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We are delighted in bringing this edition of the Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies (JPRS) to you. Through JPRS we strive to fill a void within European discussion about Palestinian refugees. We try to bring the best analysis and information on the question of Palestinian refugees.

As the Syrian conflict rages, thousands continue to flee while facing perilous danger and abject misery. Among the 2 million Syrians estimated to have been displaced in the conflict since 2011, there are some 270,000 Palestinians, about half the 540,000 Palestinians in Syria who have been made refugees now for a second and third time. They have attracted far less attention, but their fate is far worse. Those who fled to Lebanon or Jordan, have found little support and cannot return to Syria since two-thirds of their camps have been destroyed or have become war zones.

The desperation turned into tragedy as hundreds jumped on rickety boats to cross oceans in search of safety at the cost of their life. Hundreds have now lost their lives, including Palestinians, making the fateful voyage to Malta. Maltese Minster, Joseph Muscat, described how the Mediterranean is turning into a cemetery and feels let down by Europe.

PRC has taken an active role in highlighting this aspect and sent its own delegation to Malta and Lampedusa to investigate this tragedy. As refugees and stateless people, Palestinians experience extreme vulnerability during political crises. The least they require is the same level of protection and guarantees ensured for other refugees and migrants fleeing violence and war.

December 11 will be poignantly remembered by seven million Palestinian refugees as a date that enshrined their right in law through UN Resolution 194 but has been unimplemented for 65 years. It called on the newly formed Israeli state to repatriate the displaced Palestinians, “wishing to live in peace with their neighbours…at the earliest practicable date”, and to compensate them for their losses. A Conciliation Commission, UNCCP, was set up for the purpose of overseeing the reparation.

Nothing has changed in Israel for 65 years and its obduracy has swelled Palestinian refugee population. In 65 years Israel has not repatriated a single refugee, nor ever acknowledged its responsibility for creating the refugee problem, or apologised for its ethnic cleansing in 1948, demanding instead that the refugees settle in other states and find compensation from international funds.
It is the international community and, above all, the Palestinians, who continue to pay the highest price for Israel’s recalcitrance. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a landmark document, which again was ratified in December 1948. Though ushering in a new era full of hope and an end to human oppression, Israel’s willful violation of International Law and subjugation of Palestinians through its continuation of the longest military occupation in modern history undermines these great human achievements.
“It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes, while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine”.

These were the reverberating words of Count Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948) who arrived in Palestine on May 1948 to mediate a cease fire for which he was assassinated by Zionist terrorists.

Through the efforts of Count Bernadotte UN resolution 194, which reaffirmed the rights of Palestinian refugees as enshrined in International Law, was passed. The International community, realizing the gravity of the refugee crises, and to prevent Resolution 194 becoming merely a gesture of good will, formed two new institutions dedicated to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians and for their protections as enshrined in international law, including the right to return. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and United Nations Conciliatory Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) represented the concrete goals and aspirations of the international community.

Why after 65 years -11 December is the anniversary of UN Resolution 194- this resolution remains unenforced while at the same time the conflict has remained unresolved underlies the centrality of the refugee question. It is the most obstinate stumbling block preventing the resolution of the conflict.

A succinct explanation is because the right of return touches, for each side, the essence of its history since the conflict began. The national narrative of each side is centered on the events of 1948 during which the Palestinian refugee problem was created. And both sides believe that their national identity and future national existence hinge on how the issue of the right of return is resolved.

Furthermore the failure of untold peace efforts to seriously address the issue of the Right of Return is a reflection of the fact that the broader question of historical justice in general has been avoided in the various attempts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

65 years on, abundant historical studies and legal proclamations have strengthened Palestinian argument that Palestinian refugees are morally and legally entitled to choose whether to return to homes inside Israel and to claim restitution and compensation for lost property. Historical research clearly backs up Palestinian claims that they were expelled from their homes.
by violence and fear, and most likely by a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing. Legal research has illustrated that the right of return has broad incontrovertible roots in international law.

The strength of the historical and legal arguments have lead some Israeli’s to acknowledge this fact while at the same time evoking new reasons to oppose the full implementation of the Palestinian Right of Return. They have devised the strategy of conflicting rights such as the claim that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish majority country which they believe is irreconcilable with the right of return. Even though the Palestinian point is right and valid, they would argue, the Israeli point is equally if not more valid.

Such fallacious arguments does nothing to undermine the legal and historical weight that carries the right of return and only serves to appease the guilty conscious of Israelis who in their determination to defend Israel’s ethnic cleansing induce moral, legal and political predicaments about the lesser of two evils.

Israel seeks legitimacy like every other nation state but always demands exceptionalism. Every people know that self-determination is always understood as a right of all of the people of a given territory to self-government. It is not, however, a license to artificially change the demographic character of a country by either ethnic cleansing or prohibition of refugee returns.

This was also evidently clear in the UN non-binding partition recommendation for Palestine in 1947 which specifically prohibited such artificial and forced changes to the demographic composition. In international law, self-determination is inclusive, not exclusive; so long as Jewish Israelis retain their equal citizenship in Israel, their right to self-determination cannot be threatened by non-Jews returning to homes in the same country.

In its 65th year, the moral and legal force behind resolution 194 is as valid now as it was nearly seven decades ago. If Israel seeks normalcy it should not demand exceptionalism. It’s determination to remain a Zionist state, an ideology based on the purity of race, and promotes Jewish privilege while suppressing an entire people has no moral and legal basis but it does display all the vestiges of colonialism which was discarded into the dustbin of history.
Following their expulsion from historic Palestine, Palestinians felt that their displacement was a brief sojourn until they returned to their homes in historic Palestine. Israel, however, immediately after its declaration of independence, set measures to make their exile permanent and blocked any return of refugees. Israel’s goal was not only to block the return of refugees but to dissolve the refugee issue as a political issue, which it has failed to do. Israel’s stubborn refusal to abide by international law and allow refugees to return ensured that the plight of refugees became deeply rooted in the Palestinian cause. It was seen as a grave injustice that went to the core of the Palestinian issue.

Palestinian refugees who remained within historic Palestine, in the West Bank and Gaza, confronted a different reality to those who went to neighboring Arab countries in a number of ways; first, the first refugee camps are geographically near the original towns and villages, where refugees were displaced from in 1948. Second, when occupation took control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1967, refugees were able to reach their normal residences, but were not allowed to enter them. Third, the very close location of camps in cities and villages in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank facilitated the process of integration with the Palestinian community, which was formed after the 1967 war. Fourth and finally, refugee camps remained in the front line of resistance and struggle. Refugees clung to the right of return and they put this as their main priority, in addition, many camps paid the price of the brutal actions of Israeli occupation.

This chapter seeks to highlight the reality of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank after 64 years of Nakba, especially the reality of services inside the camps. It analyses various surveys carried out by Palestinian Return Centre – London in March 2012, in addition to other statistics issued by other organizations working closely with the refugees, in particular United Nations Work and Relief in the Near East (UNRWA) and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Furthermore, the chapter uses interviews that took place with activists and figures in the field of refugees to provide a detailed perspective on their situation. It will also provide a comparative analysis between camps in the West Bank and other regions.

Before we begin, some important considerations need attention. The first relates to the reality of living inside refugee camps, where it has changed.

* This is an extract from the book Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank: Research on their Demography And Determination of Return, published by PRC
over the past six decades. The demographic situation is not the same, social relations overlapped and became complicated, economic demands increased, new forms of social interactions and bonds were created which began to have political significance. However, the camp remained the face of Palestinian suffering and the focus of injustice.

Secondly, refugees living under occupation have felt the brunt of the occupation such as water shortage and settler attacks. Extreme repression was felt by the refugees enduring Israeli occupation, which deprived them not only from returning to their homes but also from taking control of their lives and having economic freedom and prosperity. These features of the Palestine refugee experience, though important to grasp in their own right, will not be the main focus of this study which will take a long term view regarding provisions and services provided to Palestinian refugees, their views about the services and attempts by outside organizations to settle them permanently.

A final note is that no formal statistics or documents are available for organizations that deal with refugees and their residential areas. For instance, UNRWA statistics only include the registered refugees, while the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) concentrates on Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in general.

1- Demographic Reality inside West Bank Refugee Camps

The study of the demographic reality of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank shows the reality of being a refugee under occupation in the West Bank. It also highlights the dramatic changes that have been taking place in the camps over the long decades of displacement, especially changes related to the number of refugees and their future aspirations. In addition it provides an insight into various important issues about future challenges that are split into generations and gender.

1.1 Population:

At the end of 2011, the global Palestinian population was approximately 11.2 million. Number of registered refugees at UNRWA, in the same period, was nearly 5.1 million refugees and they represent 45.6% of the total of Palestinians. Of the registered refugees, there are nearly 59.1% in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, 17.1% in the West Bank and 23.8% in the Gaza Strip. According to UNRWA, at the beginning of 2012, there were 1,897,471 registered refugees in the occupied territories, 1,170,000 refugees in the Gaza Strip and 727,471 refugees in the West Bank.

Also in 2011, residents of West Bank and Gaza Strip totalled at 4.2 million of whom 44.1% are refugees. West Bank inhabitants were 2.6 million Palestinians, 30% of them are refugees, while Gaza Strip has 1.6 million residents, and 67% of them are refugees.

There are figures which show that there were demographic changes related to the number of refugees in both parts of the occupied territory, Gaza and West Bank. They show that the period (1997-2000) witnessed an increase in refugee numbers in some areas and some areas there was also a decrease. For example, the percentage of refugees out of the total residents in Jerusalem reduced from 40.8% to 31.4%, while the percentage rose in Qalqiliya from 39.9% to 47%. In Jenin, the percentage also grew from 28.8% to 32.8% and in Jericho, where there is the largest rate of refugees compared with residents, it increased from 49.7% to 51.3% in 1997. The lowest percentage of refugees was in Salfeet, where it grew from 7.7% to 8.3% (1997-2007).

Despite high rates of fertility among refugees in the West Bank, there are other reasons behind the
large number. The figures can be attributed to historic and geo-economic characteristics found only in some regions. For instance, Qalqiliya is very close to the Green Line and the largest portion of its lands were confiscated in 1948, which forced displaced Palestinians to flee, especially with the strong social and historic relations between Qalqiliya and the surrounding lands occupied in 1948. Moreover, many Palestinians from Gaza Strip came to live in Qalqiliya, in the last few years, because it is near to work sites in the Green Line. Also large number of its residents left due to the tight siege. These factors contributed in the increase of refugees in Qalqiliya.

The high percentage of refugees in Jericho compared with its residents is because Jericho received large numbers of displaced persons after the Nakba due to its agricultural lands and water resources. Even though many refugees left during the 1967 war, still they represent nearly 50% of Jericho's population. It became a place of residence for “returnees”, including a considerable number of refugees, following the Oslo Accords in 1994.

The reason behind the decrease of refugees number in other areas can be best explained by the political, administrative and population factors. For example, in Jerusalem, such reduction was due to Israel's occupation practices, in particular the apartheid wall, cancelling identification documents, expelling Palestinians … etc. In Salfeet, the reduction is because of its small area, it has no camps within its borders and is a newly established governorate as it was part of Nablus before the arrival of Palestinian National Authority.

Official Palestinian statistics shows that the largest number of refugees in the West Bank is located in Nablus (34,225 refugees), meanwhile the smallest is in Tubas (6,658 refugees). The highest percentage of refugees compared with total of city residents is in Jericho (24.4%) and the lowest is in Hebron (2.6%). The large refugee population in Nablus has made it the largest city with refugees in the West Bank. Nablus has three camps with high population density such as; Balata, the highest, and Tubas in Tubas. Jericho has a large percentage of refugees compared with residents due to its historical role in accommodating displaced refugees during Nakba and establishing camps for them.

It is important to know that the inhabitants of West Bank camps are declining. The percentage of refugees out of the total number of residents was 15.9% in 1997 and in 2011 it reduced to 9.4%. It seems that the reason for this decline is the immigration from camps, mostly by young spouses, to settle in urban areas like cities to avoid over crowdedness in the camps. This allows them to improve their income through working inside the Green Line and Gulf countries.

Some have expressed their concerns about the increased emigration from the camps, especially by its more educated residents. This has negative consequences on the social, cultural and economic structure of the refugee camp, as the more educated people leave.

1.2 Age categories

PCBS resources show that the refugees community in the Palestinian territories is young. In 2011, refugees who are under 15 years represented 41.7% of the refugee population. The percentage of children in the Palestinian territories is 44% of whom 29% are located in the West Bank and 66% in Gaza Strip. Such percentage is identical with refugees’ distribution in general. While UNRWA statistics shows that 31% of the registered refugees are under 15 and those who are under 18 represent nearly 38%. 
Table (2) shows number of refugees and their percentages in West Bank camps with Urban and Countryside (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>Residents number</th>
<th>Refugees number</th>
<th>Refugees % out of residents</th>
<th>Countryside residents</th>
<th>Urban residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tulkarem</td>
<td>172,224</td>
<td>18,663</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>37,808</td>
<td>115,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nablus</td>
<td>356,129</td>
<td>34,225</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>125,326</td>
<td>192,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubas</td>
<td>58,586</td>
<td>6,658</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>12,883</td>
<td>39,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenin</td>
<td>288,511</td>
<td>11,660</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>106,883</td>
<td>169,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramallah</td>
<td>319,418</td>
<td>18,557</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>135,159</td>
<td>165,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jericho</td>
<td>48,041</td>
<td>11,733</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>10,802</td>
<td>25,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebron</td>
<td>641,170</td>
<td>16,820</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>77,240</td>
<td>547,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>396,710</td>
<td>9,602</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>44,252</td>
<td>342,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>199,463</td>
<td>14,596</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>44,932</td>
<td>139,935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Fertility rates

A remarkable change in fertility rates in the Palestinian territories has occurred in the last ten years. The rate decreased from 6.0 infants per couple in 1997 to 4.2 ones in 2010. This trend also continued in the West Bank where the rate reduced from 5.6 in 1197 to 3.8 in 2010.

Fertility rates are more in refugee camps and they reached to 4.6 infants in 2010, while it was 4.2 in the countryside and 4.0 in the urban. It seems that the difference in fertility rates in Palestinian territories between refugees and residents is not immense since it was 4.1 infants among refugees in 2010 and 4.2 for other residents(8).

The fertility rates among refugees continued to decline until they were less than that of the residents. This trend is more obvious if we take a longer perspective by looking at the rates between 1983 and 1994, when the rate was 6.17 infants.(9) Clearly, this trend was affected by several factors. This included accessibility to better education, economic improvement and cultural and social changes, which the Palestinian society underwent in general.

PCBS records show that fertility rates among female refugees inside Palestinian territories is higher than they are in Diaspora. In 2008-2009, it was 4.3 infants, 3.3 in Jordan and 2.5 in Syria.

It also noticeable that fertility rate outside refugee camps is lower than the camps. The reason is due to the refugees themselves who live outside the camp. We find that they are more educated and have good living conditions.

1.4 Mortality rates

In 2005-2010, mortality rates among infants in the Palestinian territories were 20.6 for each 1000 born. It was 18.8 in the West Bank and 23.0 in the Gaza Strip. However amongst the refugees the rates were 23.7 for each 1000 born.(10) The rates show a disparity in the gender breakdown based on previous statistics. Infant mortality rates inside West Bank camps are 29.5 for each 1000 born Male infants and 21.9 for female infants. While, in Gaza Strip camps the rates are 32.9 for male infants and 23.4 for female infants.(11)

Due to the connection between mortality rates and other factors such as health services, education
and social services, the above mentioned statistics indicate that the living conditions of non-refugees are better than refugees. Furthermore, they also indicate that the reality of West Bank refugees is better than that of the Gaza Strip.

2- Social reality of West Bank refugees

Through the available statistics on social conditions of the West Bank refugees, we notice that the refugees who are inside camps display worse indicators than refugees who live outside the camps.

2.1 Health

There is significant improvement in health provisions over years due to the hard work of refugees. A clinic was opened in each registered refugee camp by UNRWA; medical teams were able to treat widespread diseases in camps such as Cholera and Typhoid. The huge gap in terms of health provisions to refugees, woman and children was significantly bridged. Some resources confirm that health provision of West bank refugees is the best among other residential Palestinian areas.(12)

2.2 Woman and Child Health

Woman and child health is one of development standards in the refugee camps. According to many sources, health improved dramatically. For example, most of the refugee women could access clinics during pregnancy.

