent of the wages paid in the Gaza Strip came from the Palestinian Authority, the boycott of Hamas by the Authority's Western donors meant the suspension of the payment of the employees' remuneration. The population of Gaza was thus plunged into a humanitarian crisis requiring urgent aid from the European Union and the World Bank.<sup>8</sup>

After the limited autonomy with which Palestinians were given after Oslo Accords the 2000's negotiations, the occupying power had constructed a new form of domination at a distance, dividing and ruling to the benefit of Fatah and the detriment of Hamas, thus fomenting inter-Palestinian divides and conflict. Israel's policy to create another entity, essentially implementing the colonial strategy of divide and rule, has had catastrophic effects for the population of Gaza.

## **The blockade of Gaza as "humanitarian management"**

As part of its efforts to contain the intifada and then to punish the population for electing Hamas, Israel increased the intensity of its closure of Gaza. Currently, Israel permits just enough humanitarian assistance to reach Gaza so that the situation doesn't completely collapse, given the international response and condemnations that would arise.

"The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger." Dov Weisglass, an adviser to former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, told the Israeli media.<sup>9</sup>

The Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) is Israel's operating power in the occupied Palestinian territories and its officers are in regular contact with international organizations, listen to their complaints and examine their requests to bring in various goods, in both official and unofficial meetings. For example, in 2009 Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that a COGAT officer Amos Gilad had dinner from time to time with an official from the UNRWA delegation in Israel. The Israeli officers repeat the following phrase in two of their meetings with organization officials: "No prosperity, no development, no humanitarian crisis."

Israeli academic Eyal Weizman clearly reveals Israel's current policy in Gaza:

“The tightening of the siege of Gaza is the culmination of a process that saw Israel's control of the enclave transformed from a physical ‘occupation’ – the territorial system of control grounded in a network of military bases, roads and settlements, which was dismantled in the 2005 evacuation – to ‘humanitarian management’, exercised as the calibration of life sustaining flows of resources through the physical enclosure, one meant to keep the entire population close to the minimum limit of physical existence.”

This is what Israel is doing to Palestinians living in Gaza. The occupying power is tightly controlling every aspects of Palestinians' living environment, and allowing just enough humanitarian resources to enter the Strip so that the situation does not completely collapse. This is a man made catastrophe. An overview of the effects of this imposition on Gaza of a humanitarian catastrophe is presented next.

### **Overview of the effects of the blockade on Palestinian refugees – A view from within**

The blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt fully implemented since 2007, was described by the United Nations Secretary-General as “a continuing collective penalty against the population in Gaza”. The deterioration of human rights of the Gaza population is due to the serious and long-term impacts of the Israeli occupation. The Gaza Strip is home to a population of more than 1.76 million people, including 1.26 million Palestine refugees.<sup>10</sup> Over half a million Palestine refugees in Gaza live in the eight recognized Palestine refugee camps, which have one of the highest population densities in the world.

The blockade has had a devastating impact on Palestine refugees, including those living in Palestine refugee camps. Unemployment continues to be at unprecedented levels, particularly among young people. This leaves a staggering proportion of the population dependent on UNRWA's food and cash assistance. Basic hygiene is also of great concern in the camp, where 90 per cent of the water is unfit for human consumption. Overall the major problems facing refugees living camps are: electricity cuts; high unemployment; contaminated water supply; extremely high population density and lack of availability of construction materials.

### **Impact on the economy**

The first benefit arising from Israel's partial decolonization was opening the interior of the Gaza Strip and the departure of some 8,000 Israeli settlers was the ability to finally move freely throughout Gaza. However the territory would soon become a huge open-air prison, cut off from the world and in particular from the West Bank, a substantial market and home to 70 per cent of the population of the Palestinian Territories.

Israeli influence over Gaza's economic development prior to the disengagement was total in virtually all aspects. Palestinian reliance upon Israeli employment, favorable standards of trade, dispersal of tax revenues and permission to enter trade markets, conduct business, or travel outside of the occupied territories rendered Gaza vulnerable to the whim of Israeli bureaucracy.

The growing dependence, which undermines the potential basis of home-grown development in the Gaza Strip, has been described as ‘de-development’. According to Harvard professor Sara Roy ‘de-development’ is the process of ‘deliberate, systematic and increasing dismemberment by a dominant economy of an indigenous economy, whose economic and therefore social potential are not merely damaged but actually negated’<sup>11</sup>



## Chronic aid dependency

For the last decade, the socioeconomic situation in Gaza has been in steady decline. Years of conflict and closure have left 80% of the population dependent on international assistance. In 2000 fewer than 80,000 refugees relied on food assistance. In 2014 there were 876,497 refugees receiving UNRWA food assistance.<sup>12</sup> In 2016 an estimated 1.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip<sup>13</sup>. According to the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) 73% of the population suffer from food insecurity and 95% of the water from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption and may become unusable by the end 2016.<sup>14</sup> The tightened blockade has decimated lives and livelihoods, resulting in the impoverishment and de-development of a highly skilled and well-educated society.

