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the 2011 Libyan Uprising**  
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Water Pours on to Gaza Refugee  
Camps**  
Gaza- Al-Jeel Press

**Palestinian Refugees in Iraq:  
"Displaced in Exile"**  
Legal Dept. at PRC

# Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies

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Majed Al Zeer

## From the Director

In recent history, Palestinians, more than any other, have been at the bitter end of seismic shifts in the Middle. Starting with the Nakba in 1948 when there was a calamitous change to the political landscape that was implanted on the region, Palestinians have, ever since, been living extremely precarious lives.

In addition to the 7.1 million Palestinian refugees there continues new waves of displacement in occupied Palestine and other parts of the region. In the last decade many more Palestinians have been displaced, some for the third and fourth time. Even now, Palestinians in Iraq continue to experience death, persecution and exile. Their numbers have dwindled to 8,000 from 35,000.

The Palestinian ambassador in Iraq, Daleel Al Qassous, stated a few months ago that the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Iraq is the worst compared to any other group of Palestinian refugees.

The vicious cycle of exile and dislocation follows Palestinians everywhere and the uprising in the Middle East has again highlighted the bitter reality of the Palestinian community in diasporas.

Palestinians in Libya and Syria are the latest to face these traumatic shifts as thousands flee violence into neighbouring countries and refugee camps.

Some of the articles in this edition are timely addition to the discussion around Palestinian refugees in a changing Middle East. It is a discussion that's taking place in many different platforms.

The Palestinian Return Centre in conjunction with Al-jazeera organized a seminar with the title "Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World: Realities and Prospects", in Doha during April 2012. Over two days, experts presented papers on numerous issues including the political and social conditions of Palestinians in the Arab World, Impact of the Arab revolution on Palestine and Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon.

Our annual conference this year, the 10th Palestinians in Europe Conference held in Copenhagen, will be under the theme, "Our Spring blossoms our Return". The conference will be organized under the auspices of the Tunisian President, Mohammed Monsef al Marzouqi and will reflect on the Arab Spring and its significance for the Palestinian cause.

The Palestinian cause is eternally tied to peace and prosperity for the region. The call for freedom, human rights and justice in the Arab streets is immediately followed by a call for an end to the brutal occupation of Palestine.

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".



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Nasim Ahmed

## From the Editor

In the volatile political climate of the Middle East, Israel's domination and subjugation of Palestine remains constant. Early dismantling of Palestine was followed by a slow disappearance, with sudden interruptions of egregious violence. The end goal throughout has remained the same; the total supplanting of Palestine with a Jewish state.

Nearly seven decades on from the initial ethnic cleansing of Palestine, denouncing the notion that the state was merely a means to achieve total colonisation of Palestine, appears extremely misguided. Israel in its stated goal was a contradiction. The project could only succeed by reconciling the irreconcilable, a lesson that has been learnt at a great cost to Palestinians. For decades, Israel assailed against the natural flow of history and wrestled successfully with its own internal conflict between democratic principles and demographic realities to impose its will on the region.

Can this go on? Can Israel, in a changing Middle East and amid growing shifts in the world's geopolitical axis, maintain its trajectory? Definitely not. Not simply because a state of injustice cannot be maintained for eternity, or that the long arc of history does indeed bend towards justice, but also because the evident changes taking place in the Middle East and around the world will sweep Israel of its misguided path.

The nature and trajectory of this change is, however, hard to gauge. Many factors will contribute to this, and we have a fascinating insight in to China's position on Palestine from Samantha Hoffman who argues that China's growing power can alter the outcome of world politics, China's rhetoric against "hegemonism" and the US dominated world order presents a challenge to the current world system. New realities cause us to consider how China might use its power in order to alter world politics

In the short term, aware that a decade is hardly a blink in time, Israel may close in on itself even more than it already has, becoming more terrible and even more of a pariah in the region. There are clear signs of this already with the extreme right wing coalition of Netanyahu and other religious parties, who have clearly demonstrated they represent an existential threat to Palestine.

As Alice Rothchild argues in this edition, the ascension of Avigdor Lieberman, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's overtly racist foreign minister, is not only disastrous in its own right, but also represents a culmination of longstanding Israeli policies. Israeli universities, she argues, are filled with research on demographics and the devastating consequences of an Arab majority in Israel. Lieberman lifts the mask from the myth that a



country that privileges Jews over Arabs can also be a land where all if its citizens find justice and equal opportunity.

The unshakable desire for change in the Middle East has created a volcanic eruption, bringing with it tragedy for some and new pastures for others. One can only hope that in the long term the path taken is towards greater freedom, open government and more justice for the entire region as discussed by Chris Somes-Charlton.

Palestinians were not untouched. Many have been displaced again in Libya (see Elena Fiddiyan-Qasmiyeh), Egypt and Syria. However, their misfortune has not been in vain as new fissures in the Arab world, opened by a new generation of freedom seekers in the Middle East, showed that freedom and justice in the Middle East is intertwined with the fate of Palestinians. Nowhere was this more vivid than Egypt. Where, as Chris Somes argues in this edition, Most correspondents simply reported that the protesters in Tahrir Square were seeking the end of Mubarak and his regime, omitting to mention the demand for a change in policy towards Israel.

After decades of political paralysis, millions of freedom seekers in the Middle East have learnt that their political fate is tied to that of the Palestinians. Without justice and freedom in Palestine, their revolution will not meet its full potential.

This simple fact, instead of shuddering Israel to steer a new course has only increased its belligerence. Responding as it does best, seeking a *casus belli*, citing external enemies - Iran in this case - as existential threats, shamefully scoring political points through the memory of millions of murdered Jews in Europe, and holding the world hostage with guilt. (Haaretz, 6,3,2012, by conjuring the holocaust Netanyahu brought Israel closer to war)

Israel cannot remain constant while tectonics shifts are taking place beneath it. Change in the Middle East is inevitable. A free Middle East will demand freedom and justice for Palestine.







Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh\*

## Palestinian Refugees Affected by the 2011 Libyan Uprising: A Brief Overview

Whilst Palestinians in Libya remain a largely invisible population, overshadowed by the larger numbers of Palestinians in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Gaza and Egypt, at the outbreak of the Arab Spring Libya was home to over 100 Palestinian students, an estimated 50,000 - 70,000 Palestinian migrant-workers, and over 8,000 Palestinians recognised as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

As the anti-government protests rapidly escalated to a major conflict characterised by widespread attacks between pro- and anti-Gaddafi forces, Palestinians were subjected to violence from all sides, tens of thousands were displaced within the country, and thousands more attempted to escape the conflict by crossing the Libyan- Egyptian border. Palestinians' experiences before, during and after the 2011 Libyan uprising demonstrate the ongoing and overlapping vulnerabilities faced by Palestinians in the region, and the challenges of identifying a safe haven for refugees who have been displaced multiple times in their lives.

This article provides a brief overview of Palestinians' presence in Libya from the 1970s to the present, and of the multiple processes of displacement and expulsion faced by Palestinians during this period, culminating in the most recent 2011 conflict.

### Palestinians' presence in Libya: 1970s – 2011

From the early-1970s, Colonel Gaddafi supported Palestinians by opening a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) office in Tripoli, offering scholarships for Palestinian youth to complete their secondary and tertiary studies, and granting work permits to tens of thousands of Palestinian migrant workers.

In line with Libya's Reservation to Article 1 of the Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States, Gaddafi's government has historically considered Palestinians to be "Arab citizens residing in Libya" rather than refugees per se. However, as in other countries in the region, Palestinian refugees have been "increasingly asking to be recognized as just refugees, full stop."

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\* Departmental Lecturer in Forced Migration at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. A longer version of this article is available as Research Paper no. 225, New Issues in Refugee Research.

Table 1: Estimated Palestinian Population in Libya, 1970-2011

1970	1981	1992	1996	2011
5,000	23,759 (approx. 14,600 males and 9,100 females)	29,207	17,000	50,000 – 70,000

Indeed, thousands of Palestinians who were born as refugees and were registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) as refugees at birth in Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan or Egypt, have also applied for and have been granted asylum in Libya. Since 1996, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has documented that thousands of Palestinians have been recognised as refugees under the 1951 Geneva Convention or as individuals in need of alternative forms of humanitarian protection (Tables 2 and 3, and Chart 1). Of the 943 Palestinian applications for asylum in Libya in 2008, for instance, 544 were offered 1951 Geneva Convention Refugee Status, and 344 were granted complementary protection (63 cases were pending at the end of the year). In the case of Palestinians in Libya, many can therefore be considered to be “double refugees.”

Table 2: Total Palestinian Refugee Population Registered by UNHCR, New Palestinian Arrivals / Asylum Applicants, and UNHCR Assisted Palestinians in Libya, 1996-2009 (where information is available)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 – 2007	2008	2009
Total Palestinian Refugee Population Registered by UNHCR	3281	5752	7252	7602	8500	8585	8604	8787	8873	8873	No data	No data	No data
New Palestinian Arrivals/ Asylum Applications	1461	1612	350	350	898	943	942						
UNHCR Assisted Palestinians	900	400							521				

Table 2: Gender and Age of New Palestinian Arrivals/Asylum Applicants (where information is available)

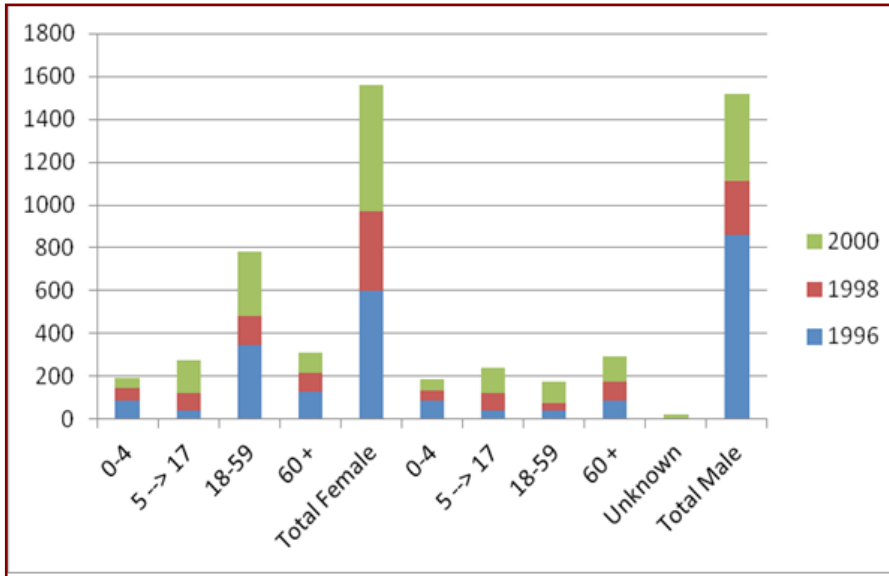
	Total	Females				Males				Unknown	Total Male	
		0-4	5 - 17	18-59	60 +	Total Female	0-4	5 - 17	18-59	60 +		
1996	1461	86	43	344	129	602	86	43	43	85		859
1998	620	60	80	140	90	370	50	80	30	90		250
2000	1000	50	150	300	90	590	50	120	100	120	20	410

### Palestinian Displacement in and from Libya: 1970s – 2011

The mass displacement of Palestinians within and from Libya in 2011 is not the first time that Palestinians have faced expulsion from the country. For instance, hundreds of Palestinian migrant-workers were expelled from Libya in March 1971, and more recently, in March 2007, Gaddafi had threatened to deport all Palestinians “in retaliation for the latest Arab peace initiative.”