There is date which indicates a dissimilarity between health of new born refugees inside a camps and those outside camps. Regarding chronic diseases in refugee camps, we notice that they are higher among male children than females and they are higher among refugees inside the camp than outside.(13)

Regarding vaccination, some statistics shows that 82% of children (12-23 months) in West Bank camps had their vaccination. The percentage of refugee children, who suffer from malnutrition, is high (10%) compared with other refugee camps. Nearly 34% of refugee children (under 3 years) in the West Bank had Anemia and 22% of children (under 5 years) suffer from lack or vitamins.(14)

2.3 UNRWA and Health reality in West Bank refugee camps

UNRWA is responsible for health services inside refugee camps. According to its resources, it works in conformity with standards of World Health Organization and other Millennium Development Health Goals. In many events, UNRWA declared that it seeks to empower refugees to live long healthy life through guarantee reaching for distinct comprehensive services, fight and control diseases and protect family health.

UNRWA divides its work in the health sector into four parts which include health care services, health and environment in refugee camps, nutrition and administrative program. It has more than 127 health centres offering health provisions. In the West Bank, UNRWA runs 41 centres and one hospital in Qalqiliya with working staff consists of 1,022 employees. This amounts to 28.5% of all UNRWA employees in the health field. UNRWA centres provide services for woman, children, family planning and medical labs in 41 centres and dental health in 22 centres. Moreover, 42 centres have services for blood pressure and diabetes and in 2011; these centres received nearly 1,860,265 patients.
UNRWA statistics shows that it doubled its health care in some residential areas in the West Bank, especially areas where occupation is at its most repressive, such as’ apartheid wall, settlement, check points and displacement. Due to the increased strain in more hostile areas of the occupation, UNRWA declared that it has prepared five mobile medial teams. These teams offer basic services for nearly 13,000 patients per month in more than 150 isolated remote places.

Upon comparison between UNRWA services in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, we find an obvious discrepancy. Although the registered number of refugees and patients, who regularly visit UNRWA centres, in the Gaza Strip is higher than the West Bank, the number of health centres in Gaza is half of that in the West Bank.

UNRWA statistics mentioned above shows that the level of health services provided to Palestinian refugees did not retract, but the actual situation indicates the opposite. A good instance of this is the data showing that each doctor examines nearly 95 patients per day, while the international standard recommends 70 patients. Furthermore, some resources in UNRWA referred to the ill-preparedness of the health sector to deal with emergencies. This happened in 2006, when a crisis in salaries occurred to governmental employees and the number of patients and visitors to UNRWA centres increased to 100%. On the other hand, transfers to hospitals reached 35% and UNRWA was unable to deal with such an increased demand.

The refugees whom we met during our study and survey show their appreciation of UNRWA health services. However, the reduction in such services became questionable and raised worries among Palestinian refugees. It seems that this decline was not in the few past years, but it began gradually in the 1970s due to the shortage of UNRWA budget.

On several occasions, refugees complained about the shortage in UNRWA medicines including availability, lack of labs, medical equipment and working staff, especially the low number of specialized doctors. Also General practitioners who work in UNRWA centres have reduced working hours from 8 am to 2 pm.

2.4 Education

PCBS (Palestinian Centre for Bureau and Statistics) resources concerning education in the Palestinian territories provide comparative data between refugees and non-refugees. Statistics shows that refugees that are 15 years and above with an undergraduate or postgraduate degrees represent 10.7%, while non-refugees are 10.4%. Education enrolment percentage for those who are 5 years and above was 44.5% for refugees (44.2% for males and 44.8% for females), while it was 43.8% for non-refugees (42.8 for males and 44.9% for females)(15)

Figures also show this is a higher illiteracy among refugees compared with others. The percentage was 4.9% for those who are 15 years and above, while it was 5.2% among non-refugees. There are statistical dissimilarities in favour of refugees in terms of reading and writing where it is 95.1% for those who are 15 years and above (97.6% for males and 92.7 for females), while it was 94.8% for non-refugees (97.5 for males and 92.2% for females).(16)

Many researchers explain the high percentage of education inside refugee as being the fruits of extremely positive attitude towards education. This proves what we have mentioned above about PCBS statistics concerning refugees of age 10 – 24 years. PCBS shows that 58.8% in the West Bank and Gaza Strip put education as their priority even before marriage, immigration, other health, and financial conditions. In the West Bank, the percentage was 57.9% and it is remarkable that 58.4% of the refugees chose education despite other difficulties they endure.(17)
There are other related factors; education by Palestinians is seen as one of the ways to reproduce and prove the Palestinian identity. Second, education is the essential weapon to confront occupation and to achieve the dream of return. Third, it could be the sole means for refugees to improve their living conditions. Finally, UNRWA educational program played a unifying role in the life of Palestinians. In spite of the significance of these factors, we should also pay attention to the development of educational sector in Palestine during the end of Ottoman era and during the British mandate. Palestine was one of the areas to see positive infrastructural work in the areas of education compared surrounding areas. This produced a group of cultivated people who took part in reorganizing and strengthening education after Nakba among Palestinians faster than ever before.

2.5 UNRWA and Education Reality in West Bank refugee camps
Talking about education among Palestinian refugees cannot be comprehensive without shedding light on UNRWA’s role in spreading education in camps. According UNRWA statistics in the beginning of 2012, there were 98 schools in West Bank out of 699 schools under UNRWA. There are also 3 vocational training centres out of 10 centres, 2 colleges for educational sciences (4-year college) out of 3 and 1,216 places for vocational training out of 6,652 places, while schools students numbered 52,633 out of 486,754 students in the five working domains of UNRWA.\(^{(18)}\)

Due to the essential effort that UNRWA exerts in the field of education, especially schools, it is necessary to focus on some phenomena connected to UNRWA schools in the West Bank to have a clear picture of its vital role.

First is related to students’ number in these schools in terms of gender. Latest statistics of UNRWA shows the continuing increase of females over males. The percentage was 58.2% and it is the highest among other sectors of UNRWA. We see the percentage in Gaza Strip is 48.1% and 48.1% in Jordan.\(^{(19)}\)

Some have explained this by citing the signed agreement between UNRWA and Jordanian government in 1967, where UNRWA was assigned the task of educating female’s refugees and non-refugees at basic grades in the villages, and the Jordanian government was assigned the task of educating males at same grades. In addition to that, number of male refugees study at governmental or private schools outside their camps, meanwhile girls do not benefit from this due to social reasons.

Second issue is related to non-refugee students in UNRWA schools in the West Bank. A prior study highlighted the high percentage of students in the West Bank (20%) compared with Gaza Strip (3%). These students were increasingly found in Jericho (57.9%), then Hebron (34.8%), Tubas (27.5%) and finally Jerusalem (23.1%).\(^{(20)}\)

These villages were evacuated in 1967 war and UNRWA, according to its operational criterion, does not them as refugees. Furthermore, UNRWA laws permit non-refugee students to study at its schools if they are living 3 km or more from any governmental school.

Finally, the development of UNRWA schools in the West Bank is also explained by its improved infrastructure. 18 schools are fully equipped and nearly all schools, except one or two, work one shift, unlike other regions where UNRWA give provisions.

2.6 Indications of Education Regression in UNRWA schools in the West Bank
Despite the gratitude that refugees show to UNRWA for its educational services, over the past few years, there has been increasing criticism of the services it delivers. Many refugees complained about the declining level of education provided in UNRWA schools in the West Bank.
Basic problems of UNRWA educational services are centred on a number of issues. There has been an overall regression in results, where educational sector at UNRWA was outperformed by state schools. Contrastingly, learning outcomes in other regions seem to be better, for example, same test were conducted and they found that UNRWA educational sector was in the lead in Jordan. The crowded classrooms are one of the problems.

If we held a simple comparison between UNRWA and governmental schools in terms of premises and educational technologies in 2010-2011, we would find that UNRWA school are in a declining state, although, historically, UNRWA services were much better than government’s. For example, 66.1% of governmental schools have scientific labs compared to 48.2% for UNRWA; 72.4% of government schools have libraries while only 61.6% of UNRWA schools have libraries and for each 21.4 students in governmental schools, there is a teacher, while UNRWA has a teacher for each 28.7 students. (21)

3- Economic reality in West Bank camps

The economic condition of refugee camps in the West Bank is unique. Unlike other refugee residential areas in Diaspora, the situation in the West Bank is cohesive with the general economy, especially because of the large number of refugees and the legal equality between refugees and non-refugees. However, the economy in West Bank refugee camps, is fragile and unstable. It experiences many fundamental shifts since its occupation in 1967, and became integrated with the occupational infrastructure.

The survey in March 2012 by Palestinian Return Centre shows the nature of economic activities of refugees in West Bank camps. For instance, 9.6% of the refugees stated that they work in governmental sector, 20.5% said that they work in construction and 10.7% said that they work in private sector. While 6% of refugees work with UNRWA, 5.4% work in commerce and 9.9% work on special crafts. Jalazun camp, according to the survey, has the highest percentage in terms of governmental jobs (16.4%), while Deir Ammar camp has the lowest (5.3%). Jalazun camp high figures is due to its geographic location and being very close to Ramallah, which is the political governmental centre in the West Bank. Furthermore, most of the refugees, who were unemployed when PNA took control, preferred to join the government, especially those that held academic qualification. In addition to that, Jalazun camp was known for following and applying rules of official bodies of PNA. On the other hand, the low percentage of governmental employment in Deir Ammar camp can be attributed to the fact that most of the refugees work in 1947 territories as the camp is near employment.

Regarding UNRWA employees, figures show that their percentages in the camps are few. In Jenin camp, is 3.3% and in Balata, it’s 6%. Deir Ammar camp had the highest percentage 10.5%.

According to the PRC survey, unemployment rate among refugees is 28.7%, which is a close reflection of PCBS figures 29.5%. (22) In Deir Ammar camp, the percentage was the largest (42.1%) and in Ein al-Sultan, it was the lowest (13.3%).

Unemployment among females is high (82.8%), while it was 17.8% among male refugees. This necessarily does not represent economic failing but instead reflects the social and cultural moors of the regions as a whole. We find the conservative values are dominating in terms of women work, which increased unemployment among females.
Table (3) shows percentages of workers and employees at different sectors according to PRC survey – March 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Jenin</th>
<th>Nur Shams</th>
<th>Balata</th>
<th>Jalazun</th>
<th>Deir Ammar</th>
<th>Shu'fat</th>
<th>Ein al-Sultan</th>
<th>Aida</th>
<th>Arroub</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governmental employee</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA employee</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector employee</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsman</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table (4) shows the relationship between Gender and Unemployment (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education level also plays an essential role in alleviating unemployment. For instance, percentage of unemployment among those refugees who finished their secondary school is less than those that not complete secondary school. It is 21.6% for those that didn’t complete secondary school and 13.7% for those who hold bachelor degree.

Table (5) shows relationship between Unemployment and Education (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary or less</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school (Tawjihi) or less</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unemployment percentage is high (37.6%) among those who are (31-45 years), while it is 33.2% among those who are (18-30 years) and it decreases among those who are (46-55 years) 14.3%.

Table (6) shows relationship between Unemployment and Age category (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age category</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 and above</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1 Living levels, conditions and the surrounding environment

PCBS data shows that living standards in the West Bank refugee camps are more basic compared to non-refugee communities living in urban and rural areas. This is clearly highlighted by comparing indicators such as the average monthly family expenditure, average spending on food out of total spending, levels of poverty and type of accommodation.

Spending indicators in refugee camps reveals that they are at low levels compared with other groups.
of Palestinian society. Monthly average spending for a family of five (2 adults and 3 children) in the camp was 717.7 Jordanian Dinars compared to 876.5 JD for families in rural areas and 910.7 JD in urban areas. Food spending percentage out of the total spending was 40% in the camps, 37.2% in the countryside and 35.7% in the urban.

Such disparities are obvious in the individual spending too. In the urban area, it is 152.1 JD, 144.3 JD in the rural areas and 118.1 JD in the camps. According to results of poverty distribution on population, poverty percentage among refugees was 32.4% , 25.8% in the urban and 21.8% in the rural areas. Regarding extreme poverty, it is 13.9% in the camps, 14.6% in the urban and 12.1% in the rural areas.(23)

Endnote:
1 Ms. Awad talks about conditions of Palestinians through figures and statistics on the 64th anniversary of Nakba (Press release) electronic website of PCBS: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopModules/Articles/ArticlesView.aspx?tabID=0&lang=ar-JO&ItemID=2164&mid=11709 (date of visit 15/5/2012).
2 UNRWA in numbers, UNRWA website: http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2012031651021.pdf (date of visit 10/5/2012). This census includes UNRWA's categorization of those of who are “other registered refugees) and they identified by being capable to receive services, in addition to 14 employees in the health sector and 15 employees in the social and relief services existed in the headquarter – Amman. If they were added to the above mentioned number, the total number of Palestinians according to UNRWA is 2,092,146, and that number does not include unregistered refugees at UNRWA.
3 Ms. Awad talks about conditions of Palestinians through figures and statistics on the 64th anniversary of Nakba (Press release) a previous resource. There some reports say that percentage of refugees in the West Bank is 37%. For more information, see Al Arab newspaper – Qatar 28/1/2012.
8 A special issue about Palestinians upon the anniversary of reaching seven billions individuals in the world. Page 31
10 A special issue about Palestinians upon the anniversary of reaching seven billions individuals in the world, page 33.
14 Ibid
15 A special issue about Palestinians upon the anniversary of reaching seven billions individuals in the world. A previous resource, page 40
16 Ibid, Page 42
19 Ibid
20 These words are for Monir Dedas, director of education at UNRWA, upon commenting on the reality of educational services at UNRWA schools in the West Bank. For more information about that, see Said Salamah and others (Education program in UNRWA schools – West Bank) Ramallah. Refugees Affairs department 2009, page 19.
22 A special issue of Palestinian upon the anniversary of reaching to seven billion individuals in the world, a previous resource, page 46
23 PCBS estimated poverty rate for families of 5 members with $609, while rate of extreme poverty was $478. For more information, see the previous resource, page 52-53
It goes without saying, after six decades of ethnic cleansing and exile, the Palestinian situation is as precarious as ever. Exile, a cycle of violence, displacement followed by resettlement has now become the hallmark of the Palestinian people. For some, even before they are able to digest one tragedy another follows. The unique vulnerabilities that come with statelessness and being refugee is vividly demonstrated by the terrible crimes committed in Syria.

This is also a month of intense retrospection, as we pass through the 20th anniversary of the Oslo Accords and the 31st anniversary of the Sabra and Shatilla Massacre. Both in their own way encapsulate the different dimension of the Plight of the Palestinian people and their just cause. This paper will take stock of major issues facing the Palestinian refugee now while commenting on the disastrous political failures in bringing an end to violence, exile and discrimination of the Palestinians. It will also stress the legal rights of Palestinian refugees taking note of Israel’s unique role and responsibility in perpetuating the refuge crises.

We believe that at the heart of the Palestinian issue is the plight of the Palestinian refugees and their human rights. Comprising of 70% of the global Palestinian population, they represent the most significant and important Palestinian constituency. Failure to recognize this as the central pillar of the Israeli Palestinian issue and the nucleus of the Palestinian struggle since their ethnic cleansing in 1948 is a disastrous oversight.

We should remind ourselves of the fact that following the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948, and the endless displacement of Palestinians, 7 million are now refugees. Their plight and the restoration of their rights is firmly and explicitly grounded in international law and reaffirmed by various United Nations resolution such as 194, which affirms Palestinian right to protection, return and compensation.

The first UN mediator, Count Bernadotte gave ringing statements declaring that it would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes, while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine”.

Over the years many attempts were made to resolve the problem through political discussions between Israel and its Arab neighbors during the spring and summer of 1949 (Lausanne talks) and during the fall and winter of 1951 (Paris talks), but they proved futile. Thousands of Palestinians also

tried to return to their homes by themselves only to be faced by bullets and hostility. Given the nature of their historical exile, born in violence and maintained through violations of international principals and law, the vast majority of Palestinians are acutely aware of their historical, moral and legal right to return. The rights and principals governing their fate is non-negotiable, not because Palestinians are stubborn, but because they are championed by the full spectrum and body of International Law.