## Right to movement and right to return

Longstanding restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have undermined the living conditions of 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>15</sup> Palestinians in Gaza continue to suffer from the violation of their right to movement. Although applications for permits to leave Gaza have increased, approval rates have declined significantly in 2015. This includes medical referrals out of Gaza, usually to health clinics in the OPT, Israel, Jordan or Egypt. In February 2016, over 30,000 people with urgent needs were waiting to cross Rafah.<sup>16</sup> Children made one fourth of the applications for referrals that were delayed or denied by Israeli authorities. Thousands of people that have left Gaza since the blockade or became displaced after the three major attacks have not been able to return and haven't seen their family in many years. This is due to Israel's continual denial of the Palestinian refugees' right of return, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in UN Resolution 194.

## Gaza under attack

The disengagement plan, which was in 2005 embodied in the evacuation of the ground surface of Gaza, of the 8,000 illegal settlers, and the building of the Wall in the West Bank, was indicative of an attempt to replace one system of domination with another. If the former system of domination relied upon Israeli territorial presence within Palestinian areas and the direct governing of the occupied populations, the latter seeks to control the Palestinians from above, by relying on the strike capacity of the Air Force over Palestinian areas.

Writing about Israeli military attacks on Gaza in January 2009, Avi Shlaim noted that the “undeclared aim [of the war] is to ensure that the Palestinians in Gaza are seen by the world simply as a humanitarian problem and thus to derail their struggle for independence and statehood.”<sup>17</sup>

The three major Israeli attacks in the last six years have further exacerbated the already catastrophic humanitarian situation caused by the blockade. This situation has led the UN to denounce the possibility that Gaza will be “uninhabitable” by 2020.<sup>18</sup>

## Unprecedented Levels of Violence and Destruction

The continuing and vastly negative repercussions of the military operations between December 2008 and January 2009, in November 2012 and in July and August 2014 have resulted in an unprecedented scale of death and destruction. As the weight of cumulative bombardments grows heavier, the solvent of Israeli siege accelerates the Gaza Strip's infrastructure's disintegration.

In 2014, the Gaza Strip witnessed the deadliest escalation in hostilities since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. According to Israel's army figures, in 51 days, 39,000 tank shells, 34,000 artillery shells, and 4.8 million bullets were supplied during the fighting, as well as 21,000 tonnes of explosives being dropped from the air. The fact that Israel did not revise its practice of air-strikes, even after their dire effects on civilians became apparent, raises the question of whether this was part of a broader policy, which was at least tacitly approved at the highest level of government. Israeli military strategists sinisterly described the 51-day attack on Gaza as 'mowing the lawn'.<sup>19</sup>

## Deaths

Evidence collected by the "Report of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1" suggest that a wide range of international crimes have been committed by Israel inside the OPT during the summer 2014 hostilities. Some 2,251 Palestinians including 1,462 civilians were killed, of whom 299 were women and 551 children; and 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, of whom 10 per cent suffered permanent disability as a result.<sup>20</sup>

## Displacement

Almost 500,000 people were internally displaced (IDP) at the height of the 2014 hostilities in UNRWA schools, government schools and informal shelters, and with host families. IDPs are living in a variety of shelter conditions, with almost a quarter living in the rubble of their damaged homes.

The destroyed buildings were mostly home to refugees who lived in the camps of Gaza or in the poor neighborhoods that ring its cities. In Gaza, where 70% of the population are refugees the boundaries between camps and neighborhoods are porous.

Some 11,000 housing units were totally destroyed and 6,800 housing units were severely damaged from the 2014 hostilities; combined, almost 18,000 homes were rendered uninhabitable,<sup>21</sup> nearly three times the number resulting from the conflict in December 2008- January 2009.

By the end of March 2016, about 17 per cent (3,000) of the approximately 18,000 homes destroyed or severely damaged had been reconstructed or repaired following cash assistance from UN agencies or other international support.<sup>22</sup>

As of April 2016, almost 90,000 Palestinian refugees remain displaced and facing various protection concerns, including overcrowding, limited access to basic services, risks due to explosive remnant of war (ERW).

## Violence on children

By the end of the 2014 hostilities, which resulted in the death of 551 children and the injury of another 3,436, many of them have been left with the life-long disabilities. More than 1,500 children were orphaned an estimated 27,000 children had their homes completely destroyed and 44,000 children were displaced at the beginning of 2016. Furthermore, OCHA reports of 364 cases of school drop-out, of whom 307 were boys, mostly as a consequence of households resorting to child labour as a coping mechanism. Of the households that have been displaced in 2014, 58% have reported an increase in psychological distress in their children, but only 6% reported receiving psychological support. Lastly, 55% of refugees displaced during Operation Protective Edge report that they have no safe places for their children to play.



## Explosive Remnant of War (ERW)

Since the end of the 2014 attack people in the Gaza strip still face the risk of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). At the beginning of 2016, according to the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS),<sup>23</sup> 16 people had been killed and 97 injured, including 48 children, due to contact with ERWs since the 2014 conflict.<sup>24</sup>

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs<sup>25</sup> (OCHA) states in the 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview<sup>26</sup> “the entire Palestinian population, including at least 900,000 children, is exposed to the dangers of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) following the recent escalation of conflict. Children are especially vulnerable when they play in conflict affected areas.”