Chart 1: Gender and Age of New Palestinian Asylum Applicants in Libya in 1996, 1998 and 2000.



The most significant experience of mass displacement from Libya occurred in September 1995, when Gaddafi threatened to expel all of the country's estimated 30,000 Palestinian migrant workers in protest of the PLO having signed the Oslo Accords. Palestinians were forcibly collected, transported and deported by Gaddafi's forces, with over 13,000 Palestinians deported from Libya over the course of eight months. Thousands more were left stranded on the Egyptian-Libyan border as most countries in the region under UNRWA's area of operations introduced further "restrictions on the entry of Palestinians, even on those who had right of residence." An unknown number of Palestinians eventually returned to Libya in search of work, but found themselves in a highly uncertain situation; thousands reportedly stayed in an irregular status, fearful of renewing their work permits and engaging with the Libyan authorities. Such fears are grounded in an acute awareness of the vulnerability of Palestinians in the country; these overlapping vulnerabilities emerged once again during the most recent conflict.

Since the outbreak of violence in February 2011, thousands of Palestinians have been "internally stuck refugees" and "internally displaced refugees," with witnesses denouncing that Palestinian families and neighbourhoods had been targeted by Gaddafi and anti-Gaddafi armed forces alike. Although all of the Palestinian recipients of Libyan scholarships had been evacuated from Libya by early March 2011, at least one Palestinian refugee-student, Khan Younis from the Gaza strip, was reportedly killed in Libya during the violence. His sister highlighted the particular vulnerability of young Palestinian refugees in the conflict:

There is a dangerous level of incitement against the Palestinians in Libya [...] the mercenaries of the Qaddafi regime are responsible for several attacks against the Palestinians in the country.

Other reports assert that Gaddafi's forces "detained Palestinians studying at a military college in the northwestern city [of Misrata] after they refused to join the pro-regime forces."

Given the invisibility of Palestinians in Libya before and during the conflict, and the international community's failure to collect reliable information regarding the number, whereabouts and protection

needs of Palestinians in the country, it is impossible to know exactly how many Palestinians have been injured, killed, or displaced by the conflict.

What is clear is that throughout the conflict, thousands of Palestinians fled within Libya, while others attempted to cross the Libyan-Egyptian border. As in 1995-1996, hundreds of Palestinian individuals and families were left “stranded” at the Salloum border crossing while the authorities decided whether they could cross the border, and where to. By 3 June 2011 UNHCR had “helped 765 Palestinians stranded in a no man’s land to travel to Gaza, through the Rafah border crossing, in Egypt.” However, there is no reliable information about precisely how many Palestinians “successfully” left Libya, and how many, and who (i.e. gender, age and point of origin) have remained internally stuck and why. Further research is also urgently needed to know how Palestinians have experienced the period following the execution of Gaddafi on 20 October 2011, and what their ongoing protection needs are.

Precisely where Palestinian refugees should, could, or might want to be safely evacuated to, and by whom, is a highly complex issue given dynamics in the region and the ongoing Israeli occupation and blockade. Especially in the case of Palestinians who had been registered by UNHCR or had been offered refugee status or complementary protection since arriving in Libya, but also for the tens of thousands of “refugee migrant workers” for whom Libya has been “home” for ten or twenty years, can the international community either expect, or indeed responsibly allow, Palestinians to return to Gaza, to the refugee camps in Lebanon, or to the explosive situation in Syria, where Syrian forces attacked a Palestinian refugee camp near Latakia (North-East Syria) on 15 August 2011, displacing over 5,000 Palestinians? Proposals for Palestinians formerly and currently based in Libya to be “returned” or “resettled” within the region are highly problematic given historical and contemporary restrictions on Palestinians’ movement, and the violation of their human rights across UNRWA’s sites of operation.

## Conclusion?

The 2011 Libyan crisis has been characterised by thousands of Palestinians’ inability to seek sanctuary by crossing the Libyan borders to Tunisia or Egypt, even when holding valid travel documents. In this and other ways, the conflict visibly demonstrates the ongoing and overlapping vulnerabilities faced by Palestinians in the region. Whilst characterised by an unprecedented degree of violence, for Palestinians formerly and currently based in Libya, the parallel processes of conflict-induced displacement and conflict-induced immobility, may be experienced as an instance of history repeating itself, yet again.

Palestinian refugees’ inability to safely “integrate” into host countries in the region, and the constant fluctuation and intensification of vulnerability experienced, have previously justified the resettlement of Palestinians to third countries outside of the region, as evidenced in the precedent of the resettlement of ex-Iraqi Palestinian refugees “stuck” at the Iraqi-Syrian and Iraqi-Jordanian borders. In March 2011, the UN reasserted “the need to identify solutions to resettle some 1,000 third country nationals (mostly Iraqis and Palestinians) at Libya’s borders with Egypt and Tunisia who do not wish to return to their countries”.

Precisely who will be prioritised for resettlement or other forms of protection, by which states and how soon, remains to be explored, as will the inevitable challenges which will be presented by state and non-state actors who reject even the prospect of the resettlement of Palestinians outside of the region.

I would argue that a balance must be achieved and maintained between the individual and collective protection needs of Palestinian refugees, and the geopolitical interests of diverse actors including Middle

Eastern and North African states, the Palestinian Authorities, international organisations such as UNHCR and UNRWA, and potential resettlement states themselves. While concerns will invariably be raised that resettlement outside of the region would jeopardise Palestinians' Right of Return (as enshrined in UN Resolutions 194 and 3236) it is essential that Palestinians themselves have the opportunity to decide the best means to secure effective protection for themselves and their families, rather than having decisions and "solutions" presented by diverse actors on their behalf.