It is not an overstatement when we say that in history of democracy, it is hard to find another example in modern times where the leaders bypassed the major constituency of nearly 70% on an issue that is so fundamental to them. For the Palestinian People, their success in keeping the issue of refugees alive, even after six decades of concerted effort by Israel and its allies to undermine, diminish and dissolve the right of refugees is faced by commensurate political failures in bringing about tangible results for their cause. While Oslo reinvigorated and remobilized the Palestinian refugees across the globe on a grass root level, politically their rights were being snubbed.

Without international law as a reference and an anchor to guide the political process, human rights and international law were hijacked by the ethics of power politics and political expediency. Oslo in essence became not an instrument for decolonization and enforcing human rights but an instrument through which Israel changed the basis for continuing its ongoing occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The result of this monumental failure to address the major pillar of the Palestinian cause has been an endless cycle of failed negotiations while Palestinian refugees are exposed to terrible conditions. After 20 years of Oslo there is no guarantee that there will not be another Sabra and Shatilla. If we look at the most pressing humanitarian issues we see the terrible price paid by Palestinian refugees for political failures.

**SYRIA**

The plight of Palestinian refugees in Syria is the most recent indicator of the grave threats and
violence faced by Palestinians. The sectarian violence in Syria is indiscriminate and in the context of the level of violence that is being perpetrated singling out Palestinians may appear morally questionably. However, as Iraq and many previous incidences of political instability in the Middle East has demonstrated, Palestinians due to their refugee status and without a state are uniquely exposed to human rights abuse. As refugees, they are on the one hand host of the regime, which has shown good faith towards the Palestinians, and on the other, they are part of Syrian society and live with the Syrian people.

According to UNRWA 420,000 (80%) of the Palestinian population in Syria need urgent emergency assistance. 90,000 families require emergency food assistance, only six health centre's out of 23 remain open and only 49 out of 118 schools continue to teach. Latest estimates are that around 2000 Palestinians have been killed in Syria and 80% are displaced and a further 60,000 have fled to neighboring Jordan and Lebanon.

This crisis has again exposed failures within the existing protection regime. For Palestinians, the lack of protection and violations of human rights represents a major disparity between the rights enshrined under international law and their application. This gap exists at a time when the laws governing the rights and protection of refugees reached the status of peremptory norms under international law and are clearly anchored in its many different bodies.

It is very clear that no other refugee community in the world is excluded from sufficient levels of protection. UNRWA has played an essential part as a humanitarian agency in assistant Palestinians. Unfortunately the perception that UNRWA looks after the Palestinian en-block in every respect has concealed its limitations to the detriment of Palestinians. The practical manifestation of this is that Palestinians are denied the full umbrella of protection and experience increased discrimination, limited access to provisions and of course a just and fair resolution.

In Jordan, hundreds of Palestinian refugees who fled Syria have been crammed into a poorly equipped living facility known as Cyber City, about 90km north of the capital, Amman. Human Rights Watch and other organizations have decried the mistreatment of refugees in Cyber City, reporting forced deportations back to Syria, and the prisoner-like status of those who have remained in Jordan. There is a clear distinction in treatment Palestinians refugees. While it allows Syrian Nationals, as soon as it established their identity and has carried out proper security checks, to enter Jordan, Palestinians are offered no such provisions and are kept apart and held in detention centre's. Many families have been separated because of its discrimination.

UNRWA also does not have the resource to accommodate such a surge in forceful displacement. In Lebanon for example where 40,000 Palestinians have fled, it's only the support of the local Palestinian people that has prevented starvation and death. There are many families opening their doors to Palestinians some are accommodating 20 to 30 people in a two bedroom flat.

The solution to the refugees is to return them to their homes. If the great powers had insisted on Israel repatriating refugees after the 1948 Nakba as was demanded by the international community, the refugee problem would not exist today.

GAZA

The siege on Gaza has been tightened on both the Israeli and Egyptian side. There is an economic and medical crises for the 1.7 million people in Gaza. The latest OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of
Human Affairs) report shows the Egyptian authorities restricted the operation of the tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border, which are used for the entry of construction materials, fuel and goods otherwise unavailable or available at a higher price from Israel. The Egyptian authorities also tightened controls on the Rafah passenger crossing, Gaza's main access to the outside world. The crossing was closed entirely for six days, before reopening partially for the rest of the month, with passage limited to certain categories of people. “The average number of people passing per day in July was 540, less than 30 percent of the approximately 1,860 who crossed daily in June. With the border so restricted, the effect on people traveling for medical care has been severe. The Palestinian Authority health ministry routinely refers patients in Gaza for treatment at hospitals in Egypt or Israel – services for which it must pay – due to the inadequacy of health services in the occupied territory. In July, however, “a total of 131 patients, of whom 22 were children up to 17 years old, were referred by the [health ministry] to Egypt, less than half the usual number,” OCHA reported. Since the coup in Egypt, OCHA reports, “the Ministry of Health in Gaza began restricting X-rays and limiting certain drugs to emergency use only, due to low supplies and the unreliable flow of medical supplies via the Rafah Crossing.”

**OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs) also adds:**

Twenty-five percent of [Gaza's] drug supplies are normally received from, or through, Egypt via this crossing. Two principal Egyptian donors, the Arab Physicians Union and the Physicians Syndicate, are expected to halt donations to Gaza in view of current urgent needs in Egypt. These groups have played a crucial role as a source for rapid supply of critical items, such as dialysis solutions, common chemotherapy drugs, for kidney transplant patients and treatments for other chronic blood disease conditions. Any sustained gap in the supply of these items would have immediate negative impact on patients. The Human Appeal International (United Arab Emirates) and Qatar Red Crescent also provide donations to the MoH in Gaza via Rafah, but according to the MoH, only one drug shipment has been received via that route since 30 June, from an Italian NGO.

Egypt has intensified its efforts to destroy the tunnels under the border with Gaza, that are a vital lifeline for the territory's economy. Because of Israel's embargo, OCHA says, the “tunnels remain the main entry point for the transfer of construction materials into the Gaza Strip.”

**OCHA reports:**

The Palestinian Federation of Industries estimated that, on average, around 1,500 tons of construction materials entered Gaza through the tunnels per day, compared to 7,500 tons prior to the imposition of the recent measures. The price of construction materials on local markets rose sharply before declining to between 20 to 30 percent above the normal price by the end of the month, and leading to a sharp slowdown in construction activities and the operation of concrete mix factories. The crackdown on the tunnels has also caused chronic shortages of fuel. Meanwhile, Israel has attempted to paint the situation in Gaza as normal, or even flourishing, as when it published a cynical piece of propaganda claiming that Gaza is prospering.

Under the 1993 Oslo accords, Palestinians are supposed to be able to fish up to 20 nautical miles from the coast of Gaza. But Israel violently enforces a unilateral three-mile limit in violation of the agreements.

Since the ceasefire agreement after Israel's November 2012 attack on Gaza, there has been a sharp increase in Israeli attacks on fishing boats, according to OCHA: The number of violent incidents...
recorded during the first half of 2013, in the context of the enforcement of access restrictions at sea by the Israeli Navy, significantly increased compared to the previous six months (July-December 2012): shooting incidents more than doubled.

**WEST BANK and JORDAN VALLEY**

In the West Bank and Jordan Valley there are daily threats to Palestinian farmers and residents. OCHA reports that an estimated 90 Palestinian communities in the West Bank which have land within or in the vicinity of 55 Israeli settlements and outposts and require “prior coordination” to access their land. However, the prior coordination regime places the onus on farmers who must adapt their access to their private land, rather than on Israeli settlers whose presence in the West Bank is in contravention of international law.

Recent damage to olive trees in the West Bank highlights ongoing concerns regarding settler violence and restricted access to private Palestinian land located within settlements and nature reserves, particularly in light of the upcoming olive harvest. In July, more than 1,150 olive trees belonging to 23 Palestinian families from ‘Awarta village in Nablus were cut down or damaged inside the perimeter fence of Itamar settlement. This is one of the largest such incidents since OCHA began recording settler-related incidents in 2005. So far in 2013, OCHA has recorded damage to 7,272 Palestinian-owned trees and saplings by Israeli settlers.

In khirbet al Ras al Ahmar, in the Jordan Valley Bedouin communities have been displaced due to Israeli demolitions. Just this month, four Palestinian structures have been demolished and more worryingly Over 70 Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli forces across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**GAZA CAMP JORDAN**

One of the bleakest prospect facing Palestinian refugees are those from Gaza refugee camp in Jordan. The camp is home to about 24,000 Palestinian refugees who left the Gaza Strip in 1968. Most of the families living there were also displaced in 1948, meaning that they have lost their homes twice in one lifetime. The majority live on less than $2 a day. About a quarter live on less than one. The vast majority of the population (at least 97.19%) do not enjoy their full civil rights. A 95.8% possesses a temporary Jordanian passport (two years passport), 1.02% an Egyptian document, and 0.37% lacks any document. The percentage of the population registered as refugees with UNRWA (i.e. entitled to receive UNRWA services) is estimated at 93%. Meanwhile, the remaining 7% are considered as ‘displaced’ and are not entitled to all UNRWA services and do not receive services or protection from other international organizations.

The legal situation of the population of Gaza Camp has had many implications. For instance, they do not enjoy citizenship rights like voting, working for the government, benefiting from all government services, or even having access to all jobs in the private sector.

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) lead several political delegations to Jordan including Gaza Camp. The overriding reaction by British MPs was astonishment . some commented how a place like this existed in Jordan? It was one of the most poverty stricken areas they’d ever witnessed. Sewage was flowing on the street as we drove around. No one took the slightest trouble to even try to create some sort of a sewage system. They imagined what kinds of health risks were caused by this phenomenon alone. How many children playing on the streets accidentally slipped into it? How many balls fell down and were then picked up by children? This scene was a disastrous sight.
The Jordanian government does not actually recognize any of the people living in the refugee camp and consider them persona non grata. Thus, none of them have a national ID, which also means they have no access to any governmental benefits, be it social, economic or political. This also means that they cannot legally work at a number of jobs, such as banks or other public positions and are limited to blue collared labor instead. It also means they are not entitled to representation in government. Unfortunately, the problems of the Gaza refugee camp residents are not limited to legalities and official paperwork. Many of the men in the camp prefer marrying a Jordanian resident, leaving many women at the camp not married. Other social problems include no access to nursery homes for old people – such services are reserved for official residents.

**GAP IN LEGAL PROTECTION**

Six decades since the beginning of their exile, Palestinian refugees are still denied the rights and protection guaranteed under international law. Their lack of protection and violations of their rights, represents a major disparity between the rights enshrined under international law and their application. This gap exists at a time when the laws governing the rights and protection of refugees reached the status of peremptory norms under international law and are clearly anchored in its many different bodies.

It is also one of the tragic ironies of this ongoing crisis that, Palestinian refugees have to endure this failure, given that the international community sought to provide a heightened protection mechanism for them by instituting two separate bodies, the United Nations Conciliatory Committee for Palestine (UNCCP) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), to actualize their rights and guarantee its protection.

Israel’s refusal to allow Palestinians to return to their home, has resulted, not only in the longest refugee crises in modern history, but has also institutionalized the exile of 7 million Palestinians. This mammoth failure has been the root of ongoing displacement and new cycles of violence and exile for millions of others. Furthermore, Israel’s illegal, incessant, expansionist policy continues to add to the number of refugees and displaced persons.

Israel is historically responsible for the plight of millions of Palestinian refugees by blocking their return. Israel also, as an occupying power, which continues to create new refugees, needs to take responsibility for the protection of Palestinians under its authority.

For Palestinian refugees, the existence of a two tier refugee regime (UNRWA solely serves Palestinians and UNHCR for the rest of the world) has failed to protect their basic human rights as refugees. There is an inconsistency, worldwide, in the treatment of Palestinian refugees. This has to be reversed, at least conceptually. All refugees experience a level of discrimination as a result of states not being a signatory to the Refugee Convention. This is multiplied manifold for Palestinians, even in states that are signatory to the Convention. This comes as a result of either, Non-incorporation of Article 1D in national legislation, or non application of Article 1D and thirdly, as a result of erroneous interpretation. Some of course interpret the Article in its proper meaning.

**CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

There isn’t enough time to take stock of all the difficult challenges faced by Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian people as a whole. I want to finish in the same vein as I started which is to commemorate the major events of September for the Palestinian people.
With this meeting convened in September at the United Nations, it is fitting we remember Count folk Bernadotte, the first UN mediator for Palestine, who was brutally murdered by Israeli terrorists on 17 September 1948. He understood best when he said “It is ... undeniable that no settlement can be just and complete if recognition is not accorded to the right of the Arab refugee to return to the home from which he has been dislodged by the hazards and strategy of the armed conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. The majority of these refugees have come from territory which ... was to be included in the Jewish State. It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes, while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine.

It seems he understood best what our politicians failed to understand 65 years later, that at the core of the issue is the right of Palestinian refugees, and resolution that fails to address this will be unjust, unfair and politically illegitimate and unenforceable.

This failure has caused Palestinians to pay the highest price with no sign that the renewed talks would bring about anything positive. Are we any closer to reconciliation, resolution and peace? All the signs are that Palestinians have paid the highest price? And our fears have become nightmares. Israel continues to occupy Palestinian land and made occupation a permanent reality. All the signs indicate that even by the low standards of Oslo there is no success for Palestinians only more of the same.

Israel however has total control of Palestinian land and resource. Settlements continue unabated sprawling all across the West Bank. Jerusalem has been cut off from the West Bank with illegal Walls and checkpoints. Israel now claims entire Jerusalem for itself hoping to turn it into their capital city. Palestinians farmers face intimidation and violence from settlers who collude with Israeli soldiers. Thousands of Palestinian still faces detention without trial, and millions still endure an ongoing siege and a matrix of checkpoints and control.

On top of that, Israel refuses to recognize our rights as refugees. It denies any responsibility for the ethnic cleansing, expulsion and theft of Palestinian land, even when evidence is clearly to the contrary.

Without consent and approval, our historical, moral and legal rights are put up for political bartering to appease Israel’s colonial aspirations.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize the following points:

• The Palestinian refugees are at the brutal end of a failed resolution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict.

• A political process that is not connected to International law and human rights has absolutely no chance of success. This has been shown by the endless failure to negotiate a political solution, by bypassing international law, through the Oslo process.

• To end the conflict, we need to end the occupation of Palestine and solve the plight of Palestinian refugees.

• The question of Palestine should be addressed on political, legal and humanitarian angles. While there is no end to the political talks Palestinian face one humanitarian crisis after another.

• While the bulk of responsibility lies with Israel and Western governments who fail to check Israel’s many crimes, Arab nations must also provide support and assistance without discrimination.
• NGO’s around the world also need to channel their efforts to highlight the issues and provide assistance in the best way possible.

• Palestinians must be united in defending this rights and keep in mind that UN Resolution 194 is still relevant, valid and ratified every year at the UN. The basis of our strategy should be based around the concrete legal basis of our historical rights.

• In the meantime we need to end discrimination against Palestinian refugees in their host countries and countries of refuge. Countries neighboring Syria must stop discriminating Palestinians and extend its hospitality and protection to everyone fleeing from the war in Syria.

• The international community should extend UNHCR’s provisions to provide the same protection to Palestinians without dissolving UNRWA. The final and permanent solution is for Israel to cease its ongoing occupation of Palestine, end its racist policies and recognize the indisputable rights of all Palestinians to return and live in Palestine.

• The international community must put pressure on Israel and Egypt to lift their siege.

• The US must not cower to lobbying that seeks to divest UNRWA of its funding this will make the situation of Palestinians even more serious.
For more than 65 years Palestinian refugees have lived in Lebanon. A survey from 2005 found that 44 per cent of Palestinian households fall into the lowest income bracket (earning less than US$2,400 per year) compared to 6 per cent of Lebanese households.\(^1\) Their difficult socio-economic situation is a result of several factors. Firstly, they lost their land and livelihood before and during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and became refugees. Secondly, they have lived through a civil war, Israeli bombardments and have on several occasions been the main target for violence and destruction, from different actors. Thirdly, the refugees in Lebanon suffer from social, economic (and of course political) restrictions and legal regulations created by the Lebanese government. Lebanon has been a reluctant host country for a refugee population it feels it should not be held responsible. For reasons such as the demography of the country and the volatile confessional make-up of Lebanon, the refugees have not been granted any civil rights by the Lebanese host government, and strict limitations are placed on their ability to work and own land.