Beit Hanoun, located north in the Strip close to the Erez crossing, is considered one of the most affected areas in the Gaza Strip during the 2014 conflict. After the 2014 summer hostilities more than 7,000 ERW are estimated to remain in the Gaza Strip. Although in January 2016, over 40 per cent of ERW had been identified and destroyed, the remaining ERW continue to pose a threat to the population living in Gaza, particularly to children who play in conflict-affected areas and adults who work on agricultural land potentially contaminated by ERW.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

The last round of fighting in Gaza should not be seen as a disruption, a supposed time of calm, but it is the interaction between two complimentary forms of violence. The status quo to which the Gaza population has returned to after each Israeli offensive of 2008-'09, 2012 and 2014 - that is a situation of occupation, control, isolation, siege and domination – should be interpreted as a form of violence imposed with other methods. The everyday violence of the occupation and the blockade is certainly less evident to detect than the more imposing violence of Israel's bombing campaigns. But it is precisely the lesser evident form of violence that is threatening the survival of Palestinians. In fact, the structural violence of the colonial occupation is physical, real and deadly as much as bombs and drone attacks. An ordinary violence is only harder to detect, and therefore more difficult to resist.

Ultimately, because of the inability of international law to enforce its rules, state consent and compliance is critical for its successful implementation. In the absence of external political will to make Israel abide with the law, violations are the norm rather than the exception.

The actions of the Israeli state against Gaza may become acceptable in law, if not resisted. The siege - ongoing since 2007 - the 2008-9 invasion, and the 2009 attack on an international flotilla carrying supplies into the enclave, 2012 and 2014 attacks have all been carried out with relative impunity, and do not appear to have significantly affected Israel's international standing. Each of these forms of aggression contains within it a multiplicity of small-scale practices and incidents: restricting the supply of food to the point of starvation; targeted assassinations; sending advance warnings that then allow the military to kill those civilians who choose not to evacuate;<sup>35</sup> attacks on activists in international waters; the use of white phosphorus in inhabited areas - the list goes on. A dangerous precedent is being set.

With the exception of the extremely slow reconstruction process of what was destroyed during the last Israel-Gaza war in the summer of 2014, the conditions that preceded that war remain in place. Without improvement on any of these issues, the risks for a new round of fighting remain high. Given that it is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, and considering the past 3 recent

attacks, a high number of civilian deaths would be extremely likely. The continued escalations show the fragility of the informal truce in place since 2014. The international community must intervene promptly to prevent a disaster, before it happens.

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## Discriminatory Access to Water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

International law states that water resources in Israel and Palestine should be shared equally between the two. However, Israel has appropriated and monopolized the use of the water resources at the expenses of the Palestinians. Palestinians now have to buy water from Israel's national water company, which discriminates against them by limiting the amount of water they can access while providing unlimited access to Israelis, including illegal settlers. Moreover, the destruction of water infrastructure by the Israeli military and the inability to obtain building permits have constrained the economic development of Palestinian communities.

### Appropriation of water resources

Palestinians have access to only 10% of all water in the region. Israel retains control of the remaining 90% through a variety of discriminatory practices of appropriation.

The Wall was not built on the internationally recognized Green Line of 1967 but 85% of its actual trajectory runs deep into the West Bank and annexes Palestinian lands that lie on water aquifers to Israel. This secures Israel's access to water through Palestinian wells.

The fertile Jordan Valley belongs to the Palestinian territories according to international agreements but in practice it is fully controlled by Israel, which abuses its water system and prevents Palestinians from accessing it.

Israeli military orders for the occupied territory restrict the access of Palestinians to their own water reserves. For example, Order 92 grants complete authority of water-related issues to the Israeli army.

Mekorot, Israel's state-owned water company owns 42 wells in the West Bank. It uses Palestinian-owned water to supply illegal Israeli settlements and sells the rest back to Palestinian villages at a higher cost. To ensure unlimited supply to settlements, it reduces or cuts off the water supplied to Palestinians (Al-Haq and EWASH 2013).

Settlers illegally occupy Palestinian land in the West Bank, including wells and natural springs, which they protect with violence (OCHA 2012). They also contaminate the water with polluting substances (Al and Action Against Hunger 2009). Although this is illegal under both international and Israeli law, Israeli occupation forces don't intervene nor prosecute their acts of violence (Yesh Din 2015).

The Israeli army continues to seize Palestinian lands and declaring them 'closed military zones', 'firing ranges' or 'state land' for 'security reasons'. More than one third of the West Bank falls within these categories. It includes water-rich areas, which Israeli settlers, unlike Palestinians, have access to.



Israel diverts 75% of the waters of the Jordan River into Israel, reducing the water flow in the OPT and causing a drop to the Dead Sea level of 1 metre per year (HRW 2010). Wadi Gaza stream, which flows from the West Bank into Israel and Gaza, was also diverted into a dam in Israel.