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Iman Yaseen\*

## Palestinians in Egypt after the Egyptian revolution

Relationships between Palestinian refugees have deepened where previously they lacked a unifying entity for three decades. The Arab Spring has restored and strengthened this bond. Abd Al-Rahman, supervisor of “New Egyptians” page on Facebook said: “we made up the page last march, through which we appealed for the first peaceful protesting event calling for the right of all Palestinian born Egyptian mothers to acquire Egyptian nationality in accordance with law No.154 of 2004.” He added: “despite the fact that this law has been approved since 2004, we had no hope of being granted Egyptian nationality during Mubarak’s reign, and consequently we didn’t think to claim our rights. Following the downfall of Mubarak’s regime we acquired Egyptian nationality. Days before, we celebrated the wedding of the first couple whose acquaintance with each other was via the “New Egyptians” page. We hope more social interaction will take place among the Palestinian families.”

Perhaps the most important act carried out by the new recipients of Egyptian nationality is their demand for fees to obtain their university certificates to be suspended over the last ten years. M. K. (cannot disclose their identity) said: “before we got the Egyptian nationality, the Egyptian authorities used to treat us as foreigners and impose on us high university fees which most of us couldn’t pay. As a consequence our graduation certificates used to be suspended until we paid off the fees, which was impossible for many. But now we went to the relevant authorities in the Tahrir administrative compound to acquire letters directed to university administration stating our acquisition of Egyptian nationality so that we would be exempted from the payment of fees”. She added: “those who are still students among those who got the letters were exonerated from the new semester’s fees; as for graduates, they are still waiting for a reply that we hope to be positive”.

As for the participation in the Egyptian parliamentary elections, L. N. said: “whoever acquired the nationality and was able to get the National Number Card before September was able to cast his vote as any other Egyptian, because the law allows them to; as for those whose cards were delayed due to the huge number of applications submitted, they weren’t able to participate”. He added: “our participation in the Egyptian election doesn’t mean we will dispense with our Palestinian identity, and we headed to the [Palestinian] embassy and demanded our Palestinian passports. We got the preliminary consent of Said Abu Ali from the Ministry of Interior in Ramallah, but he told us that scrutiny of such a decision is the prerogative of the central authorities and have to be endorsed by president Mahmoud Abbas in person”. He added that 40% of Palestinians who acquired the Egyptian nationality by means of their birth to Egyptian mothers are originally holders of Palestinian passports, and what remains is waiting president Abbas’ decision”. Meanwhile, N. A. said: “after we obtained Egyptian nationality we are keen on strengthening ties between the Egyptian and the Palestinian



people and to change the distorted image of Palestinians which had been portrayed by the Egyptian media under the former regime; our first step is to open a branch for the Egyptian-Palestinian Friendship Society, and we embarked on the process of acquiring the approval of the Ministry of Interior. We requested that the location of that society be in Gaza and managed by the Egyptian expatriate community there, while its other branch would be here in Egypt”.

Jubilantly, S. A., who recently acquired the Egyptian nationality, said, “at last, we can visit Gaza after we obtained our Egyptian nationality, our access to Gaza has become easier: Now all we have to do is go to the concerned authorities in the Tahrir compound and acquire the necessary entry permits to Gaza Strip. As for me, the cause is simply that I am of a Palestinian origin, and this cause is sufficiently important now to the Egyptian authorities following the Egyptian revolution”. S.A. adds, “We won’t be satisfied with just visiting Gaza, we have many projects in mind, including the organization of travels to Gaza that would also include Egyptians, in order to acquaint our Egyptian brothers with the suffering of their brethren in the Gaza Strip as a result of the siege imposed on them over the past five years”.

L. A, said that despite the suffering of the Palestinian Refugee in Egypt under the former regime, it doesn’t mean that all of the Palestinian community in Egypt was living under dire economic conditions, but we have many Palestinian businessmen on whom the former regime put restrictions and deprived them of the possession of land and the establishment of big projects and were to participate in the development of Egyptian, let alone Palestinian, economy. He added,” we now have a sizeable number of businessmen who have acquired the Egyptian nationality, and we have vast expectations and aspirations and future plans to establish shared projects in order to increase the volume of investment between the twin countries”.



On the political level, the New Egyptians, as they like to call themselves, hope to interact with each other and to work in promoting reconciliation and to end the Palestinian split.

The treatment of Palestinians in the Egyptian airports and crossings has improved. The divisive feelings caused by the former regime have changed. Moreover, the Egyptian authorities have granted their approval to the opening of the Friendship society in Gaza, a society that would provide services to the Gaza residents of those who acquired the Egyptian nationality. Statistics show that 30% of those who applied for Egyptian Nationality by birth to Egyptian mothers are residents of the Gaza Strip.





Reem Kelani\*

## Sayyid Darwish: music to Palestinian ears

Why write about an Egyptian composer who died in 1923? The answer is the very same reason that this issue of the Journal of Palestinian Refugee Studies is focusing on what the Arab world has been witnessing of late with respect to Palestine and the Palestinians. You will notice that I do not attach any season, summer, spring or autumn, to the fresh air of awakening across the Arab world.

In the blog(1) I wrote to accompany my January 2012 documentary for BBC Radio 4 on the music of the Egyptian revolution (called 'Songs for Tahrir'), I noted that it was the collective that has always driven my research into music. This might not come as a surprise to those who have attended my concerts, but since my childhood, music has never simply been a form of entertainment. For some reason, it's always been associated with a concept, a narrative, or – dare I say – a cause. I never consciously resolved that it should be so, but I have always listened to and practiced music that meant something as well as, and notwithstanding musical ecstasy (be it happy or sad).