The overall political situation for the Palestinians has resulted in the Palestinian actors themselves being incapable of or unwilling to provide assistance for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon for most of the 65 years. While the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was a major political and social actor in Lebanon in the 1970s, the political environment amongst the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has since their departure in 1982 been characterised by fragmentation and rivalry, which means that the refugee camps are governed by a complex web of Palestinian actors.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in 1994 after the Oslo Accord, but was not represented in Lebanon before the reopening of the PLO representative office in 2006. In 2011 an official Palestinian embassy were opened in Beirut and this might implicate a more active role for the PA in the years to come.

As a result of the factors mentioned above Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has had trouble to become self-supporting, and have been largely depended on international humanitarian assistance. This article will provide a brief overview of the various actors involved with the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon and the challenges they face.

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Lately, the civil war in Syria has led to a new wave of refugees into Lebanon. Some of them are Palestinian refugees who have lived in Syria, and the actors involved in the Palestinian community in Lebanon have had to stretch far to cover also their needs. By the end of summer 2013 more than 600,000 refugees have arrived from Syria, and close to 100,000 of them are Palestinian refugees. 47,000 of them have registered for assistance with UNRWA, the UN agency working with Palestinian refugees, which will be described below.\(^{(2)}\)

**The United Nations (UN)**

The United Nations’ responsibility for the Palestinian refugees derives from its role in 1947 in promoting the partition into two states of Mandatory Palestine. With this they paved the way for the creation of the State of Israel and the beginning of the Palestinian refugee situation. The UN has been unable to broker a final solution to the situation, and has instead taken on the responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees until a solution can be established. In 1949 they established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide this assistance. First however, it is worth mentioning two UN bodies that for different reasons are not functioning or not working with the Palestinian refugees.

**UNCCP**

The United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) is the body established by the UN Resolution 194 in 1948 to provide protection for Palestinian refugees. When the UNCCP was established, however, one did not foresee that the refugees would not be able to return, and the UNCCP was not given the resources or machinery to continue to work for such a long period of time. Today, UNCCP has no budget and no staff, with the result that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and elsewhere are left with no international agency which works explicitly for their protection.

**UNHCR**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in December 1950 to provide protection to asylum seekers who were recognised as refugees. UNHCR was followed by the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. The Refugee Convention secures refugees the right to work, travel, receive social security and enjoy the freedom of association. However, the UNHCR statutes, “Stipulate[s] that a person receiving assistance or protection from another UN organ or agency is not entitled to UNHCR assistance/protection.”\(^{(3)}\) Thus, because UNRWA and UNCCP were already established to care for assistance and protection of the Palestinian refugees in their field of operation, these refugees have to this day been excluded from the UNHCR mandate.

The same is true for the Refugee Convention, which Lebanon in any case has not signed. Notably, the Palestinian refugees arriving from Syria lately are also from “UNRWA’s field of operation,” and as such falls under UNRWA’s responsibility when they arrive in Lebanon.

**UNRWA**

At its establishment in 1949 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was mandated to:

Carry out direct relief and works programmes in collaboration with local government, to consult
with the Near Eastern governments concerning measures to be taken preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available and to plan for the time when relief was no longer needed.\(^4\)

UNRWA was thus designed to inaugurate a work program which would make the refugees self-supporting and eventually make the agency redundant, as well as to care for the immediate needs of the refugees. However, the work program was not successful and only the relief part of UNRWA’s program is still in place. The mixed mandate of providing relief and at the same time making plans with the aim of finalizing this aid turned out to be too big a challenge.

UNRWA’s main responsibilities today are to offer education, healthcare, infrastructure improvements such as solid waste management, monetary support for hardship cases and, for some, job opportunities. UNRWA is thus providing services that are invaluable to the refugee community.

Many refugees have also seen it as the responsibility of the UN, which in practice became UNRWA, to help them to return to their homes. The UN response has so far been limited to confirm Resolution 194 every time they renew UNRWA’s mandate, which has been approximately every fourth year. The resolution:

> Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.\(^5\)

From UN’s point of view the mandate of UNRWA has only been to provide humanitarian aid until a peace settlement could be reached. Since the beginning, UNRWA has been considered as a service provider organisation. As such, they have played an important role for the survival of the refugees. The agency was not empowered to guarantee the safety, security or legal and human rights of the refugees. However, with the UNCCP out of practice and the UNHCR not responsible, UNRWA has gradually been forced to act somewhat out of their mandate. Since the Geneva donor meeting in 2004, UNRWA has started to link its service provision to advocacy, and a more rights-based approach to their humanitarian mandate is emerging.

Most of the international assistance to the Palestinian refugees is channeled through UNRWA. And most of UNRWA funding comes from governments and the European Union (EU). UNRWA relies on voluntary donations, which makes it vulnerable to shifting donor priorities. Almost from the beginning they have suffered from delayed and unreliable funding. Over the last two decades in particular, the agency has suffered from chronic under-funding, or more precisely, a relatively constant budget for an increasingly growing refugee population.

The Palestinian refugee population has become inevitably connected to UNRWA in many ways through their long-lasting relationship, which may be described as a love/hate relationship. The common perception prevails that UNRWA is the sole duty bearer responsible for ensuring assistance and protection, a perception that is reinforced by the existing international mechanisms. UNRWA has therefore become in practice something more than just a service provider. In many ways UNRWA has become a social authority substitute for the national civil authority which is not there, and is made responsible in many ways for the welfare provision, and the lack thereof, for the camp refugees. It is said to be:

> Considered by the Palestinians as a Palestinian organization, by the Arab countries as a source of financing for host governments in the service of the Arab cause, and by the international community,
which finances it, as an international humanitarian organization - and therefore neutral and apolitical by definition and mandate... [and therefore] has had to face the most delicate political situations in order to be able to pursue its operations.(6)

UNRWA was from the beginning meant to be a temporary organisation. However, with the continuing uncertainty of the peace process, the dissolution of UNRWA does not seem realistic in the near future. All relevant parties stress the need for UNRWA to continue its services and UNRWA's mandate was most recently renewed until 30 June, 2014.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
NGOs have played an increasingly larger role in the Palestinian community the last three decades, due to the enhanced constraints on both UNRWA and Palestinian actors. A synopsis from 2009 found that 62 International NGOs and close to 100 local, Palestinian NGOs have been active in the Palestinian community at some point during the last four decades.(7)

International NGOs (INGOs)
The first INGOs that supported local NGOs during the 1970s and 1980s were solidarity groups that played a major role during this period of civil war in Lebanon with a focus on relief. In the western political environment at the time, with a strong support for Israel, it was not clear that European and American NGOs should get involved with projects in support or even in relation to Palestinian refugees. Most donors preferred to channel the assistance to Palestinian refugees through UNRWA.

After the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza, many of the INGOs followed the donors’ wishes and focused their attention there. However, the peace process also made it more politically acceptable for the home public of the INGOs to get involved with Palestinian refugees also in Lebanon. Most of the INGOs are, however, working through local organisations and maintain a purely financial role.

In the case of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the biggest potential influence of INGOs is to change the society, not the individual. In other words, to advocate and lobby towards their own governments and other decision makers about the refugees’ situation in order to bring about a durable solution. INGOs hold a potential to act as agents of change through their connections to political actors at home and abroad. They often have strong financial and managerial foundations, at least compared to local NGOs. However, they are most often very volatile actors, and are present in the Palestinian community only for a period of time, and as such with a short-term vision. Their strength in advocacy is severely limited by these factors. INGOs have also been very wary about the political aspect of the Palestinian issue, and humanitarian support for Palestinians has at times been difficult for many INGOs to engage in. Due to these limitations, INGOs have contributed with important emergency aid, but have in general lacked the long-term development commitment to the Palestinian community. The main role of INGOs is therefore a financial one in that they are providing funds for the Palestinian NGOs.

Palestinian NGOs
Palestinian NGOs are mainly working in service provision in order to fill the gaps that are not covered by UNRWA, and especially in the fields of health and pre-school education which compromise almost half of the projects of NGOs. They provide important services and opportunities and as such play an invaluable role in the society. In emergency situations, such as
during the 2006 war and the Syrian refugees crisis, the Palestinian NGOs have proved to be very effective in their coordination and distribution of emergency assistance. The situation for Palestinian NGOs has, however, been characterised by the unstable political situation in Lebanon. They have had to adapt to the changing situations, sometimes having to function as emergency, relief NGOs, while in quieter periods transforming themselves into development NGOs. However, the constant emergence of new crises has meant that long-term projects are often replaced by emergency projects. Inevitably, this has reduced the capacity for NGOs to develop and evaluate their projects.

NGOs working in the Palestinian camps today are almost entirely dependent on foreign support, with between 80 and 90 per cent of the resources coming from foreign donors. Reliance on foreign funding does, however, make the NGOs vulnerable to political agendas of the funding agencies. Once funds stop, many projects cease to exist. After the Lebanese Civil War they faced a decrease in aid provided by INGOs, states, and foreign governments that considered the struggle in Lebanon to have ended. While there was little trouble in securing funding for the Palestinian NGOs between 1982 and 1990, they faced dramatic decreases in the 1990s. As a consequence of the 2006 war, the destruction of Nahr el-Bared camp in 2007 and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis, much funding has yet again been directed to emergency relief at the expense of development funding. However, as is the case with Nahr el-Bared, it is not enough to plan emergency programs lasting for only three months. The reconstruction of the camp will continue until the end of 2014, seven years after the destruction. However, due to lack of funding, UNRWA had to reduce its relief assistance as of 1. September 2013. The earmarking of donor money for certain projects has made it difficult to move the money around to where it is most needed. For example, the money that was given to rebuild the physical infrastructure of Nahr el-Bared could not be reallocated to provide food and shelter for the population in the meantime.

The Palestinian NGOs are limited by their financial and administrative weaknesses. As part of the development aid system the Palestinian NGOs have to adapt to the “NGO speak” in order to get funds as well as to adjust to international trends in the donor community. This sometimes makes it difficult to cater for the actual needs of the Palestinian community in particular, because it is still very much in need of basic services provided by the NGOs. Often the priorities of the international donors are not those of the Palestinian community. Especially problematic is the continual need for service provision in the Palestinian community in relation to the donors’ focus on the “hot topics” such as democracy, gender and the environment. For example, it is easier to get support for workshops about children’s rights than to get support for the running cost of a kindergarten. The Palestinian NGOs continue also to be influenced by the fact that they are affiliated with the political environment in the refugee community and as such have some way to go in order to enhance cooperation. Due to the fragmentation of the NGO community, volatile finances, as well as the recurrent emergency situations, the Palestinian NGOs have not been able to provide as much long-term development or to advocate for structural changes as perhaps is wanted and needed.

The Palestinian refugee community has been in a sort of “emergency situation” for 65 years and is in much need of long-term planning and stability. It is therefore a major problem that the funding and international attention has come and gone with the emergency events. Critics of UNRWA and of NGOs claim that they perform a maintenance function, and by “keeping the refugees alive” reduce the pressure for radical reforms. It is clear that the situation for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will not improve unless there are major shifts in the political will to do so. The dilemma is that without many of the services provided by UNRWA and NGOs in the Palestinian community the situation for the refugees would be very difficult. As long as the refugees are facing obstacles that prevent them from becoming self-supporting, they will continue to be in need of international assistance. The
ongoing influx of Palestinian refugees from Syria is further stretching the organizations working in the Palestinian community. The pressure on the scarce resources is already creating tensions in the community. The civil war in Syria does not seem likely to find a peaceful solution very soon, and one does not know what the situation for the Palestinian refugees will be when the war will end. Will they be able to return to their (refugee) homes in Syria, or will they become a new group of “permanent refugees” in Lebanon?

Lately there are, however, also positive signs of change, for example in the Lebanese government’s policies towards the Palestinian refugee population. In a Ministerial Statement issued in July 2010, the government committed itself to providing for the humanitarian and social rights of Palestinian in Lebanon. The opening of the Palestinian Embassy in 2011 has further improved the political climate and put a greater focus on the situation for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. However, the solution to the “Palestinian refugee problem” relies on negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel. These negotiations were resumed in July 2013 after a long stand still. At this point, it is not possible to predict what the outcome of these negotiations will be and their consequences for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. We can assume, however, that UNRWA and the many NGO’s working in the Palestinian community in Lebanon will continue to play an invaluable role in the provision of basic services to the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon for the foreseeable future.

Endnotes
4 UNRWA webpage: http://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions
7 Raunsgard, Gunhild (2009), “Keeping them alive» - Humanitarian Assistance to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, and the Role of NGOs.” Master’s thesis in History, University of Bergen. Available at: https://bora.uib.no
8 UNRWA webpage: http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/harmonization-certain-relief-assistance-displaced-families-nahr-el-0
Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria: Restricted Access to Safe Territory and Protection in the Middle East

Palestinian refugees as a distinct group of refugees all over the Middle East continue to undergo renewed displacement and dispossession since their original expulsion from that part of Mandate Palestine which became Israel in 1948. In the last decade only, it was the case in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion on Iraq, when thousands of Palestinians were persecuted and pushed to leave the country, with hundreds of them being stranded in no-man's-land area between borders, as Jordan and Syria denied them entry. It was the case in the aftermath of the 2011 conflict in Libya. Currently, the ongoing war in Syria has brought displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian community in Syria.

This article shows the essence of the ongoing crisis and points to the current failure of the international community and states to guaranty access to safe territory and international protection to Palestinian refugees from Syria in compliance with their international obligations.

The information was collected through field interviews (Egypt in March – April 2013, Lebanon in August – September 2013), skype interviews, analysis of human rights reports and media releases documenting the current predicament of Palestinian refugees from Syria.

In the midst of the war in Syria

The majority of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) are descendants of Palestinians whose normal place of residence until May 1948 was Palestine and who after being expelled fled to Syria in 1948. Later waves of Palestinians came to Syria in 1967 and 1970. PRS were enjoying almost equal treatment with Syrian citizens and were very well integrated into Syrian society. Still, they were able to preserve their distinct identity. Among 529,000 UNRWA-registered PRS, the majority was living in camps-turned-suburban neighbourhoods (Yarmouk, Sbeineh, Qabr Essit, Jaramana, Khan Eshtieh, Khan Dunoun, Dara’a, Homs, Hama, Ramel, Neirab, Handarat/Ein el-Tal and Husseiniyah), while others lived inside Syrian cities.

From the start of the Syrian uprising, later turned into a civil war, PRS as a guest population strived to remain neutral. With the situation in Syria deteriorating, a number of internally displaced Syrian families took shelter in Palestinian refugee camps.

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In Yarmouk camp, in the southern suburbs of Damascus – the biggest camp in Syria hosting more than one third of PRS, young Palestinian community organized in order to provide displaced Syrians with food, medicines, mattresses and blankets. Since relief activities have been considered a criminal act by the Syrian regime, a number of the relief providers were arrested, but also since the rebel fighters entered the area the whole Yarmouk camp was being targeted. On 16 Dec 2012, the regime’s MiG planes bombarded a mosque and a school in Yarmouk, both hosting Syrian internally displaced. Few days later, the camp was encircled and a Syrian army checkpoint was placed at the entrance to control the movements of people and goods into and out of the area. In early July 2013 the camp was completely sealed off, which means that neither people nor goods were allowed in. The humanitarian situation in Yarmouk is grave: there are serious food and medicine shortages, there are no doctors nor paramedics able to attend to the sick and wounded, there has been no electricity nor mobile network coverage for the last few months. The only means of communication are landline telephones and 3G internet – both operating only occasionally. The camp regularly experiences different types of shelling and less regularly fighting between pro-regime and anti-regime militants. Since the beginning of 2013, UNRWA has had no access to Yarmouk and adjacent camps located in the area under the siege.

Other Palestinian camps in Syria are in similar or only relatively less grave situation. The commissioner-general of UNRWA Filippo Grandi estimates that seven or eight out of the twelve camps have become battlefields with the opposition at the centre of the camps and government forces surrounding them, while most of the population is trying to flee. According to the Agency’s estimates, some 80% of PRS (approx. 420,000) are in need of urgent assistance, while over 50% of PRS are displaced both in Syria and neighbouring countries. The estimated number of Palestinians killed within Syria or during their flight from Syria ranges from 1,500–2,000 person, while the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria has so far documented 1,731 persons killed. PRS die under shelling, under sniper fire, under torture in prison, out of starvation and lack of medicines, with only two tragic examples being the loss of life by 23-year-old Mar’ee Muhammad, who died from wounds incurred by shrapnel in Yarmouk camp on 26 Aug 2013, and 24-year-old Khaled Bakrawe, relief activist, who died under torture in the regime prison. Khaled Bakrawe, whose death certificate was issued on 11 Sep 2013, is believed to have died much before that date. His body was never returned to his family.