## **Destruction of Palestinian water resources**

The Israeli army regularly destroys Palestinian water cisterns, wells, springs and canals as well as confiscates water tankers, including those provided by humanitarian organizations (Amnesty International 2009, EWASH 2011). This amounts to collective punishment.

Water and sanitation projects in the OPT require Israel's approval, which is rarely given. This prevents the development of Palestinian communities (World Bank 2014).

Illegal settlements dump untreated waste into Palestinian land and streams, which pollutes underground resources. The materials used to treat water to make it drinkable are not allowed into Gaza by the Israeli blockade.

Water infrastructures have also been destroyed during military attacks in Gaza. AI claims that "While some of the damage has been incidental; much of the destruction by the Israeli army has resulted from deliberate, direct or indiscriminate attacks, in violation of international humanitarian law" (2009).



Al Arakiv 10 August 2010 Activestills.org

## **Violating the right to water**

The right to water is recognized by the United Nations and was declared legally binding by the UN Human Rights Council in 2010. The human right to water is part of the right to an adequate standard of living (ICESCR, Art.11-2). It is recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art.24) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Art.14). Water supply must be sufficient, safe for consumption, and accessible without discrimination (WHO 2000).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights asserts that States must refrain from "any practice that denies equal access to water," "interfering with water allocation," "diminishing or polluting water," and "destroying water services as a punitive measure" (Gen. Comment 15).

International treaties stipulated that the use of water resources should be shared fairly between Israel and Palestine (UNGA res.63/124 on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers; UN Partition Plan 1947). In the Oslo Accords, Israel recognized the water rights of the Palestinians in the OPT, but only 20% of the water resources was allocated to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

By appropriating and monopolizing Palestinian water resources, Israel violates the laws of the occupiers, who can administer the occupied land and resources only to the benefit of the local population (Fourth Geneva Convention, Art.55, 147).

Moreover, by discriminating against Palestinian people as an ethnic group, Israel is violating the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Art.5).

## Discrimination in numbers

There are 3 main water resources in the OPT: the Mountain Aquifer (shared between Israel and the West Bank and split into Western, North-Eastern and Eastern Aquifers); the Coastal Aquifer (shared by Israel and the Gaza Strip); and the Jordan River (surface water shared by 5 countries).

Israel uses more than 80% of the water of the Mountain Aquifer, which is the only source of underground water for the Palestinians. It also uses 100% of surface water from the Jordan River, denying Palestinian access.

The southern end of the Coastal Aquifer, which runs underneath Gaza, is not sufficient for the needs of the population. 95% of its water is unsafe for human consumption because polluted (PWA 2014).

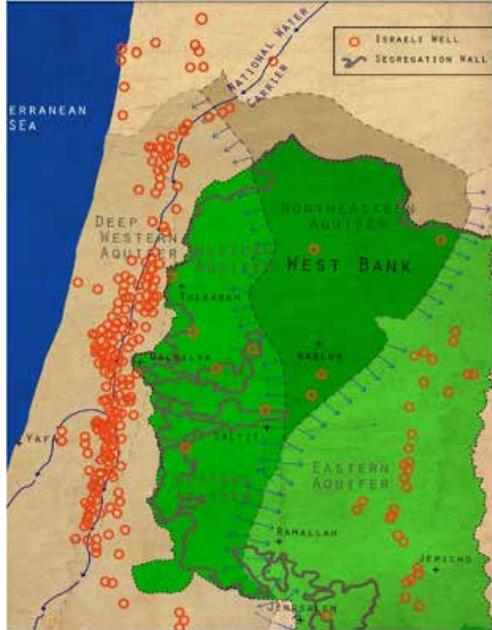
Palestinians in the OPT consume 74 litres a day per person (below the 100 litres recommended by the World Health Organisation). Israelis consume 300 litres a day per person (four times as much) (AI 2009; PCBS 2014). Illegal Israeli settlers in the West Bank consume 400-700 litres a day per person (5-6 times as much) (Who Profits 2013, EWASH 2011). This includes domestic as well as urban and industrial use. To compare: one quick shower consumes 50 litres of water (Lifesource 2012).

- 180,000 – 200,000 Palestinians in 134-200 communities have no access to running water (AI 2009, UNICEF 2009).
- 1,577,799 Palestinians in 463 localities in the OPT are not connected to the wastewater network (PCBS 2010).
- Only 23 permits to drill or rehabilitate wells by Palestinians were granted by Israel between 1967 and 2000 (CESR 2002). All were for domestic use only. None were in the abundant Western Aquifer.
- 50% of Palestinian wells have dried up because of the lack of permits to rehabilitate them (World Bank 2014).
- 244 wells in the Gaza Strip were destroyed by the Israeli army only between 2000 and 2006 (UN Economic and Social Council 2006). These include historical Roman wells that were still in use.
- Israel continues to extract 3 times more water than what was allocated to them under the Oslo Accords (World Bank 2009).
- Water supply in the OPT is contaminated by cesspits and Israeli settlements' sewage. Only 30% of Palestinian communities in the West Bank are connected to a water sewage network (World Bank 2009).
- Mekorot charges Israeli citizens and illegal settlers in the West Bank NIS 2.60 per cubic metre, while charging Palestinians between NIS 3.34-4.90 for the same amount (PCBS 2015; Who Profits 2013).
- More than 70% of households in Gaza are being supplied with piped water for only 6-8 hours once every 2 to 4 days, due to insufficient power supply (WASH cluster 2015).
- Up to 90 million litres of partially treated sewage are being discharged into the Mediterranean Sea every day (WASH cluster 2015).
- In 2008, 26% of diseases in the Gaza Strip were water-related (WHO 2008).