I can give no stronger example than a wedding I attended in Galilee aged nine; it changed my perception of music for life. Until then, I was not that keen on Arabic music, which I always associated with long songs comprising melodic modes that my young ears struggled to fathom. But when I saw older Palestinian women sing and dance at a wedding and celebrate an identity with which I was struggling, it all made sense to me, even those tricky Arabic microtones. Now, every time I hear older women sing, be they Palestinian women celebrating a child's birth or Scottish women doing a tweed waulking song, I think of that seminal moment in my life: a moment where music stood for something both beautiful and worthy.

So, where does Sayyid Darwish (1892 – 1923) come into this? It could be because his music has been part of the Arab collective memory for near on a hundred years. It could be that his short songs, compared to Umm Kulthoum's protracted improvisations(2) , made it easier for a young bi-lingual and bi-cultural Arab such as me to relate to. My husband says that Darwish invented the pop song before anyone had heard of the pop industry! It could be that many of his songs were written for and about certain groups in Egyptian society, notably the marginalized. And it could also be because his songs were political and not merely artistic.

For many Arab music critics, their views of Sayyid Darwish are affected by the way in which he was seen to be hijacked by the 'Arab Left' and turned into

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\* Reem Kelani is a Palestinian musician born in Britain and brought up in Kuwait. She released the album *Sprinting Gazelle: Palestinian songs from the Motherland and the Diaspora* in 2006 and she is completing a follow up album focused on the music of Sayid Darwish.

an Egyptian version of Victor Jara or Woody Guthrie. This distracted people from Darwish's musical contributions, which stand in their own right, even had he not sung against British colonial rule in 1919. At the same time, since the days of King Fouad I of Egypt (1868 – 1936), and later his son King Farouk I (1920 – 1965), Darwish's music was invariably ignored and sidelined, from the King's palace, to the Institute for Oriental Music in Cairo, to official radio broadcasts, down to the national schools music curricula.

To add insult to injury, the first 'Cairo Congress for Arabic Music' which was held in Cairo in 1932, barely acknowledged Sayyid Darwish's contribution. Many believe that this was on direct orders from King Fouad I, a sore point which lingers to this day with Darwish's family and fans. That the work of the founder of modern Egyptian music was ignored at such an important conference, attended by world luminaries such as Béla Bartók, truly beggars belief.



In the wake of the "23rd July Revolution" by the Free Officers in 1952, Nasser's regime advocated agrarian reforms, part of which imaginatively included initiatives to collate, notate and perform Sayyid Darwish's work as part and parcel of preserving the traditional and classical musical heritage of Egypt.

This, however, is also what fed into the eventual 'hijacking' by the Left of Darwish's music which frustrates musical puritans to this day. Moreover, one of Darwish's long time librettists and companions, Badi' Khayri (1893 – 1966), was an active member of the first Egyptian socialist party which was set up in the 1920s. Hence many of Darwish's fans erroneously assumed that he too was a card-carrying member of the socialist party.

When Egypt signed the Peace Treaty with Israel at Camp David in 1979, the then national anthem, penned by Salah Jahin (1930 – 1986) and set to music by Kamal el-Tawil (1922 – 2003), was seen as unsuitable for a country now at 'peace' with its previously warring neighbour. The opening stanza of this militant anthem was *Wallāh zamān yā silāhī* ('O, my weapon, it's been so long')! And so, the Jahin-Tawil anthem was jettisoned, and instead of replacing it with a new anthem to reflect post-Camp David Egypt, Sadat's regime brought back Darwish's iconic anthem *Bilādī, Bilādī*, ('My Homeland, My Homeland') (3) in 1980. The Egyptian street accepted this anthem, because of its nationalistic sentiment of loving one's homeland, and because it was seen to revive the music of the People's Artist, as Darwish is often described.

However, I believe that for many revolutionaries and activists, this act came to symbolize the neutralization of an anthem that had originally been written as an uncompromising statement against British colonial rule. By adopting it as a result of normalisation, it was seen as an appeasement to Israel, reassuring her that military struggle was no longer on the agenda. I do not know what Sayyid Darwish would have made of this, but one can only guess that he would have treated it with one of his notoriously loud outbursts of anger.

And no Palestinian activist can ignore the ‘anthems of the Palestinian revolution’, a repertoire which was spawned after the launch of the largest faction of the PLO, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fateh) in 1965. Sung mainly by men and performed in militaristic but nostalgic manner, these songs accompanied almost every Palestinian festival I have attended since my childhood. Alongside dabke traditional line dance, women singing, Palestinian embroidery and freshly baked date cakes, the festival sound system would blast out these revolutionary songs. No surprise then that one of the most famous songs of this repertoire was a reworking of Darwish’s *Bilādī, Bilādī*(4) . When addressing the homeland in the second stanza of the Palestinian version, the narrator sings ‘Fateh is a revolution against our enemies’; Darwish’s original lyric declaims ‘my love and my heart are yours’! This illustrates how much Egyptian nationalistic fervour against foreign occupation, managed to seep into the repertoire of the Palestinian liberation movement via Sayyid Darwish’s testimonial music.

When asked if Sayyid Darwish was indeed a member of the Egyptian socialist party, librettist Badi Khayri explained that Darwish wasn’t simply musicanti (a corrupted borrowing from Italian). Khayri added his now famous rhetorical riposte “do you think that starting up a political party would happen overnight? No, you first need those committed artists and intellectuals to pave the way on the streets.”

For my part, I interpret Darwish’s music in the same vein: you cannot separate his musical innovations – which stand out in absolute form – from his sense of belonging to the homeland and its tribulations. This is what nurtures me as a Palestinian artist, believing in music for music’s sake, yet asserting the existence of a cultural narrative for the Palestinians (and for that matter, for any other nation striving for independence).