Protection of Palestinian refugees: UNRWA and UNHCR
According to international refugee law and regulations, Palestinian refugees fall under the mandate of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) if they are present in one of its five fields of operations, that is Gaza Strip, West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, and under the mandate of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) if they are present outside UNRWA’s area of operations.

The source of this division rests with the Article 1D of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which states: This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance. When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitively settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of this Convention. There has been a lot of grey area in the interpretation and application of the above provision over the recent decades. However, it was substantially clarified by ‘The Revised Note on the
Applicability of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to Palestinian Refugees’, issued by UNHCR in October 2009. The Note explains: If the person concerned is inside UNRWA's area of operations, he or she should be considered as “at present receiving from organs or agencies other than [UNHCR] protection and assistance” within the meaning of paragraph 1 of Article 1D, and hence is excluded from the benefits of the 1951 Convention. If, however, the person is outside UNRWA's area of operations, he or she is not “at present receiving from organs or agencies other than [UNHCR] protection and assistance” within the meaning of paragraph 1 of Article 1D, and therefore “such protection and assistance has ceased” within the meaning of paragraph 2 of Article 1D. It means that in countries outside UNRWA's operations Palestinian refugees in need of protection should be able to approach UNHCR. In practice, as it has been the case in the Middle East, Palestinian refugees are often prevented by the national authorities from approaching UNHCR and accessing protection that the agency could offer to them. Currently, it is the case in Egypt.

No access to safe territory in the region

In search of safety and protection, Palestinian refugees from Syria dispersed within Syria as well as to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Libya. Others made it to Europe or to faraway places such as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, or Maldives. Currently, PRS are by and large not able to leave Syria in a regular way since most of the neighbouring countries have been denying them entry, in a clear violation of the international principle of non-refoulement, which forbids states from returning refugees to places where their lives or freedoms could be threatened. For the fleeing PRS, Iraq was never an option as the country has persecuted and expelled its own Palestinian population since 2003. Jordan closed its border to PRS at some point in 2012 and announced this decision in January 2013. Next to introduce restrictions on the entry of PRS was Lebanon, in August of the same year. Turkey is believed by PRS to require them to obtain a visa in order to access its territory, that is why they often decide to enter irregularly. The last of Syria’s neighbouring counties, Israel, whose creation is a root cause of the Palestinian refugee problem, would by no means allow for the reparation of PRS, according with its unjust and discriminatory stance toward Palestinian refugees in general. A number of PRS have fled to Egypt in 2012, however the country has later restricted its entry regulations for PRS.

No access to protection in the region

Those PRS who had managed to enter one of the neighbouring countries before the restriction were in place have so far found neither safety nor protection there.

Lebanon: Lebanon has been the main destination country of fleeing PRS. UNRWA put their number at 49,000 (as of 29 Oct 2013), while the actual number might be higher. PRS typically enter Lebanon on a 15-day tourist visa, which some of them were able to extend for a period ranging from one to three months. However neither entry nor visa extension might be possible any more after the introduction of new restrictions in August. Many who are not able to extend their visas end up overstaying hence becoming irregular.

The fact that PRS are arriving to Lebanon as second time refugees fleeing the war in Syria is not in any way recognised. UNRWA can only record their moving from one field of operations (Syria) to another (Lebanon), but it cannot legalize their stay. PRS remain in Lebanon as regular or irregular tourists, which makes them extremely vulnerable and puts them at constant risk of refoulement.
Not only their protection needs but also their humanitarian needs are not being met. Most PRS stay in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, which for their 60 or more years of existence have been sites of poverty and deprivation. PRS are not allowed to take legal employment in Lebanon, nor access state services.

Additional restrictions introduced on 6 August 2013, when Lebanon started denying entry to PRS, came into being without any official announcement. The policy is not as systematic as in the case of Jordan, since reportedly those who can prove that they have “a departure flight from Beirut airport within 24 hours” or equally strong reasons are allowed to enter. Nonetheless, decision-making at the border seems to be completely arbitrary with the great majority of PRS being denied entry.

Jordan: In Jordan, most of some 9,657 PRS (UNRWA’s count as of 29 Oct 2013) are not able to regularise their presence there. As explained by UNRWA: “The irregular status of Palestine refugees displaced from Syria in Jordan means they endure a considerable degree of insecurity. They face difficulties in civil processes such as registration of births and in access to government services, and are at constant risk of refoulement”. There is also a group of approximately 200 PRS held in dire conditions in Cyber City, a closed government facility in Ramtha in northern Jordan.

Turkey: PRS by and large believe that they need to obtain a visa in order to enter Turkey, thus they usually cross into the country with smugglers – numbers cannot be determined. However, as confirmed by senior UNHCR staff, those coming directly from Syria do not need a visa and entry to Turkey is greatly facilitated for those refugees carrying travel documents, as opposed to those with no such documentation. All refugees from Syria, including PRS, fall under temporary protection regime in Turkey. PRS with special problems can and do approach UNHCR, as Turkey is a country outside UNRWA’s area of operations, however awareness of this opportunity among PRS is very limited.

For majority of PRS, their irregular entry and stay makes them extremely vulnerable and renders their departure irregular. PRS leave Turkey striving to reach safety in Europe, occasionally in smugglers’ trucks, usually on smugglers’ boats. The latter are commonly known as “death boats”, as they are overloaded with passengers and often capsize and sink. A story reported by a refugee from Neirab camp of Aleppo portrays the tragedy: Ziad*, in his early thirties, had been wanted because of his voluntary work as a relief (food) provider to the population of his IDP camp and fled Neirab camp with a group of other PRS. They entered Turkey irregularly and headed to Istanbul. Ziad paid 5,500 euro, the whole life savings of his elderly father, to smugglers. They put him in a truck, and after a few days of extreme discomfort he made it to Sweden, where he applied for asylum. His close friend, one of the group that had left Neirab together, had less money with him. He paid some 3,000 dollars to smugglers and was put on a boat, which sank on 31 Jul 2013. He lost his life by drowning in the Mediterranean. Another man who was on the same boat survived, but not his wife, nor his daughter. The 31-July boat was heading to Greece and the majority of its passengers were PRS: reportedly 24 died, 18 went missing, 12 were rescued. Another boat heading to Italy carrying mostly PRS, capsized on 3 Sep 2013: reportedly 61 died (many children), 45 survived.

Egypt: Egypt, like Turkey, is a country outside UNRWA’s area of operations and a party to the 1951 Convention. Thus, PRS who fled there should be able to register with UNHCR and be entitled to the benefits of the 1951 Convention. However, this is not the case, since the Egyptian authorities permit PRS to register only with UNRWA, although the agency has no mandate in the country. It means that PRS are left alone with no UN agency being officially able to protect and assist them. The number of PRS in Egypt is estimated at some 6,000–7,000 by relief and community organisers. PRS not only
have difficulty entering Egypt, but also extending their visas. They usually cannot send their children to public schools nor access public hospitals. Many PRS were imprisoned and deported to Syria. The situation has become even worse after the July coup d’etat. A real media hate campaign targeting Syrian refugees including PRS has been launched. Cases of regular persecution are being reported. Should PRS wish to leave Egypt in a regular way, they will only be allowed to go to Syria or to the Gaza Strip. Many have no other choice but to enter smugglers’ boats trying to reach safety in Europe. In an incident dated from 17 Sep 2013, a boat carrying over 200 refugees, most of them PRS, and leaving from Alexandria was shot at by Egyptian costal guards. Two PRS, 50-year-old Fadwa Taha travelling with her children and grandchildren, and 30-year-old Amr Delol accompanied by his pregnant wife and children, were killed. Several others were injured and the rest of the passengers were imprisoned in Alexandria.

Some of those trapped in Egypt cross irregularly to Libya and board unseaworthy boats from there, which often ends in tragedy.

Faraway locations
The lack of protection in the Middle East region and the lack of ability to reach proximate safe territories, like Europe, push PRS to flee to places as far as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia or Maldives. PRS resort to many different routes, with one example being the trajectory of Abu Alaa*. A man in his sixties, he first left Syria for Lebanon, then he left Lebanon irregularly on a boat to Australia, where his two brothers live. His wife and children, dispersed in Syria and Lebanon, lost contact with him for over a week. Abu Alaa re-appeared in Indonesia, where he learned about a new agreement signed by Australia and Papua New Guinea, by which he would be deported to Papua New Guinea should he reach the shores of Australia by boat in an irregular manner. He decided not to continue for Australia. He might now try going to Malaysia, a country so far receptive to PRS. In fact, he does not know where he should head to in order to secure a better destiny for his children.

Conclusions and recommendations
PRS fleeing Syria cannot access any safe territory since neighbouring countries have been closed their borders to them in clear violation of the international principle of non-refoulement. Those PRS who managed to flee cannot access effective protection within the Middle East region. There is a growing realization among PRS that this situation will not change. Thus, they try to reach Europe in an irregular and extremely dangerous way in search of protection and of a better future for their children. The international community should recognise the existing inaccessibility of protection endured by the PRS within the Middle East area. In countries outside UNRWA's area of operations, such as Egypt, UNHCR should be allowed by the national authorities to fulfil its protection role towards this group of refugees in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In countries within UNRWA's area of operations, such as Lebanon and Jordan, UNRWA should be supported in further implementation of its mandate towards PRS.

Ultimately, as pointed by Amnesty International, Palestinian refugees from Syria should be included in resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes, which are administered by UNHCR, should they experience special hardship and no other durable solutions were available to them.

The international community and the states have an obligation to provide all refugees, including Palestinian refugees from Syria, with access to safe territory and international protection.
Endnotes:
2. Most of this group was eventually resettled to Europe and Latin America.
5. UNRWA, In Figures, January 2013.
6. UNRWA, Where We Work – Syria – Camp Profiles, (undated).
8. Interviews with PRS conducted in Lebanon (August – September 2013) with follow-up skype interviews (October 2013).
13. Interviews with PRS conducted in Lebanon (August – September 2013).
20. Interviews with PRS conducted in Lebanon (August – September 2013).
24. Email communication
25. Field and skype interviews with PRS who have passed through Turkey (March – October 2013).
30. UNHCR, Palestinian refugee family’s escape from Syria via tropical island to new life in Sweden, 30 August 2013.
31. Skype interview (Sep 2013).
Is the European Union taking a more independent role on Israel’s Occupation?

For many years, the stated policy of the European Union and its member states, including the UK, on the question of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel’s settlement project has been clear: the settlements are “illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-state solution impossible”. But although this rhetorical position has been restated endlessly in repeated statements condemning the Israeli government’s continued settlement expansion, it seems to have been completely ineffective, and the occupation has continued and expanded. The only practical steps the EU has taken was to try to mitigate the effects of the occupation on the Palestinian population through generous funding (€525m in 2011) for the Palestinian Authority and for a range of development projects across the Opt.

But since last year there have been signs the EU may at last be converting their rhetorical condemnation of Israel’s settlement programme into action. This change was partly in response to the changing situation on the ground, partly to a growing exasperation at the intransigence of the Israeli government, and partly to the continued pressure of elected members in both the European Parliament and in national parliaments in many member states, of activists across Europe and of a range of development and human rights NGOs.

Every year EU diplomats based in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Opt) have compiled reports detailing Israel’s creeping annexation of Palestinian territory; including settlement expansion and the accompanying expropriation of Palestinian land, house demolitions, settler violence and forced population transfer. Every year EU Foreign Ministers received the reports, expressed concerns the two-state solution was being foreclosed, called on Israel to change policy, and then moved on.

But in May 2012 the urgency of the reports finally got through, certainly the total intransigence of the Israeli government and its blurring of the 1967 borders helped, and perhaps the sustained pressure from NGOs and activists across Europe also contributed. The EU Foreign Ministers agreed unanimously to consider action to back up its rhetoric in two areas; firstly fully and effectively implementing existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products (labelling and customs) and secondly challenging Israeli controls on development in the Opt which had resulted in the demolition of 62 EU-funded projects in the first half of 2012 alone. By December 2012, as Israel announced further settlement

* Dr Phyllis Starkey (Member of Parliament 1997-2010, Trustee of Medical Aid for Palestinians)
expansion the Foreign Ministers’ reaffirmed their view that none of their agreements with Israel
could be applicable beyond the 1967 borders of Israel.

These changes in the attitude of the European External Action Service and the governments of many
member states had become apparent to many NGOS and activists from the latter half of 2011, and
as a result, a coalition of 22 human rights and development NGOs across eleven European countries
decided to build on years of advocacy by parliamentarians and activists, focus on EU policy in relation
to settlements and their associated infrastructure and recommend practical ways in which the
European Union could convert its rhetoric into action, and at the same time bring its actions into line
with existing EU and international law.

Their hard-hitting report “Trading Away Peace” was published in October 2012

The report pointed out that the EU is Israel’s biggest trading partner; it has concluded an
Association Agreement with Israel giving privileged access to European markets, and Israel
participates in a range of European Co-operation agreements. In all of these, Israel has
unilaterally included settlements on the same basis as Israel proper. The result is that Europe is
sustaining Israeli settlements through trade and other links such that the EU imports 15 times more
from illegal Israeli settlements than it does from Palestinians. The report argued that unless the EU
re-asserts its legal position and limits the scope of all agreements with Israel to within the 1967
borders, it risks undermining the billions of aid it has pumped into Palestinian state building and with
it, any chance of a political solution.

**Trading Away Peace recommended the EU and its Member States should:**

1. Ensure correct consumer labelling of all settlement products: to guarantee EU consumers can
choose to avoid settlement produce, European governments must insist all settlement products
are correctly labelled as “West Bank (Israeli settlements), as has already been done by UK
(2009) and Denmark (2012).

2. Discourage companies from trading with and investing in settlements: national governments
should issue formal advice to importers and other businesses to refrain from purchasing
settlement goods and to avoid all other commercial and investment links with settlements.

3. Ban imports of settlement products: more radically, governments could legally exclude
settlement products from entry to the EU market. Trade in products of illegal settlements
is inconsistent with EU foreign policy and, at least in cases of products involving the use of
non-renewable resources such as water or minerals, may directly aid or assist on-going
breaches of international law.

4. Ensure settlement products do not benefit from import duty relief: insist Israeli exporters start
correctly designating the origin of settlement products, and cease designating them as ‘Israel’
and incorrectly claiming preference.

5. Exclude settlements from bilateral agreements and cooperation instruments: clear territorial
provisions explicitly restricting application to Israel proper, regardless of Israeli domestic law,
must be included in all EU and member state arrangements with Israel e.g. Horizon 2020 and
ACAA.

6. Exclude settlement products and companies from public procurement: this must be done
before Israel is allowed increased access to public procurement markets in the EU, as currently
envisaged under the EU-Israel Action Plan
7. Remove organisations funding settlements from tax deduction systems: the Norwegian decision to exclude an organisation collecting donations for Israeli settlements, from eligibility for tax deductible gifts, can serve as a model.

8. Prevent financial transactions supporting settlements and related activities: as recommended by the EU’s Heads of Missions in the OPT, governments should apply restrictive measures to all financial transactions from their citizens, organisations and businesses in support of settlement activities breaching international law.


10. Issue guidelines for European tour operators: advising operators to end support for settlement businesses, including hotels, bus operators, archaeological sites, etc.

11. Insist Israel disaggregates settlement data for the OECD: European governments and other OECD members must require that statistical data provided by Israel always distinguishes between Israel proper and the settlements, in order to avoid validating an internationally unlawful situation.

The report stressed that all these measures target only illegal settlements, not Israel. They re-emphasise the pre-1967 Green Line that is of critical importance for the viability of the EU-promoted two-state solution, and uphold international law.

How has the EU responded?

The Trading Away Peace report was backed up by extensive lobbying, both private and public, of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and Brussels based diplomats as well as national governments and parliaments in Member States. It found a more sympathetic hearing than might have been expected because there was already a recognition there had to be a change in European policy if the last chance of a political solution on the ground in Israel/Palestine was not to disappear for the foreseeable future. Action has been taken, or is under consideration, on a number of the report’s recommendations.