## Impact on the development of Palestinian communities

The World Bank (2014) has demonstrated that the lack of sufficient water supplies has restricted both the agricultural and industrial development of the OPT. This means that the lack of water supply actively destroys Palestinian livelihoods. The World Bank estimates that 110,800 jobs have been lost as a direct consequence of the lack of access to water. The damage of contamination and over-extraction is such that the Coastal Aquifer may be unusable by 2016 and Gaza may be unlivable by 2020 (OCHA 2015).

Israel's colonial practices of appropriation and destruction of Palestinian water resources and infrastructure as well as its discriminatory policies favor illegal settlers to Palestinians. These practices have resulted in the solidification of settler control of Palestinian land in the West Bank as well as increased dependence of the OPT on the occupier and donors.



*Israel has drilled 42 wells in the West Bank in violation of international law, and Israel is overdrawing the Western Aquifer beyond its agreed upon allocation from within Israel*

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## Ongoing internal displacement of Palestinians

The Israeli government regularly displaces Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and in Israel through practices of forcible evictions, house demolitions and land dispossession. These practices are grave violations of international law. The consequences are particularly detrimental for Bedouin herder communities and Palestinian inhabitants of the Area C of the West Bank, while benefiting the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Prof. Raquel Rolnik stated that these practices “are the new frontiers of dispossession of traditional inhabitants, and the implementation of a strategy of Judaization and control of the territory” (2012).

### Bedouin communities in Israel

The Bedouin communities in Israel are an indigenous Arab population from the Negev desert. Today, they are particularly vulnerable to displacement and dispossession, as the UN Human Rights Council highlighted in one of its reports (2012).

More than half of the 160,000 Bedouins in the Negev desert live in about 35 villages that are not recognized by Israel.

A total of 100 Palestinian villages in Israel are not recognized. As a result, they lack basic services, like connection to water and electricity networks and are at constant risk of being displaced (Adalah 2012).

Before 1948, 90,000 Bedouins lived in the Negev. With the creation of the state of Israel, they were deported or forced to flee to neighboring countries. Only 11,000 remained.

The remaining Bedouins have been forcefully transferred to the North of the Negev desert. 105,000 of these were concentrated in 7 government-planned urban townships, destroying their livelihoods, which resulted in high crime and poverty rates.

Relocation sites are not always provided and when they are, they have proved inadequate in terms of humanitarian standards concerning health, space, and services (OCHA 2014).

Government legislations have attempted to introduce the forced displacement of the Bedouins into legitimate legal action. An example was the Praver Plan Bill, which planned to forcibly transfer tens of thousands of Bedouins away from their lands. The bill was passed in 2013 but then was halted.



“Discrimination between Jewish and Bedouin-Arab populations is evident in various areas, including health, education, welfare, planning, the right to vote and religious services” (Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality 2009)

Case study: The unrecognized Bedouin village of Al-Araqib, in the Negev desert, was razed to the ground by the Israel Land Authority (ILA) and Israeli police in 2010. 46 buildings were destroyed, 4,500 olive trees uprooted and 300 people displaced. The families had already been displaced in 1951 and although they were promised they could return to their lands after 6 months, the area was declared ‘state land’ and they were never allowed to return legally (Adalah 2011).

## Area C of the West Bank

Area C corresponds to 60% of the territory of the West Bank. According to the Oslo Accords of 1993, it is fully controlled by Israel concerning all civil and military matters. 70% of this area is off-limits to Palestinians. Demolition orders put Palestinians at constant risk of forced displacement.

48,000 Palestinian homes in the OPT have been destroyed by the Israeli army since 1967 (Middle East Eye 2016). Between 1988 and 2014, 14,087 demolition orders were issued against Palestinian-owned structures in Area C of the West Bank, affecting 17,000 structures (OCHA 2015).

The total number of structures targeted and individuals displaced since the beginning of 2016 now exceeds the total for all of 2015 (OCHA 2016). In the month of February 2016 there was the highest number of house demolished in a single month since OCHA began recording in 2009.

6,200 Palestinians live in 38 communities which have been designated within a ‘firing zone’ for Israeli military training (OCHA 2014).

Around 30,000 Palestinian Bedouins (including 60% children) reside in 183 small residential areas in Area C. 70% of these are refugees, who were displaced in the 1948 war which established the State of Israel (Al Haq 2014, OCHA 2014).

Over 60% of the Palestinians who have been displaced since 2008 because of home demolitions are Bedouins.

27% of all Area C inhabitants are registered as refugees (Al Haq 2014).

Violence by illegal settlers towards Palestinians contributes to their displacement and goes largely unpunished by the Israeli government (Al Haq 2014, Yesh Din 2015).