Endnote:

- 1- Reem Kelani Songs for Tahrir: What makes a composer a legend? And what makes a revolt a revolution? [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/2012/01/songs\\_for\\_tahrir\\_what\\_makes\\_a.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/2012/01/songs_for_tahrir_what_makes_a.html)
- 2- Wallāh zamān yā silāḥī, (‘O, my weapon, it’s been so long’), performed by Umm Kulthoum: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzwi48l1c-g>
- 3- Sayyid Darwish’s original *Bilādī, Bilādī*, (‘My Homeland, My Homeland’), performed by Muhammad Bakhit, c. 1919 – 1920: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckqhoYhU3IM>
- 4- Fateh’s reworking of *Bilādī, Bilādī*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WthlQLyaxA>





Sameh  
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## Israel and the Arab Spring

It was bewildering to see Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, welcoming the Arab spring. It was even more puzzling to see its president, Shimon Peres, repeatedly support and salute these “So called spontaneous” revolutions. But is it really a source of joy and delight for Israel? Is it really a chance for Israel to see more democracies similar to its own extending across the Middle East? Why is Israel not concerned about these revolutions, or is it actually concerned and thinking for itself new ways out on the long term with new contingency plans afoot? One would have to wonder to oneself who the loser is and who the winner from these revolutions.

The fall of Mubarak regime was supposed to be the corner stone of a new Middle East. Not the Middle East that was planned and aspired to by the Bush Administration, which was orchestrated and set into motion by PNAC and by his foreign secretary Condoleezza Rice. Actually, the fall of Hosni Mubarak and his stooges has been a benchmark move and individually the most important event within the sweeping democracy change movement; which is supposed to be paving the way for a completely different NEW Middle East appearance. Israel for decades closed its front with Egypt and opened others in different directions. The Mubarak regime certainly had been a strategic ally for Israel and the US. In addition to protecting Camp David accord, keeping the borders with Israel safe and normalizing in different levels; Mubarak worked on Americanizing the Arab decision which served only Israeli political interests. The regime had an overwhelming effect on key Arab regimes which later formed the alliance of “Moderate Arabs”. Key events were determined through Egypt like the Arab intervention in Iraq-Kuwait war and their participation. Back then, it had supported Oslo accord and even the launch of Palestinian authority.

Egypt on many occasions pressured the Palestinian leadership to set up talks and negotiations. It has since softened the Palestinian positions and pushed to agree on many rounds of peace talks like Taba or Sharm al Shiekh which in some times was refused by Palestinian Authority due to Israeli right wing extremist positions. The Egyptian pressure was extended by appointing ex Egyptian Foreign Minister, Amr Mosa, as the leader of the Arab league. His appointment was purely just an extension of Egypt diplomatic supremacy on the Arab(s) decision.

Egypt played a key role in paraphrasing the Arab Initiative which gave up partially on the Palestinian Right of Return and accepted the original 1967 borders. The initiative was a chance for Israel to be involved in peace not only

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with Palestinians but the whole Arab world. Yet, Israel has refused it within hours as then former Israeli PM, Ariel Sharon, invaded the West Bank and besieged Yasser Arafat and his Governmental compound in 2002.

Between 2005 to 2010, the Egypt regime worked bit by bit in accordance with Israeli politics in regard of the Gaza Strip. It did impose a siege over Gaza exactly the same as the Israeli one. It blocked commercial goods, citizens and passengers legal movements from and into Gazan territories. The policy of Egypt was more against the Hamas faction rather than people. But factually speaking, the people of Gaza were the only victims.

Instinctively, the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian people were also not happy with Mubarak but had no audacity or courage to say NO for decades. The regime refused to confront Israeli policy decisions in Africa, the strategic background of Egypt. Israel did however build strong relations with many countries like Ethiopia and countries bordering the Nile river system and tributaries. Dozens of projects were carried out by Israel in Africa, either on the military or the infrastructure level. Yet, Egypt still did nothing. Not that long ago, Israel personally worked hard in the inception of the newly born state of South Sudan to help towards achieving its own independence.

Many Israeli companies have swarmed all over the Egyptian markets like flies on dead meat. Israeli tourists themselves still have and still the freedom to enter Egypt, especially Taba. The relation between Israel and Egypt was never actually greatly affected by an incident like the Intifada and Gaza War in 2009. Mubarak himself personally conducted the biggest gas and energy deal with Israel which is 7 times less than standard world market prices. Under Mubarak, Israeli spies were actually released from Egypt and handed back over to Israel. All of this took place by the will of the Mubarak and not the Egyptian people. Apparently this was all in Israel's favor and Israel only.

As Mubarak was forced to step aside, the region started to take another shape that will be more people - oriented rather than regime - oriented. The revolution in Egypt is not yet complete and still already experts are warning of a civil war with the economy diminishing, and huge investments escaping. However despite all these conditions, the mainstream public in Egypt is still at Cold War with Israel. The massive protests against Israeli embassy in Cairo, the attempt to go to Gaza mid May are some signs. Israeli diplomats were inspected at borders with Egypt on their way to Cairo; for the first time ever recently.

The new regime in Egypt, "on the governmental level" tried to stand by it's people. It has re-opened Rafah Crossing and promised to lift the siege. It has facilitated the Palestinian leadership despite the American-Israeli refusal. The regime even started to work on renovating their relations with Iran, which will indeed make the new Middle East map entirely unpredictable and unprecedented.

An important analysis suggests that Mubarkism is still there and still strong, albeit by some characters in the Egyptian Military council. These entities are in constant contact with America, and in the key decisions are made in consultations with the American administration.

Egypt's revolution is still incomplete and the forthcoming elections in September or October will certainly change the face of Egypt. As all expectations are suggesting, and as observers agree, the Muslim Brotherhood political party should win. This winning was already evidently pre-determined early in the constitutional referendum amendments in Egypt. The policies will most certainly change but how Israel will deal with it? Muslim brotherhood is in total support of Hamas and is not happy with the status quo with Israel. Will they sacrifice their cosy relations with Israel and cancel Camp David? Will Egypt enter into a confrontation with Israel? What will be the new Middle East like? What will be the future of peace?