Labelling— neither the European Commission nor individual Member States will give support to a boycott, but European consumer protection law requires consumers to be given the necessary information to allow them to choose whether or not to buy a product. Labelling settlement products as “Israel” is inaccurate since settlements are NOT part of Israel, and so breaches EU consumer protection law. On this basis all EU member states have agreed that settlement products must NOT be labelled as originating in Israel. Denmark took the initiative in late 2012 to issue this advice (modelled on the UK advice of 2009) to its retailers but other member states have hidden behind the EU and asked the Commission to issue EU-wide guidance instead. The Commission is engaged in a bureaucratic process of reviewing the huge range of existing EU labelling regulations and is committed to issuing EU-wide guidance by the end of 2013 or early 2014.

Customs duties – under the EU-Israel Association Agreement Israel’s exports to the EU benefit from preferential access to EU markets including relief from import duty. This gives Israeli products a price advantage compared with imports from other non-EU states. Settlement products are not entitled to preference and should pay full import duty, but there has long been evidence that Israel was wrongly claiming import duty relief on settlement products. The European Commission has made the procedures for claiming import duty relief more robust by making the importer responsible for the
claim and introducing large fines for wrongful claims, but they have still not insisted that the Israeli authorities themselves clearly distinguish between settlements and Israel so there is suspicion that some settlement products may still be benefiting wrongly from import duty relief.

Funding guidelines – the most radical step taken so far by the European Commission was the publication in July 2013 in the Official Journal of the EU, of guidelines for future EU funding for Israeli organisations through EU programmes and institutions. In the first instance the debate on these guidelines has focussed on Horizon 2020, the next phase of the EU’s multi-billion programme for scientific research and co-operation, but the same guidelines will apply to all EU-Israel funding streams such as the various university exchange programmes, civil service exchanges and grants from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The guidelines would exclude from funding any activities that are carried out in settlements. In the case of grants and prizes etc. the organisation itself must have its place of establishment (which cannot just be a PO Box) within the 1967 borders of Israel. In the case of loans from the EIB, the final recipient of the loan must not only be established within the 1967 borders but must also operate only within those 1967 borders.

The Israeli government has reacted very negatively to these new guidelines and has focussed on Horizon 2020, due to start on 1st January 2014, because they must sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the EU by that date. They have threatened to withdraw from Horizon 2020, but this has provoked a domestic backlash from the Israeli scientific community who fear their exclusion from co-operation with European colleagues would damage Israeli scientific competitiveness. Israel has orchestrated a massive PR and lobbying campaign to get the EU guidelines changed and there are some press reports suggesting they may have achieved some concessions. The Commission seems however to be holding firm. Indeed it is difficult to see how they could compromise since the guidelines have already been published, and clearly state that they are required “to ensure the respect of EU positions and commitments in conformity with international law on the non-recognition by the EU of Israel’s sovereignty over the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967.”

The outcome of the talks between EU and Israeli officials must be concluded soon, and could mark the moment when the EU at last stands up to Israel and insists it will no longer turn a blind eye to the illegality of the settlements. Once the Horizon 2020 MoU is concluded it will set a precedent for all the other EU-Israel funding mechanisms including EIB loans.

Area C – in response to growing pressure from a range of development NGOs, and Israel’s creeping annexation of those parts of the West Bank that were designated Area C by the Oslo Agreement, the Commission has also been discussing how it can more effectively fund development projects to support the Palestinian population to remain on its land. Area C is under Israeli military and civilian control but in the Jordan Valley and around Israeli settlements in particular the Israeli authorities have been very aggressive in refusing permits for any Palestinian buildings or water infrastructure, demolishing Palestinian structures, facilitating settler destruction of Palestinian crops and buildings, and forcibly transferring Palestinians, particularly Palestinian Bedouin, off their land. Various EU member states have funded the development of Palestinian masterplans for parts of Area C to try to establish a basis for permitted development but the Israeli authorities are blocking the implementation of these masterplans. The EU is considering a joint strategy where Member States fund, either directly or through NGOs, infrastructure projects within Area C without waiting for Israeli permit approval.
What about peace negotiations?
The start in July of the US-sponsored peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has had a deadening effect on the implementation of any further policy changes by the EU or its member States. Because the current negotiations are seen as the last best chance of a political solution, no-one wants to do anything that might rock the boat. But diplomats, including the UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, have made it very clear in repeated public statements that the negotiations will not continue beyond March 2014, and that unless they bring significant progress towards the goal of an independent Palestinian State the status quo cannot be allowed to continue and European policy will radically alter. It is not clear whether the Israeli government, still less the Israeli public, understand the implications for them of failed negotiations.

What next?
Sustained pressure from public opinion, parliamentarians, activists and NGOs across Europe, coupled with the increasingly intransigent position of the Israeli government, have managed to shift the Israel/Palestine policy of the European Union and its Member States over the last 12-18 months in a more progressive direction. The changes have been small, and in many instances implementation is not yet complete, but they are significant. We need to maintain that pressure to ensure the funding guidelines are implemented across all sectors, the EU-wide labelling guidelines are published and the EU does start to fund infrastructure projects in Area C.

Depending on the outcome of the peace negotiations, after March 2014 we should either be pushing for speedy implementation leading to an independent Palestine with the full and active support of the EU, or if negotiations fail a much more assertive EU policy that would present Israel with the full costs of its continued occupation, not least the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. The next few months are crucial.
1. UNRWA is heavily stretched and I was hoping to provide our readers with some basic facts, information and analysis about how UNRWA is meeting growing demands especially in countries like Lebanon where there is an influx of 40,000 refugees from Syria.

- Currently, there are 92,000 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) in Lebanon. The number of PRS in Lebanon amounts to 12% of the refugee population from Syria registered in Lebanon by UNHCR.
- Temporary shelter and accommodation is the most pressing need of the Palestine refugee families from Syria, exacerbated by increased cost of rent due to the sizable influx of refugees from Syria (both Syrian and Palestinian). Furthermore, poor sanitation standards in overcrowded camps are now exacerbated by the influx of PRS.
- Palestine refugees from Syria have access to education and health care through UNRWA and the Agency is doing its utmost to deliver other services to them.
- UNRWA has been able to provide cash assistance for housing and food. In addition NFI’s have been provided to new comers. UNRWA is providing protection support.
- UNRWA appreciates the continued free movement enabling Palestine refugees from Syria to enter into Lebanon. We do urge the government not to discriminate between Syrian refugees and Palestine refugees coming from Syria, including on visa and entry requirements.
- Lebanon is rapidly facing increased burden from the influx of refugees from Syria and must be assured of international assistance.
- UNRWA continues to urge the international community to provide adequate support and financial resources to meet the needs of host countries and the growing number of refugees.
- UNRWA continues to cooperate closely with other international organizations, in order to deliver assistance and support when and where needed.

2. How do you see the future of UNRWA in light of US calls to defund UNRWA by redefining Palestinian refugees. Are the political pressures endangering humanitarian assistance.

UNRWA continues to enjoy a very supportive and productive relationship with the US government which continues to be our largest single donor. The US is always prompt and generous in responding to the needs of UNRWA and the refugees we serve. There are fringe elements who are making the calls you suggest, but their lack of understanding of refugee law and practice undermines their case. And there is a general perception that these critics of UNRWA are politically driven.

3. Do you also envisage UNRWA taking a broader protection role for Palestinian refugees.

Our protection role in UNRWA is a “work in progress” as the situations in which our protection work takes place is constantly changing. As for a “broader role”; our strategic objectives continue to reflect or aim of the full enjoyment of rights by our beneficiaries and it does not get much broader than that.
This year marks the 65th anniversary of the beginning of the Palestinian Nakba (literally Catastrophe) that saw the creation of the state of Israel following Jewish terrorist campaigns and ethnic cleansing in Palestine. After 4,500 years [1] of uninterrupted presence on Palestinian land, 1948 saw the first major uprooting of the indigenous population and the creation of a huge refugee crisis that has persisted and grown ever since.

The refugee crisis is at the heart of the Israel – Palestinian conflict, yet it is barely mentioned in Western media or political debate, while other, far less important issues are given more prominence. There is a clear moral and strategic need for a campaign for Palestinian refugee rights, but here in the UK, nobody is pushing the issue of the world’s largest and longest-running refugee crisis.

Background

The number of Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is five million, while the total number, including those not registered with the agency is closer to seven million. Palestinian refugees can be found in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, and as far from home as Brazil, India and Bolivia. In the Gaza Strip alone, the number of refugees registered with UNRWA is expected to rise by 400,000 to 1.6 million by 2020. Added to the main host countries are the Palestinians living all over the world in the Diaspora, and those internally displaced inside Israel. All of these people have the right to return to their land and receive compensation, and for all of them annual commemoration of Nakba Day on May 15th is commemoration of an ongoing injustice. 1948 was the high water mark but the catastrophe has continued without a break.

Perpetual Vulnerability

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) describes the plight of the Palestinians as “by far the most protracted and largest of all refugee problems in the world today”. One of the main features of the Nakba is that once displaced, Palestinians are left vulnerable to further
displacement and violence. There are numerous recent examples, including the Palestinians in Iraq who were made victims of the US/UK invasion in 2003 which was followed by sectarian attacks that targeted Palestinians during the ensuing civil war. The Gaza Strip, an area populated mainly (80%) by Palestinians who had fled ethnic cleansing in 1948, has endured repeated Israeli attacks, each one destroying homes and creating a new refugee crisis.

Syria

For decades, Syria had been heralded as the country that had best hosted its Palestinian guests, granting rights equal to those of native Syrians, except for citizenship and allowing them to live relatively normal lives. But now Syria serves as a case study in the cycles of exile and displacement that are the basic features of the insecurities caused by statelessness. Palestinians are caught in the middle of a brutal war between the government of Bashar Assad and multiple rebel groups. Indiscriminate sectarian violence is not unique to Syria and there is a long history of blaming stateless Palestinians for a country’s problems; for example in Iraq, Libya, Kuwait and Lebanon. Because of this history, Palestinians are painfully aware of the results of backing the wrong side in a civil conflict and have generally remain neutral in Syria. But the Assad government has viewed Palestinian refugee camps such as Daraa and Al Raml as the front line between the regime and protestors. Only after anti-regime protests spread around the country was the lie of Palestinian culpability put to rest. The largest Palestinian camp, Yarmouk, has been targeted by Assad’s forces and over a thousand Palestinian deaths have been recorded. Overall, by early 2013 15 percent of Syrians had been displaced, while 50 percent of Palestinians in Syria had been displaced [3].

As a result of their statelessness, Palestinians find themselves treated differently at borders than others fleeing the same violence. For example, Jordan allows Syrian nationals to enter its territory but Palestinians are kept separately in detention centres, viewed as a problem for UNRWA to deal with. But UNRWA is under-resourced and its directors spend much of their time, cap in hand, fund raising. The mass displacement of Palestinians from Syria has led many to flee to Lebanon. Unlike Jordan, Lebanon has kept its borders open to refugees from Syria. But once in Lebanon, Palestinians face a multitude of problems in obtaining housing, health care and education and are faced with the Lebanese government’s discriminatory policies which bar Palestinians from many professions and from owning property. 40,000 Palestinians from Syria are spared starvation and death in Lebanon by fellow Palestinians, not the United Nations. In Lebanon 20-30 Palestinian refugees can be found living in a two bedroom flat.

The above is just a snapshot of the profound insecurity Palestinians face. It is difficult to envisage any significant event in the Middle East that could not result in displacement and hardship for Palestinians; such is the precariousness of their position.

The refugee issue is central to the conflict

The refugee crisis is the key issue requiring attention if peace in the Middle East is to finally be reached. In the first 20 years after the conflict exploded in 1948 observers and Western policy makers recognised the refugee problem as the most crucial issue and significant attention was given to it. The UN mediator on Palestine emphasised, in his September 1948 progress report, the need for “the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the Arab refugees as well as payment of adequate compensation for the property of those choosing not to return to their former homes” [4].
The world, through the United Nations General Assembly, recognised the need for a just resolution of the problem of Palestinian refugees in conformity with its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 and this international consensus remains strong today. But Israel never had any intention of allowing the refugees to return.

By focusing on the refugees as the key to achieving stability in the Middle East policy makers were also addressing the need to bring about peace between Israel and its neighbours. Indeed, achieving genuine peace is not just about two states, Israel and Palestine. There is a wider regional aspect and the neighbouring states of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, which have suffered so much economic and social instability as a result of the refugee crisis, must also be satisfied with the outcome. Absorption of the refugees in to these states on a permanent basis will not achieve this.

The refugee crisis, initially presumed to be a short-term aberration to be easily corrected, has instead persisted, a source of constant and profound humiliation for Arabs. While focus on the refugees has receded, for six and a half decades the crisis has deepened and spread thanks to a conspicuous absence of Western political will to enforce refugee rights. It says something about the success of the Zionist project that the prospect of the return of the refugees to their land is about as likely as the disappearance of the state of Israel. Both are possible, both lack a clear path to realisation and talking about either is considered taboo.

Two-state solution ignores refugee issue

As a result of Palestinian capitulation at the 1993 Oslo Accords negotiations, the pivotal issue of the seven million refugees was officially relegated to final status negotiations, effectively kicked into the long grass by Israel, the US, Europe and the Palestinian Authority (PA). The focus of the relevant power brokers switched to the territories occupied in 1967.

Some foolishly believe that the establishment of a Palestinian state will automatically lead to a resolution of the refugee issue. This approach views the two-state solution and statehood more generally as an elixir for all of Palestine’s ills. Such views encourage negotiations to proceed without ever addressing the roots of the conflict, stripping the context in which events take place from discussion.

A dogmatic approach of playing by the rules set by the Olso Accords betrays an ignorance of Zionism’s relentless pursuit of a complete takeover of Palestine. Israel aims to destroy Palestinian public and private life and her atrocities are systematic, rooted in a racist ideology. There has been no shift in this approach since Israel’s foundation and the current round of peace talks will only serve Israeli interests.

As international solidarity with the Palestinians gathers momentum, it is important to ask about the issue of refugees; who is fighting their corner in 2013? Given the huge numbers of people caught up in this crisis, it is clear that resolution of the conflict in the Middle East can only come through the implementation of their right of return. Without this, all attempts at peace will flounder.

Britain

In the UK, Palestinian solidarity is widespread with more and more groups forming to call for justice in the Middle East. Despite the glaring need to bring attention the issue, none of these groups has the refugee crisis at the forefront of its campaigning.

Each group attempts to appeal to both the public and politicians with their campaigns, some
giving more emphasis to popular awareness and others focusing more on political lobbying. The list of solidarity groups is long: Palestine Solidarity Campaign, CAABU, Medical Aid for Palestinians, Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East, Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine, Conservative Middle East Council (the closest the Conservative party has to a voice for Palestinians), Friends of al Aqsa, Middle East Monitor, Prosper Palestine, Action Palestine among many others that include student and trade union organisations.

One reason for not focussing on refugee rights could be fear of being branded left wing, radical, or anti-Semitic and therefore being excluded from the mainstream. To call for the right of return, as opposed to just supporting it, is indeed a radical call. The return of the refugees would spell the end of the Zionist dream of an exclusively Jewish state in historic Palestine and therefore elicits hysterical reactions from supporters of Zionism.

A second reason is that the return of the refugees is not seen as politically viable; politicians making such calls predictably face reprisals from party leaders.

In the UK media, there is also virtually no media coverage of Palestinian refugees and the mainstream media has been shown to use Israeli government statements as the point of departure for its Middle East coverage. Two factors in particular encourage campaigners to continue to play by Israel’s rules: the PA continues to bow to Israeli demands and the democratically elected party Hamas is still viewed as a terrorist organisation, despite its many ceasefires and attempts to broker peace.

Those in the UK seeking to protect and further their own careers on the back of the Palestinian cause seem happy enough to go along with this unreality. But the result is a stifled debate and limited campaigning, essentially based on what Israel ‘allows’ us to discuss. Campaigns for freezing the building of illegal Jewish settlements or recognising a Palestinian state at the United Nations, rather than being seen as means to a higher end, have become ends in themselves.

As a former member of the executive committee of Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East (LFPME), I saw an obsession with wanting to be perceived as ‘moderate’ and ‘safe.’ The Labour Party promised that a cautious approach from LFPME would be rewarded with a more international socialist stance on Palestine, but the party leader Ed Miliband is as steadfast in his support of Israel as his predecessors Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. By ignoring the refugee issue, the approach of LFPME and others effectively endorses the status quo.