Case study: The Palestinian town of Susiya is located in the South of Hebron, in Area C of the West Bank, and has suffered multiple displacements and waves of house demolitions. Its residents were Bedouin families who settled in the town after being forcibly displaced from the Negev desert after 1948. All the 170 structures in the town, including 2 schools and 2 clinics, have pending demolition orders. Their inhabitants have been dispossessed of two-thirds of their private lands to give space to the development of nearby illegal Israeli settlement of Susya (OCHA 2015).

## Internal displacement in the Gaza Strip

Israel’s military attacks on the Gaza Strip have displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in recent years. After multiple displacements, their living conditions are worsened by the lack of construction materials and humanitarian assistance available due to Israel’s blockade on the Strip.

The summer 2014 attacks resulted in the largest displacement recorded in Gaza since 1967.



12,620 housing units were totally destroyed over the course of the 2014 summer hostilities and 6,455 were severely damaged, displacing 17,670 families or about 100,000 persons (including 44,000 children) (OCHA OPT 2015). Almost 150,000 additional housing units sustained various degrees of damage but remained inhabitable.

At the height of the conflict, an estimated 485,000 people – 28% of the population – were displaced, including almost 300,000 in 90 UNRWA-operated emergency shelters.

75,000 people remain displaced, as of April 2016 (OCHA OPT 2016).

People who have been displaced in the war now live in precarious conditions, within the rubbles of their homes or in overcrowded, makeshift shelters. 50% fear having to move from their current location (OCHA 2016).

Case study: Rafah refugee camp is located at the border with Egypt. It was originally home to 41,000 refugees who fled the 1948 war. It now hosts 104,000 refugees, who live in overcrowded buildings with inadequate services. 90% of the water is unfit for human consumption. Unemployment is high and Israel prohibits entry of construction materials to build new homes, schools, or clinics. In August 2014, Rafah was heavily attacked by Israeli airstrikes, killing civilians and destroying homes, a hospital, and ambulances. Amnesty International reported that the attacks amount to war crimes (AI 2014).

Year	Military Operation	Totally Destroyed (Housing Units)	Severe/Major Damage (Housing Units)	Partial/Minor Damage (Housing Units)
2014	'Protective Edge'	12,620	12,740	143,680
2012	'Pillar of Defence'	184	198	10,000
2008/09	'Cast lead'	3,425	2,425	54,800

2 OCHA OPT Internally displaced people before ceasefire as of 26 August 2014

## Forcible displacement under international law

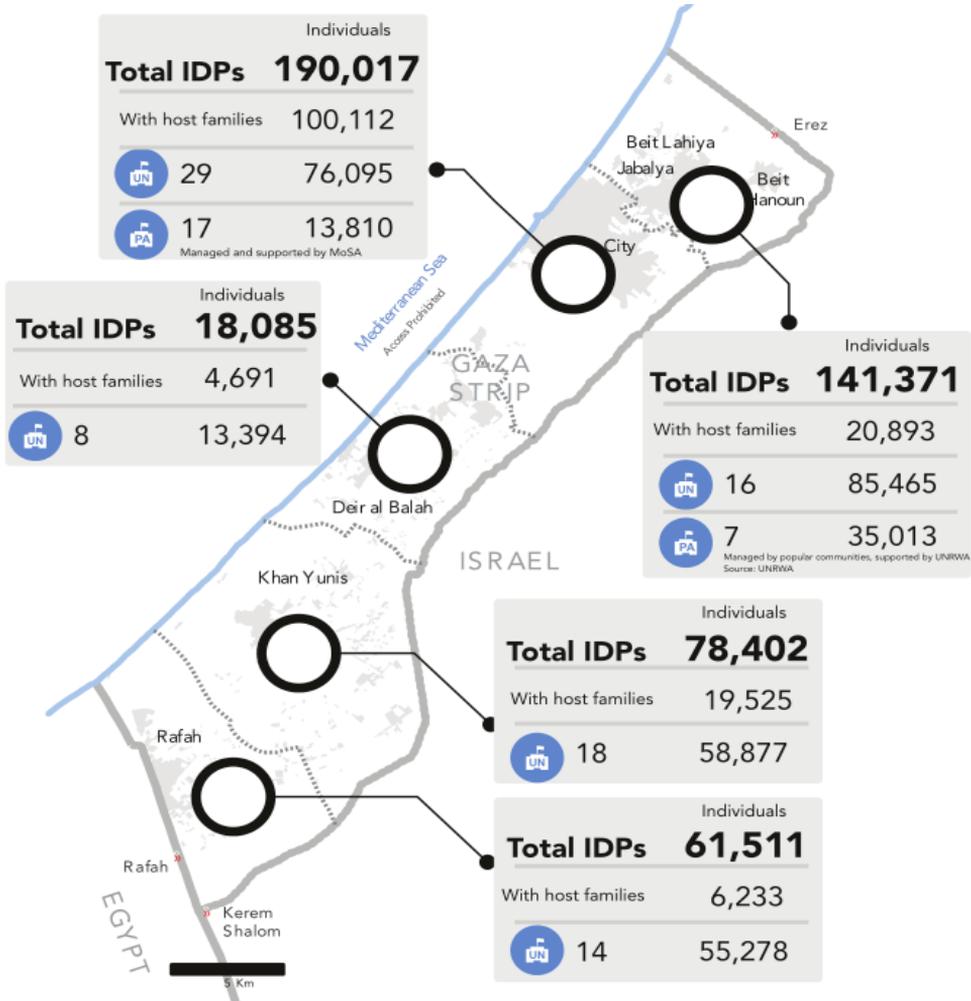
International law prohibits the forced transfer or deportations of a population, regardless of their motive (Fourth Geneva Convention Art. 49). Evacuations are allowed temporarily only for security or military measures, but people should be provided with appropriate accommodation and must be allowed to return to their homes as soon as hostilities have ceased. Moreover, people cannot be transferred outside the occupied territory.