Indeed, answering these questions and others will be a bizarre and unravelling political adventure. Only time will tell to either prove or disapprove that the excitement of Israel towards these revolution was true to heart or not!



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## Tahrir Square 2011 – a personal perspective

Listening to the commentators, journalists and reviewers giving their retrospectives on 2011, many seemed to put the events in Egypt in early 2011 at the very top of their pick list. For those of us who were fortunate to have been on the ground in Tahrir Square, it was one of life's great moments. It was, for sure, the Egyptian people's finest hour.

From my first visit in 1983, I had been struck by the frenetic energy of modern Cairo, a stark contrast to the vast solitude of Egypt's desert and the silent power of the Nile. I remember being shocked at just how tough life seemed to be for ordinary Egyptians. In the intervening years, as the country's wealth grew, a few benefitted exponentially, whilst the lot of the masses worsened, as the population multiplied and the institutions of state became ever more self-serving and incapable of addressing the needs of society at large. By early 2011, the extent of that failure was under-appreciated internationally, partly because of the oppressive nature of the regime and partly because many news networks had perhaps been too willing to accept the line proffered by leading Western governments (that the Mubarak government must be fundamentally decent because it maintained a peace agreement with Israel). Under Mubarak, Egypt became a police state much like the most oppressive states of the old Soviet bloc. It was not just the brutality of the riot police in the street, or even the routine use of torture. Heads of government corporations and institutions, and even ministers, would worry about what the State Security might say about them; one news report in the wake of the Revolution described how the ministry of transport paid the State Security to ensure it got a 'good' report. It was State Security which, reportedly, funded and supported Salafi groups as a counter-balance to the Muslim Brotherhood, as was State Security widely rumoured to have been responsible for the bombing of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve 2010 (which killed 23 and badly injured some 125, mostly Christians).

The role of the various security agencies was to protect the regime and its leaders against the people. The inequity in Egyptian society required as much. The other primary source of grievance centred on Israel. There is nothing Islamist in this: most Egyptians feel deeply the injustice suffered by Palestinians because of Israel's creation, as do most Egyptians object to Israel's actions, whether it be the invasion of Lebanon in 2006, of the Gaza Strip in 2008, or the moves towards dispossession of Palestinians in the West Bank. There is also the anger of Egyptians towards Israel's invasions in 1956 and 1967, painful memories of which latter conflict were revived in 2007 with

the broadcast on Israeli television of a report that its Army had murdered 250 unarmed Egyptian prisoners of war after they had surrendered in the Sinai Peninsula. The devastating Israeli air raid on Bahr el-Baqar school on 8 April 1970, in which 46 children were killed and over 50 wounded, was another event which still arouses outrage among Egyptians. A re-working of Baligh Hamdy's song written about this massacre was one of the sounds of the 2011 Revolution.

Egyptians' exasperation was heightened by the widespread perception that US foreign policy in Egypt was little more than a service to Israel, which was so eager to maintain the façade of the Camp David Accords. Keeping the Accords in place, however, gave Egypt's State Security yet further cause for suppression. A body of artistic work, encompassing film, music and literature, was but one casualty of the drive to do America's bidding, as any voices deemed critical of Egypt's relationship with Israel were silenced.



To the Egyptian people, their interests were being sacrificed at the expense of US and more particularly Israeli foreign policy goals. The Mubarak regime was not merely tolerated, but supported by the US, despite the brutality of its security forces and the failure of its institutions. When Egyptians learned, after Mubarak's resignation, of the tens of millions of US dollars which the president's family had been receiving in commissions from the Israeli partner for the import of Egyptian gas, they were left in no doubt that their national interests had long been abandoned by their leaders in the pursuit of personal greed.

Israel was a central part of the narrative of the Revolution from the beginning, and yet many Western news networks seemed to avoid highlighting this. Most correspondents simply reported that the protesters in Tahrir Square were seeking the end of Mubarak and his regime, omitting to mention the demand for a change in policy towards Israel.

One manifestation of the pressure for change came in early March 2011 with the appointment by interim Prime Minister Essam Sharaf of Nabil el-Araby as foreign minister. He quickly announced that Egypt would move to re-open its border with the Gaza Strip at Rafah. As summer 2011 developed, the protesters became emboldened, moving their protest directly to the Israeli embassy in Giza. This outpouring of popular anger towards Israel culminated in the ransacking of the embassy in September and the hasty departure from Egypt of Israeli diplomatic personnel.

If the revolution of January 2011 was emphatically secular, so too was the actual protest outside the Israeli embassy over the summer. Some of those who stood at the forefront and who broke into the embassy were from the core of activists who had been in Tahrir Square months earlier.





Indeed, it was the absence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists from these protests which has fuelled suspicions about secret dealings between them and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Moreover, it is these same alliances which seem to be responsible for the apparent reversal of earlier moves to free Egypt from Israel's embrace.



The fact of Egypt today and of other states in the region is that a more open and democratic process will lead to a more challenging regional environment for Israel. At the same time, it needs to be said that there are few voices advocating a military option. The Egyptian Army certainly appears to see little or no benefit to be gained from any new hostilities.

If the Army's moral authority has been undermined since early 2011 by its brutal treatment of civilian protesters, it has been further damaged where its actions have been seen to inflict additional humiliation on Palestinians. As the rebellion developed in Libya in March 2011, for instance, thousands of Palestinians fled the fighting and sought refuge at Salloum on the border with Egypt. Whilst other refugees were allowed passage, most Palestinians were denied entry into Egypt and were held for weeks in internment camps, before they could be transferred under escort by the Army to the Gaza Strip. Similarly, hundreds who had caught flights out of Libya were detained at Cairo airport, before they were eventually dispatched to Gaza. It is hard to imagine a genuinely democratic government in Egypt sanctioning such a policy against Palestinians.