Campaign groups such as LFPME should dispense with the notion that playing along with the game of the peace process will reap any rewards or concessions. There are no rewards from Zionists or their sympathisers. It is time to stop seeing Palestinians as perennial victims and start a new approach which will worry the Israelis and is much more likely to produce tangible results. Campaigning on the Palestinian refugee issue is now a moral and strategic necessity.

On a delegation to Lebanon in 2011 I witnessed harrowing conditions in the Bourj al Barajneh and Nahr el Bared refugee camps in Lebanon, a lack of access to the outside world and people without representation or democratic rights. Living conditions are abysmal. As friends of the Palestinians, campaigning and lobbying groups in the UK have a duty to take up the refugee issue as a show of solidarity with those who most need it.

It is a fact that peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved without the rights of the refugees being met. This means that millions of Palestinians must return to their land, which in turn means the end of the Zionist goal of a Jewish state in historic Palestine. It is also necessary to accept that Palestinian campaigning and lobbying is essentially a battle with a foe very capable of projecting an image of power and influence. Many are uncomfortable with the notion of campaigning on this basis,
but what is the alternative?
The current approach of campaigning, but only on what is allowed by Israel, has failed and Zionists in Britain are comfortable. Campaigns on stopping the building of illegal settlements or for the release of Palestinian prisoners are important, but they need to be carried out in the context of the vastly more important issue of the refugees. The refugees’ return will gain public support in Britain if it is effectively explained and Zionist campaigners will struggle to offer a coherent response. Israel is much more likely to offer concessions on issues such as settlements when a genuine debate on refugee rights is underway.

The future of the Palestinian refugees is unclear but what is sure is that they will remain victims until the debate on the Middle East shifts to them as the heart of the issue. Campaigners in the UK and elsewhere need to do all they can, skilfully and with courage, to achieve this. Then perhaps Nakba Day will become a commemoration of an historic event and not a reminder of a present day tragedy.

Endnotes
PRC prepared a set of very useful materials on the Palestinian cause. A3 Leaflets were prepared to cover the issue of Separation Wall, Right of Return, Palestinian Refugees, Palestinian Prisoners and Israeli “Settlements”.

Free copies are available at the centre. To order hard or soft copies visit our website: www.prc.org.uk
THE OSLO ACCORDS 20 YEARS ON:
WAS IT A MAJOR POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH OR A CON TRICK?
AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO US?

Introduction
On September 7-8, I attended a two day conference in London called “Oslo 20 Years On”, marking 20 years of the Oslo Accords. The event was organised by the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) and the University of Exeter Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS). There were a range of speakers, including:

- Two dissident Israeli academics: Illan Pappe (historian, author of “the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”, and now at Exeter University), and; Uri Davis (author of “the Apartheid State”, and member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council and Palestine National Council)
- Dr Daud Abdullah, Director of Middle-East Monitor and Dr Ghada Karmi, a leading Palestinian activist, academic and writer, who spoke on “Thinking beyond Oslo”
- Rosemary Hollis, a British political scientist, professor of Middle East Policy Studies and director of the Olive Tree Programme at City University
- Petter Bauck, senior adviser on conflict-related issues in the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
- Ismail Patel, the Chairman of the Friends of Al Aqsa (FOA), who spoke on “the Theft of Water and Palestinian Resource”
- Emile Badarin, a PhD student at Exeter who spoke about the Palestinian leadership
- Three speakers on the Impact of Oslo (Majed Al-Zeer, Khaled Waleed and Gillian Kerr-Shephard)
- The Reverend Stephen Sizer, Vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, who gave a talk about Christian Zionism (of which he is a leading critic), and
- Three British Politicians who have advocated on behalf of Palestinians: Jeremy Corbyn (MP), Clare Short and Baroness Jenny Tonge.
- Mrs Rawan Damen, from Aljazeera, then presented the first part of a film called “the Price of Oslo”, presently being shown on the Al Jazeera network.

I shall not give a blow-by-blow account of the event, but limit myself to some salient insights and impressions of mine. The papers will in any case be posted on the website in a week or so and shown on their Youtube channel that you can find at the bottom of the PRC homepage www.prc.org.uk. At the end of this note I try to tease out conclusions for those individuals and organisations interested in world peace.

* This article is based on notes taken during the Oslo conference organised by PRC in September 2013
* Jonathan Coulter career was in the development of agricultural and food markets (in Africa and elsewhere). Has a life-long interest in international relations which he studied as part of his undergraduate degree in Birmingham University, and in recent years has spent much time studying middle-eastern affairs and implications for Britain and the European Union.
Some salient points

Speakers generally concurred that the Oslo Accords were a major failure from the Palestinian perspective. They were heralded as “A political breakthrough of immense importance”, and provided for Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza, 22% of pre-1948 Palestine. In reality however, settler numbers grew from 232,000 in 1991 to 500,000 in 2010, and the West Bank has been divided into three areas (A, B and C), with Israel having full control over Area C which is about 60% of the whole. Among other features the Wall/Security Barrier has been built, and movement controls multiplied. Meanwhile Israel is using the Palestinian Authority (PA) as its surrogate in administering much of the rest – largely at the expense of the European Union which is saving Israel the cost of its occupation. The PA has lacked any elected authority since 2009; however it is the dominant employer, reportedly with a 150,000 payroll, and wields massive power of patronage over people living in the West Bank. The situation in Gaza is of course much worse, and it has a government that Israel and the international community treat as pariah. Nowhere are misgivings greater than in the host country, Norway, where according to Peter Bauck, most MPs were pro-Israeli prior to the Accords. Now by contrast, over 70% are pro-Palestinian while only 10% belong to “Friends of Israel” organisations.

The overall message I got from the Conference was that the Oslo Accords were part of a major CON TRICK, one that had successfully manipulated the Israeli public, the Palestinian leadership and international opinion in favour of long standing Zionist agenda which included the West Bank. The following interventions were pertinent in this regard:

- Ilan Pappe started by saying that since 1967 Israel’s political and military elite had orchestrated three public debates about the future of the country; first the “custodian” versus “redeemers” debate about Israel’s role in the occupied territories, then a debate about the Oslo Accords, and the last a televised debate after the exit from the Gaza Strip. However, these were not true debates but charades supporting decisions that were already taken. The elite had already decided to occupy the West Bank before the 6-day War in 1967, and the Oslo Peace Process was a means of legitimising Israeli control and expropriating land, while deceiving the international community and domestic opinion.
• Illan went on to say that the “two-state solution” is not believed or genuinely debated in Israel, and no political party spoke about it at the recent election. Ismail Patel built on this observation by showing that water resources were key to understanding Israel’s real attitude. It is highly dependent on West Bank water, which comes from aquifers and the Jordan Valley, but that these resources were sequestered by military order after 1967. Residents of Israeli settlements consume five times as much per head as do Palestinians. A genuine two-state solution would be intolerable to Israel, as it would lose half of its supply.

• Emile Badarin described what he called a “realist-liberal” peace paradigm, which seeks to limit the terms of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to subjects acceptable to the Israelis, postponing contentious issues like the millions of refugees in the countries surrounding Israel/Palestine. At the same time it promotes intermediary organisations like the PA “with an army of bureaucrats”, that make the occupation more sustainable than previously.

• Stephen Sizer spoke of the phenomenon of Christian Zionism, saying Israel was exploiting it to advance its ends, giving the example of intense lobbying to get the US Embassy moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The Oslo Accords opened the door to the annexation of East Jerusalem, as it failed to clearly define settlements; in the case of Jerusalem, Israel calls them “Jewish neighbourhoods”.

• Dr Ghada Karmi claimed that Oslo had created “the myth of equivalence”, in the sense that each party had a Government and were by virtue of this “roughly equal parties” – whereas in reality the PA’s writ only runs in a series of disconnected enclaves. This in turn according, to Petter Bauck, has allowed the international community to abdicate its responsibility for finding a solution to the conflict.

Israel has major resources to influence World opinion, including a $250 million dollar marketing budget (according to Illan Pappe) and the support of innumerable voluntary enthusiasts and home-grown Zionist and Christian Zionist organisations in Western countries. Baroness Tonge has been very much on the receiving end, and she claimed the Israel lobby had turned round the public positions of political figures including President Obama, William Hague and Chris Patten. When such people are in positions of power, she said, they are subject to the Lobby and if they oppose it their career will end there. In the UK the main elements of this lobby were the Jewish Chronicle, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Community Security Trust. She didn’t mention the British Israel Communications Centre (BICOM) dedicated to creating a more supportive environment for Israel in Britain, and there are also the Friends of Israel organisations in the three political parties, the Tory one claiming to include 80% of Conservative MPs. Recent events at the BBC suggest that the UK-based lobby has scored some successes – see blogs by Amena Saleem on the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign website.

I spoke with Jenny Tonge face-to-face and found her very personable. Coming to politics after a long career in community medical services she was better placed than younger politicians to brave a powerful lobby.

Another speaker to fall foul of the lobby was the Reverend Stephen Sizer, whom the British Board of Deputies has denounced for making statements that it finds offensive and for posting links to articles on other websites which it considers racist and anti-Semitic. He is currently under investigation by the Church of England, but an impressive number of individuals have come to his defence, including some Jews and Israelis. Such cases underline Jenny Tonge’s point, showing that it is very difficult to speak up in the face of any powerful lobby that has the resources and the time to scrutinise every statement and every web link for something that can be construed or misconstrued, as may be the
Rosemary Hollis made an interesting intervention, indicating that the following facts lay at the root of the failure of the Oslo process:

a) That the Americans involved did not sufficiently empathize with the pain that the Palestinians felt as a result of their experience – they were over pre-occupied with “fixing the problem” and did not want to hear the Palestinians out, labelling them as “mythological”, and;

b) that neither Americans nor Europeans wanted to acknowledge the wrong inflicted on Palestinians during the “Nakba”[1].

The last session dealt with possible solutions and ways forward. Dr Ghada Karmi put forward a radical solution, i.e. that the Palestinians should ask Israel to rule them directly, dismantling the PA and pressing for equal rights within the land of Israel. The quest for rights rather than statehood would be more readily understandable to the international community. However, some other speakers pointed to the likelihood of objections from entrenched interests associated with the PA, from international players who were comfortable with the idea of the “two-state solution” – not to speak of Israel itself. Dr Uri Davis, who has a seat on Fatah’s Revolutionary Council, proposed a somewhat different approach involving the creation of a federal entity, including nominally Jewish and Palestinian states. He also felt that Palestinians should make more use of the Israeli legal system which enjoyed a degree of independence vis-à-vis Israel’s political establishment, and could on occasions produce rulings favourable to Palestinians.

There was a final panel discussion, which the Chair (Dr. Salman Abu Sitta) summed up as follows:

• All speakers were in favour of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and wanted it expanded
• Work should be done to simplify and better present the Palestinian cause to the UK public
• Legal and moral issues should be combined, and
• There should be fresh elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)

Concluding comment
The more I learn about Israel/Palestine, the more I feel that the underlying problem is as much about us as about them– about our ability to promote peace and make the world better for ourselves and others.

Our main instruments in promoting peace are democratic institutions crafted over centuries, and which bring us major benefits of life, liberty and happiness – so to speak. However, we need these institutions to perform much better in the area outlined, and this has ramifications going beyond the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Our leaders must make difficult decisions over a range of dangerous middle-eastern conflicts stretching from Syria to Afghanistan, and in doing so, it is vital that they act rationally and hold in check overbearing lobbies working on behalf of Israel, Saudi Arabia, News International, the Arms Trade or whoever.

The recent commons vote against military action on Syria (significantly, action that was supported by both Israel and Gulf States) provides a ray of hope in this area, as did the parliamentary awakening to media manipulation last year and the Leveson enquiry that followed. It is in this context that I feel that the “Oslo 20 years on Conference” is a step in the process of rolling back lobbies and discovering our own purpose.

Endnote:
[1] The Nakba (catastrophe in English) was when some 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from Palestine after the Israeli declaration of independence)
Field Update: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

UNRWA data released in 2013 showed that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was 474,053. They are distributed in 12 refugee camps in 58 different areas.

The general condition of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has gone through many changes. Politically, steps were taken to calm the security tension to safeguard Palestinian refugees in the camps amid rising tension between different Lebanese’s parties and factions. Efforts were also made to ease the security tension between Lebanese factions which is caused by the volatile situation in Syria.

On the academic level, various meetings and workshops took place. Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations held a seminar titled, “Strategic Evaluation for the Palestinian Cause in 2013” where it highlighted the developments in the Palestinian cause over 2012. It also provided an analysis for the year 2013. The centre held workshop tackling the conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Shahid Association for Human Rights published their yearly report documenting the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The report revealed that the humanitarian conditions of Palestinian refugees remain the same with slight improvements in some areas.

Twelve Palestinian organization and association launched a campaign under the title; “My Ownership doesn’t abolish my Right of Return” it aimed at enabling Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to own properties. It also seeks to cancel the amendments made in 2001 to law 296. The campaign seeks to make it clear that the right of return will always remain sacred for all Palestinians and property ownership in Lebanon will not affect its status.

The International Campaign to demanding an apology from Britain held a number of activities where people have started to sign the petition including officials and politicians like former Lebanese Prime Minister Salim al-Hos, former minister Dr. Abd Al-Rahim Murad and Dr. Isam Noman.

On the popular level, the refugee camps hosted thousands of Palestinian refugees as well as Syrian refugees who fled the country due to the current conflict. With the growing numbers of Palestinian refugees coming from Syria, UNRWA is facing great difficulty in securing accommodation. This has pushed some to protest in front of UNRWA compounds to secure accommodation and support for nearly 49,500 persons.

A field delegation by European MEPs and British politicians visited the refugee camps in Lebanon to investigate the condition facing Palestinian refugees including those that have fled Syria. Also, various aid convoys and campaigns arrived at the camps to help refugees fleeing Syria.

Field Update: Suffering of Palestinian Refugees in Syria Jan-May 2013

Palestinian refugee camps in Syria are exposed to various attacks that include killing, bombing, kidnapping and assassinations. Targeting the refugees began in al Raml refugee camp in Latakia then spread to other camps. The number of Palestinian casualties in the last 5 months (from Jan-May 2013) is 400 including children and women. Hundreds of the refugees were kidnapped or jailed. On the 27 of April 2013, the Free Syrian Army announced its control over Handarat refugee camp in Aleppo following deadly clashes with forces from the Syrian regime. The clashes resulted in the killing and wounding of many Palestinians in addition to forcing thousands out from the camp.
Khan Al Shaikh refugee camp was attacked on March 2013 with bombing and missiles resulting in many casualties. The houses of the refugees were severely damaged while cars were bombed and public transport busses were destroyed. The action of the regime was due to kidnapping of a regime officer by FSA. On the 17th of January 2013, a fighter jet belonging to the Syrian regime bombed al Husainiya refugee camp killing 9 Palestinians, 7 of them were children. On 12 May the camp was hit by ground-to-ground missiles (GRAD) resulting in severe damage to many houses. The camp was a battlefield between the regime and FSA on many occasions.

Al Yarmouk refugee camp was heavily bombed by regime jet fighters. In March, 4 people were killed and 20 wounded due to air bombardments. FSA executed 2 Palestinian refugees under claims they are collaborating with the regime. Refugees in the camp have complained about the regular practices of some groups that are loyal to the FSA who sabotage and steal their properties. Protests took to the street refusing the siege imposed on the camp asking that the bombing of the camp should end.

On the humanitarian level, refugees in the camp have been subjected to a tight siege imposed by the regime. It has installed various checkpoints at the entrance of the camps banning medical and food stuff from streaming into the camp.

A horrendous massacre was perpetrated in Sbaina refugee camp as a barrage of rockets hit the camp. Tens of people were killed and others were wounded including children and women. A tight siege is also imposed in the camp creating a humanitarian disaster as food, commodities and medical equipments are dangerously scarce. Added to this, oil and other materials are not allowed to enter the camps which increase the suffering of people as they are the only means to heat, cook and stay warm.

Al Nayrb refugee camp is in a similar humanitarian condition as it is under siege this time not by the regime but groups of FSA. They don’t allow humanitarian goods including basic food needs and they restrict freedom of movement of people. Many have been arrested by the FSA. The camps have become a battlefield between the Syrian regime and the FSA.