The destruction of private property is also strictly prohibited, including homes (Fourth Geneva Convention, Art.53; ICC Statute, Art.8(2); ICRC Rule 50).

As an occupying power, Israel has an obligation to protect the Palestinian civilian population and to administer the territory for the benefit of that population (Hague Regulations IV, Art.55). Any voluntary move or transfer of civilians must meet international standards, including relating to a free and informed choice.

Israel's practices of displacement discriminate against the Bedouin communities. In this way, Israel violates not only their individual rights, but also their collective and cultural rights as an ethnic minority within the state, which requires special protection.

Israel's practice of forced displacement of Palestinians has been condemned by the UN Security Council (res. 89, 468, etc.) and General Assembly (res. A/70/497, A/RES/70/90) as well as by the European Parliament (2012/2694(RSP)).



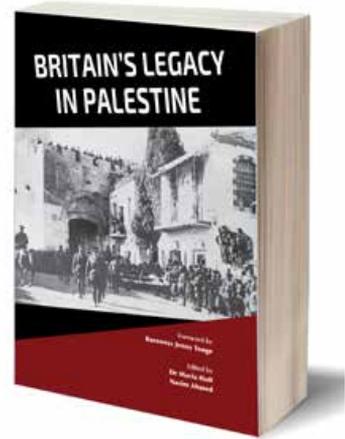
1 OCHA OPT: The Gaza Strip: Internal Displacement in the Context of the 2014 Hostilities (July 2015)



Andy Simons\*

## Britain's Legacy in Palestine

Dr Maria Holt & Nasim Ahmed, editors,  
with foreword by Baroness Jenny Tonge



Of late, there's been a lull in the publishing compendium books about the reasons for the Palestinian struggle. Recent collections of essays by various experts tend to focus on specific history, such as the Lena Jayyusi-edited *Jerusalem Interrupted: Modernity and Colonial Transformation, 1917-Present* (Olive Branch Press, 2015). Most publishers would chance their resources on assessments of today's situation, as does the Yasir Suleiman-edited *Being Palestinian: Personal reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Occasionally, a bold imprint steps up to offer something really challenging, such as the Antony Loewenstein & Ahmed Moor-edited *After Zionism: One State for Israel and Palestine* (Saqi Books, 2012), a brave, early entrant in the single-state-for-all sweepstakes that has attracted heaps of indignant Zionist condemnation. And there are compilations of today's fiction, poetry, and fine art too.

Naturally, there's a lot that deserves highlighting of the richness of Palestine and its communities. And perhaps the publishing community sees no commercial edge or angle in framing, between the front and back covers, new thought on how Palestine's 20th Century oppression actually came to be. After all, there are many single-author books from all over the spectrum – the anti-Zionist one is a wide rainbow indeed. Haven't all the remaining old newspapers, British Colonial Office and Parliamentary records been sliced and served to us on a plate? To quote and annoy the spirit of a late Prime Minister: "No, no, no!"

So, for political background of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate years, major publishers have left it mainly to single-author tomes. And there are some important historians of recent years who can really write, not the theory-knitted, jargonised academic stuff of the odd university conference, but insightful history that's as graspable as a grape from its stem. And new insights get added to the playlists of those contemporary explorers who are keen to broadcast their latest historical findings.

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\* Andy Simons is a retired British Library curator of UK publications and worldwide jazz.

Dr Salman Abu Sitta, the cartographer-demographer of pre-Nakba Palestine, gives some context to the history. But throughout these variously-authored chapters, the curtain is pulled back on the puffery that went on between the Zionist leaders, British MPs, the League of Nations itself, and the residents of the land in question.

The constant lies, public and private, amongst politicians and scattered to the citizenry, served to get some advantage to Zionist victors. Any topic was used to compose argument: benevolence, greed, class war, idealism, racism, and a selection of Christian advocacies too. A sample of statements in the House of Commons is surreal, when the point-scoring employed the promise that a Jewish State would prevent all the tragedy that is now commonplace in the Occupied Territories.

John Quigley is an expert in the pre-Israel propaganda (hasbara) towards the West. His chapter on Westminster's continued steadfastness to the Balfour Declaration actually adds to his recent book, *The International Diplomacy of Israel's Founders* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), in that it shows that factual deflation and falsification founded Zionists' arguments all through that recent, troubled century.