Mafraq Ala’deen refugee camp in Homs was besieged by the regime. Road blocks of sand and fences were imposed to encircle and close the camps. A checkpoint on the entrance of the camp was made to observe the movement and restrict food and humanitarian necessities in the camp. Local merchants and traders exploited the siege and instability and raised the price of goods.

There are clashes between the FSA and Syrian taking place around the camp where light and heavy weaponry were used. The camp was affected by the clashes as missiles rained down. A mosque and a school were hit leaving people dead and many others wounded.

Diraa, Khan Danon and al Sayda Zaynab refugee camps are also affected by the fighting. Exchange of fire and bombings have caused considerable damage. In Jaramana refugee camp, the refugees demanded that the PLO Palestinian Refugee Commission intervene and not abdicate from its responsibility.

Politically, a delegation from Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) visited Damascus to look into the conditions of Palestinian refugees in the country. It also aimed at protecting the refugees and allowing them to return to their homes in the camps. According to the people in the camps as well as a number of NGOs, the visit has not achieved its aims and done nothing to ease the suffering of Palestinians.
Report: Kerry Proposes Return of 80,000 Palestinian Refugees to Israel

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has proposed to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas the return of 80,000 Palestinian refugees to Israel as part of a comprehensive peace deal, a Palestinian official told China's Xinhua News Agency.

"Kerry's proposal on the return of refugees is the same proposal offered by former U.S. President Bill Clinton during Camp David peace talks held in the United States in 2000," the official said. However, the official added that Abbas wants to increase the number to 200,000 Palestinians returning to Israel.

As a result of the 1948 War of Independence and subsequent Arab-Israeli Wars, several million Palestinians and their descendants live in surrounding Arab countries. These Arab countries have refused to integrate the refugees, where they are often lack basic human rights.

As part of previous peace negotiations, Israel has discussed allowing a small number return. However, Israel is concerned about the demographic and economic consequences and has called for a more comprehensive solution to the issue that also addresses compensation for Jewish refugees as well.


Number of Palestinians in the World is 11.8 Million, says Statistics Bureau

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) presents the situation of Palestinians at the end of 2013, as follows:

Increase in world population of Palestinians
- The projected number of Palestinians in the world is 11.8 million, of whom 4.5 million are in Palestine, 1.4 million in Israel, 5.2 million in Arab countries and around 665 thousand in foreign countries.

More than one-third of population in Gaza Strip
- The projected number of Palestinians living in Palestine at the end of 2013 is 4.5 million: around 2.8 million increased in the West Bank and 1.7 million in the Gaza Strip.
- Palestinian refugees make up 44.2% of the Palestinian population in Palestine: 41.2% of them in the West Bank and 58.8% in the Gaza Strip.

Decrease in average household size
- The average household size in Palestine was 5.3 persons in 2012 compared to 6.4 in 1997: 5.1 persons in the West Bank and 6.0 persons in the Gaza Strip.

High fertility rate among Palestinians in Jordan
- The total fertility rate for Palestinians living in Jordan was 3.3 births in 2010 compared to 2.5 in Syria in 2010 and 2.8 in Lebanon in 2011.

Youthful Palestinian population in Israel
- The number of Palestinians living in Israel is 1.4 million, of whom about 36.1% are aged below 15 years compared to 4.1% aged 65 years and above.

Higher fertility rate among Palestinians in Israel than among Jews.
- The total fertility rate in 2012 among Palestinians living in Israel was 3.3 births compared to 3.0 births among Jews.
- The average Palestinian household size in Israel is 4.8 persons. The crude birth rate of Palestinians in Israel exceeded 24.8 births for every 1000 of population.
The number of Palestinians in historical Palestine will exceed the number of Jews, over time.

The number of Palestinians in historical Palestine totaled 5.9 million at the end of 2013.

There were 6.0 million Jews at the end of 2012, according to estimates by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the number is expected to reach 6.1 million Jews by the end of 2013.

The number of Palestinians and Jews will total about 6.4 million each, by the end of 2016, provided that current growth rates remain constant.

However, the number of Palestinians in historical Palestine will total 7.2 million, compared to 6.9 Jews by the end of 2020. http://www.imemc.org/article/66665

Caught between Syria’s regime and rebels, Palestinian refugees are starving to death

Before Syria’s civil war began, the bustling camp was home to 150,000 Palestinian refugees who led normal lives, complete with schools, hospitals, and nonstop traffic. Today, it stands mostly in ruin. Only 20,000 Palestinian refugees remain there, most of which are poor, elderly, or children who cannot afford to run away. Syria’s largest Palestinian refugee camp, once home to half a million people, now resembles a World War Two ghetto.

The camp was closed off by the Syrian regime six months ago, after it served as a primary base of operations for the Free Syrian Army and other radical Islamist militias. The battle in Syria is not only between the regime and the Free Syrian Army, but also between the Free Syrian Army and the radical militias. Many Palestinians from the Yarmouk camp have joined the Free Syrian Army.

UN aid workers are unable to enter the camp, as the Syrian army denies them access and the rebel militias open fire against them. Humanitarian conditions at Yarmouk are “worsening dramatically,” warned UNRWA Commissioner General Filippo Grandi on December 20, adding, “[W]e are currently unable to help those trapped inside. If this situation is not addressed urgently, it may be too late to save the lives of thousands of people including children.” It’s doubtful anyone is heeding his warnings.

The tragedy lies in that there really is no one to negotiate with in order to secure free flow of aid to the camp. Palestinian leaders managed to reach an agreement with the Syrian regime, but the regime demanded that all armed individuals leave the area. When the Palestinian leaders met with officials from rebel groups, and especially the Islamist militias, their demands were refused, as the rebels claim that the land is Syrian, and not Palestinian. Earlier this week, it seemed that an agreement would be reached, but the fighting rages on in the camp and those in dire need of aid won’t get it anytime soon.

“Why are Palestinians in Syria being punished this way?” asks Palestinian Journalist Mirna Sakhnini on the Yarmouk camp’s Facebook page. “Is it because they tried to stay neutral, refusing to be mercenaries for either side? Is it because they refused to lay down the arms of the Palestinians, and take up the arms of the Syrian fighters? The Palestinians decided to live alongside the Syrian people not because they betrayed the Syrian regime but due to their humanity, respect, and love for Syria. Today, they alone are paying the price of war.”

Sakhnini defines the suffering of the Palestinians in Syria as a “second Nakba, and first starvation,” and she states that recently, religious edicts have been issued to allow camp residents to eat cats and dogs in order to allay their hunger.

Roughly half a million Palestinian refugees lived in Syria before the war began. Most of them lived in the refugee camps, but some rented apartments throughout Syria. Economically, their situa-
tion was similar to the lower-class Syrians, but some of them managed to find good jobs, open businesses, or earn a living from agriculture. Their civil status was better than refugees in Lebanon, where until about four years ago refugees were forbidden from working in 68 different professions, from living outside of refugee camps, owning property, or leaving the country. Though Syria did not grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees, it never placed significant restrictions on them in terms of profession or property ownership.


**Palestinians die from hunger, medical shortages in Yarmouk**

A Syrian monitoring group said Friday it had documented the deaths of 41 Palestinian refugees in besieged Yarmouk camp, including women and children, as a result of food and medical shortages. “Food and medical shortages have killed at least 41 people in the past three months in Yarmouk” in southern Damascus, which has been under suffocating army siege since rebel groups took control of it, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Of the total, 24 have died as a result of malnutrition. The rest died either because of a lack of specialized treatment or because of a shortage of medicines, Observatory director Rami Abd al-Rahman said.

According to the Britain-based group, which relies on a network of activists and doctors across Syria for its reports, three of the fatalities were children and 13 of them women.

“Among them was a one-day-old child who could have survived had there been incubators,” Abd al-Rahman said.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees has frequently warned about the dire conditions in Yarmouk. UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness Thursday described “extreme human suffering” in the camp, saying food shortages continued and that the absence of medical care had led to women dying in childbirth. Syria’s army has imposed sieges on several rebel towns and neighborhoods near Damascus and beyond.

The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, meanwhile, also warned aid was not reaching civilians in Syria as he began a visit to Syria to assess the humanitarian situation and negotiate greater field access for the ICRC.

The ICRC president will hold talks in Damascus with a number of senior Syrian government officials and with the leadership and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the ICRC’s main partner in the country. Maurer will also be visiting people suffering the effects of the conflict to observe the situation first-hand.

“I am deeply concerned about the escalating violence and its impact on civilians,” Maurer said. “I am determined to press for greater field access for the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent – in particular, to improve the impartial delivery of medical aid in besieged areas. Another priority is to ensure that our staff are rapidly given access to Syrian places of detention to assess conditions and treatment.”

Yarmouk was once home to some 170,000 people but tens of thousands have fled fighting in the camp. Syria is officially home to nearly 500,000 Palestinian refugees, around half of whom have been displaced by the conflict.

Israel against return of refugees to future Palestinian state

The hawkish Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman expressed his rejection of the return of Palestinian refugees even to any future Palestinian state, a report said on Saturday.

The Israeli Radio quoted Lieberman as saying during Friday’s meeting with visiting US Secretary of State John Kerry that even if an agreement was reached, various Arab countries currently hosting Palestinian refugees would want to send the some three million people to the independent Palestinian territories, which would create “a very difficult humanitarian situation.”

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) said recently that the Palestinian refugees in the world reached 5.3 million by the end of 2012. They are dependent on UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA).

Lieberman is the most prominent politician in the so-called “Russian” sector, of Israelis who immigrated from the former Soviet Union. His party, Yisrael Beiteinu, merged with Likud in the lead-up to the last elections.

The Israeli minister warned that, that such a move would cause frustration, violence and a deterioration of security if the Palestinian infrastructure could not handle such a mass influx of people.

“Any agreement between Israel and the Palestinians must be based on a solid foundation of security for Israel and a stable economy for the Palestinians,” Lieberman said.

The right of return is one of the thorniest issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinian Authority (PA) said that the issue of refugees will be included in the peace talks with Israel.

Israel rejects the idea of Palestinian refugees’ right of return to their original homes in the 1948 areas in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 194, saying that in any future peace solution, they can only return to their independent state, which will be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel fears that a massive influx would threaten the Jewish majority in the country, which now counts some 8 million of whom some 1.6 million Arab Palestinians.

The Palestinians say that in the summer of 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled their homes after armed Jewish guerrillas stormed their villages and forced them to leave after hundreds of them were slaughtered.

The Palestinian leadership holds Israel politically, legally and morally responsible for the acts of killing, destruction and displacing against the refugees. It says that their issue will be included in the peace talks with Israel.

Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank: Research on their Demography And Determination of Return

Prepared and analysed by: Awni Fares & Hassan Kaddoumi
Supervised and edited by: Adeeb Ziadeh & Omar Kachouh

Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank Continuity of life and Determination of Return, provides an in-depth analysis of the current situation of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. It begins with an historical overview of the plight of refugees, focusing more specifically on the establishment and development of life in the camps. It provides details of the current composition and the roles provided by United Nations Work and Relief Agency (UNRWA), other agencies and the Palestinian Authority.

The study offers a critical evaluation of the services provided by different organizations and institutions to the refugees. It also lists recommendations for more efficient ways to direct aid and assistance in addition to shedding light onto the critical question relating to the right of return.

While surveying the refugee camps the book begins with a look at the historical background to the birth of the refugee crises which the Palestinians refer to as their Nakba (catastrophe). This is followed by discussion on the question of the definition of refugees that has proved quite controversial within the international framework dealing with the question of Palestinian refugees.

A detailed description of the birth and development of refugee camp is then presented paying detailed attention to the shifts in political importance of the camps. The evolution of the camps from their formative period during 1948-1967, through their role in the first Intifada during the 80s and their political marginalisation after the Oslo accords where power shifted to the Palestinian National Authority is extremely insightful.

One of the many unique features of this book is its use of both quantitative and qualitative surveys in providing a comprehensive analysis of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. It details twenty three refugee camps from their birth to their current composition. For example one of the camps reviewed is Al Amari camp which was established by the Red Cross in 1949. The inhabitants were all historic Palestine; 37% came from Lod, 15% from An Naani and the rest from 50 small villages that were ethnically cleansed by Israel. UNRWA began to provide assistance from 1950 and the demographic composition of the camp when through different stages of growth and stagnation.

The book provides a detailed look at the quality and levels of provision made available at
the camps. After describing the social and demographic composition of the population base of the West Bank, which includes fertility rates, age categories, mortality rates and other indicators, it presents a lengthy survey of the level and types of provision, including health and education available to the refugees in the West Bank.

The historical and demographic overview is then followed by a detailed survey of the attitudes of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank which is based on a questionnaire. The survey reflects the views and opinions of Palestinian refugees towards the institutions providing assistance and support. In addition to their views on health and education it includes their views on relief and social services, microfinance, emergency programme and UNRWA budget.

The just cause of the Palestinians is inextricably linked to the plight of Palestinian refugees and their dream of returning to their homeland from which they were expelled. The book investigates this central position of the right of return which Palestinian factions placed as a central plank and one of the main priorities since the beginning of the Nakba. The opinion pool carried out about the attitudes of Palestinian refugees in the camps of the West Bank regarding the right of return explores the very strong emotions this issue invokes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of people committees and Palestinian organizations</th>
<th>Greatly contribute %</th>
<th>Fairly contribute %</th>
<th>Contribute to a low degree %</th>
<th>Don’t contribute %</th>
<th>Don’t know/no opinion %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing complete health services</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing complete educational services</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing complete relief services</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With continuous changes taking place on the ground socially, politically and economically it’s refreshing to see a book addressing key points on all three areas. By making good use of available data and carrying out its own polls and surveys, this book provides a unique look at the historical challenges of Palestinian refugees, the quality of international response and services and the views on refugees in the West Bank on crucial questions like the right of return. As a source of information, it will be useful to individuals and organisations interested in understanding the plight of refugees and how to improve assistance to them.

- **Publication Date:** 2013
- **Paperback:** 112 pages
- **Publisher:** Palestinian Return Centre & The Academy of Refugees Studies (20 Nov 2013)
- **Price:** £10.00 (plus P&P)
The Failure of the Two-State Solution: The Prospects of One State in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Hani A. Faris (Author, Editor)

Diplomats, politicians and activists alike have long laboured under the assumption that a two-state solution is the only path to peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But as this conflict continues unabated, and violence and instability deepen, it seems that the ideal of two states coexisting alongside each other and the ever-elusive goal of peace slip further from reach.

The Failure of the Two-State Solution examines the impasse in the Israel-Palestine conflict, exploring the reasons behind the breakdown of attempts to establish a meaningful Palestinian state. This book therefore points to another - until recently unthinkable - option: a single bi-national state in Israel-Palestine, with all inhabitants sharing in equal rights and citizenship, regardless of ethnicity or faith. Hani A. Faris has drawn together a wide-ranging and in-depth analysis of the historical and current situation in Israel-Palestine. By analysing the history of the conflict in Israel-Palestine and its numerous peace initiatives, this book demonstrates how the current deadlock has been reached.

With a nascent Palestinian state hampered by Israeli security policy and internal political divisions and the continuing expansion of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, it is argued here that the viability of the two-state solution seems to have run its course. And so highlights the one-state solution as an option, and debates and develops the organisational steps and strategies, on a local and international level, that would enable the construction of a bi-national state. With scholars from the US, Europe, the Arab world and Israel analysing the possibility of a one-state solution and the shortcomings of the two-state track, this is an important and ground-breaking book for students of Politics, International Relations, Peace Studies and Middle East Studies and all interested in the resolution of this seemingly intractable conflict.

• Publication Date: 2013
• Hardcover: 400 pages
• Publisher: I. B. Tauris (30 Mar 2013)
THE PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE
KEEPING THE ISSUE ALIVE

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

OUR GOALS

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

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

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

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

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

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

Nationally PRC holds public meetings in Westminster in partnership with mainstream political parties.
RAISING AWARENESS
There are many misinformation about Palestinian refugees, from the birth of their plight in 1948, their status under international law, their current composition and their position within international law and the political process. PRC seeks to rectify this and address the refugee issue in its proper historical context.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Delegations
PRC successfully coordinated a number of delegations from Europe and the UK to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Its most high profile delegation was in 2011 when over 50 European parliamentarians visited Gaza.

WWW.PRC.ORG.UK