Rev. Stephen Sizer opens the curtains to the dawn of the Onward Christian Zionists movement, with headlines being that popular 1840 double-act of Lords Palmerston and Shaftsbury. The "land without a people..." catchphrase was in fact nicked years later from one of Shaftsbury's routines on the political stage.

Legal historian Victor Kattan shows us that Britain was, at the time of the Balfour Declaration, absolutely not a democracy and so the lack of it in Palestine and other colonies wasn't contradictory. Citing the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand, he discredits Big Ben's Big Promise as a thank-you to Chaim Weizmann for his scientific discovery that aided bomb production. More importantly, Lord Balfour and Winston Churchill are shown to have been condescendingly racist. I only hope they don't put Balfour's portrait on a £5 note as well.

Thanks to Karl Sabbagh, we can read transcripts of leading Government ministers' addresses in Parliament in 1930, when Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield) suffered one of his few political defeats (see Khalid Kishtainy's *The New Statesman and The Middle East*; Beirut: Palestine Research Center, 1972). Looking back, Christopher Sykes called Webb "the most anti-Zionist Secretary of State with whom Zionists had to deal at any time." And on these pages we read the verbal attack of their Parliamentary puppets: Lloyd George – Liberal MP for Carnarvon Boroughs (Wales) and father of the House, Leo Amery – Liberal MP for Birmingham South and former Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Herbert Samuel – Liberal MP for Darwen and at the time Deputy Leader of his party and former High Commissioner for Palestine.

You would have had to bow down to these grand gentlemen back in the day and reading their words in support of the Mandate's Zionist project will surely drop your jaw. While they're united in rejecting any decrease of Jewish Zionist immigration into Palestine, their arguments are of smoke-and-mirrors, racist howlers that would insult our intelligence today but succeeded in fooling the know-nothing MPs in the Commons. The few rational, know-something MPs didn't stand a chance.

The concluding section of the book holds up the case for the Palestinians' right of return, both legally and morally. As such, they form a concise collection of arguments for campaigners and activists. The above-mentioned Abu Sitta, whom I call the Ordinance Surveyor of Palestine, notes in his recent autobiography that "at least 90% of the sites" of the original Palestinian villages "are empty." So while having the currency of 'land for peace' may get you a cup of coffee in Washington DC, it won't buy justice where people know even a few of the facts from this handy book.



As I was challenged along the way through these chapters, I contested a few points here and there. The Mandate Government certainly suppressed Palestinian identity but the fact that the collective noun 'Palestinians' wasn't used back then can't be part of that evidence. Palestinians referred to themselves as Arab, not Palestinian, and they weren't most of them pan-Arabists, but primarily concerned with the British Mandate occupation and the exponential immigration of Zionist Jews wanting to form an exclusively Jewish society. The Palestinians' influential bodies were called 'Arab,' such as the Arab Executive, as it's termed in numerous history books, with the local Palestinian nature of it being obvious. It closed down in 1934, and was replaced at the start of the 1936 revolt by the Arab Higher Committee, with input from six parties and including both Muslims and Christians.

Another point I questioned was the typology of 19th Century British elitism, having included a 'cultural' quality, when the meaning in context clearly should be 'martial,' as the Germans were so labelled a century later.

While this is not a tool to introduce the uninformed to the foundation of injustices we face today, it would be an ideal gift for PSC members, journalists, and (if only) politicians.

Make no mistake, despite the 150 pages here, this is no shortcut to unpacking the origins of Palestinian displacement but your time spent will be rewarded as you read, digest, and synthesise. While there's no index, the co-editors have made the effort to link the page footnotes, so one in Chapter Two can refer to a previous one in Chapter One, even though the latter section was by a different writer. More importantly, the book's short length is deceptive, for it's both handy and revealing.

**Title:** Britain's Legacy in Palestine

**Editors:** Dr Maria Holt & Nasim Ahmed

**Foreword:** Baroness Jenny Tonge

**Participants:** Professor Salman Abu Sitta, Professor John Quigley, Dr Victor Kattan, Faysal Mikdasi, Dr Rev Stephen Sizer, Karl Sabbagh, Dr Emile Badarin, Numan Abd al-Wahid, Dr Uri Davies, John Bond and Nasim Ahmed.

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# THE PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE KEEPING THE ISSUE ALIVE



Organisation in consultative status with  
the Economic and Social Council since 2015

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 is an organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2015. The centre is also an accredited NGO with the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since 2003.

### Support Palestinian Refugees

The Palestinian refugees are diverse and 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.



## RAISING AWARENESS

There is a great deal of misinformation about Palestinian refugees, including the birth of their plight in 1948, their status under international law, their current composition and their position within national 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 and 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. The 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 10,000 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 MPs in the UK and in Europe. We regularly hold public seminars in the Houses of Parliament and European Parliament. Our strong relationship has encouraged PRC to embark on many joint initiatives with British and European MPs.

### Exhibitions

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

### 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 2011 when over 50 European parliamentarians visited Gaza.



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