On another front, perhaps the biggest issue facing Egyptian society is the under-representation of women at a political level. If recent governments have been a study in failure, it has been a male failure, and in their insecurity, the existing political leaderships have sought to keep women ever more firmly under



heel. Whilst the old regime instituted a quota for women of 64 seats in the national assembly in the 2010 elections, the country's military rulers quietly abandoned it. There is thus the prospect that there will be very few, if any female representatives in the new assembly. This imbalance is likely to exacerbate the pressures on some religious and ethnic communities, notably the Copts, as well as to contributing to more inward-looking and ultimately regressive policies by Egypt's Islamist parties.

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## China's rise: a game changer for Palestine?

China's rise and the implications it has on the global order have been topics of considerable academic and political discussion. As China continues to solidify its position as a key international player, it has growing power to alter the outcome of world politics. China's rhetoric against "hegemonism" and the US dominated world order presents a challenge to the current world system. These realities cause us to consider how China might use its power in order to alter world politics. One related question is: how might China's policy on specific international issues, especially policy which noticeably in opposition to the United States', alter the resolution of these issues? One region where Chinese perceptions of the current world order have the potential to make an impact is the Middle East. China's popularity in the Middle East is growing, and largely due to its position on issues critical to Arab states. A matter where China's policy is especially favoured is the Israel-Palestine conflict, where China has consistently vocalised support for Palestine. It was only in 1992 that China established diplomatic relations with Israel. Since then, Sino-Israeli ties have strengthened. Despite the improving Sino-Israeli relationship, China has maintained its support for Palestine, its criticism of Israel, and, by extension, its opposition to the United States' policy on the issue. We can address the issue of how China will change the dynamics of international relations by asking whether China might have a positive impact for the Palestinians.

China's support for Palestine is especially evident in the United Nations. This support has caused some optimism among Palestine's supporters who believe that China's permanent member status in the UN Security Council will allow it to challenge the United States' Israel-Palestine policy. On issues where the United States has allowed Israel to flagrantly violate international law, China firmly criticises Israel. For example, ahead of a February 2011 UN Security Council vote on a resolution condemning Israeli settlements, China's UN Ambassador Li Baodong stated: "China resolutely opposes the construction of settlements by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and supports the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people." (1) Another example is China's reaction to the 2010 Israeli attack on the Turkish flotilla carrying humanitarian goods to Gaza. China strongly condemned the raid, and foreign ministry Ma Zhaoxu urged a "quick response" from the UN Security Council. Another Chinese diplomat, Yang Tao, stated that "Beijing was prepared to back quick [Security Council] action on the raid, and urged that

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Israel's blockade on Gaza be lifted.”(2) Such statements explain why China's popularity in the Middle East has been on the rise, and explain why Middle Eastern states hope China can use its Security Council status in order to challenge American and Israeli dominance in the region.(3)

China's support for Palestine is almost exclusively rhetorical; nonetheless China's recognition of Palestine's claims is more extensive than most of the world's leading states. China informally recognises the “State of Palestine”, instead of the “Palestinian Territories” and furthermore recognises the Hamas government as not only the legitimately elected Palestinian government, but also as one which must be directly and fairly dealt with in order to negotiate a solution. Further affirming this policy, in a July 2011 meeting with a Palestinian delegation Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi emphasised China's support for the Palestinian people's rights and for their bid for UN membership. Yang said: “China is ready to continue coordination with the Palestinians on all fronts in order to gather support for the Palestinian effort,” he further stressed the “right of the Palestinians to end occupation as soon as possible, establish their independent state and achieve peace in the region.”(4) This statement illustrates that China's rhetoric is aligned with international law, identifying Israel's actions as an “occupation” of Palestine, but at the same time careful to emphasise a peaceful approach from both sides.

However, this rhetorical support does not consistently manifest itself into practiced policy. For example, in a 2009 vote to approve the Goldstone Report, which was highly critical of Israeli actions during the 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead, China voted negatively. Also, regardless of China's critical rhetoric toward Israel, Sino-Israeli relations have improved vastly since 1992. Chinese trade with Israel increases annually.(5) While this trade is in diverse sectors, one analyst suggested that: “China's quest for advanced technology, especially defense-related technology and weapons systems, and Israel's aggressive export efforts in these sectors, underlie Sino-Israeli economic relations.”(6) In fact, Israel has reportedly sold weapons to China on several occasions, causing some strain in US-Israeli relations. China has also sought increased military cooperation with Israel. In an August 2011 visit to Israel, Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army made a goodwill visit to Israel to “exchange views with the governmental and military leadership on issues such as bilateral military ties, and [the] international and regional security situation.”(7) In his meeting with Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak, Bingde said that “a deepening Sino-Israeli cooperation is contributing to regional peace and stability”, he furthermore stressed the positive developments in recent years between the Chinese and Israeli armies.(8) Given China's growing relationship with Israel, it must be called into question whether China's rhetoric in favour of Palestine will cause a tangible change in favour of Palestine in the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In order to make this projection, it is necessary to understand precisely what concerns drive China's policy.

In 1987, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson stated that China's policy on Israel was reflective of China's support for the “just struggle by the Arab and Palestinian peoples against the aggressive and expansionist policy of the Israeli regime.”(9) While this is partially true, a driving reason behind this policy was concern caused due to the United States and the Soviet Union.(10) China's current policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to relate to China's attitude towards the United States' “hegemonism”. This policy position is consistent with the idea that China's foreign policy reflects a goal of creating a fairer world order. However, to think that China's policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict is reflective of such a foreign policy vision is limiting. It is perhaps most instructive to think of China's policy in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict as a part of a larger Middle East strategy which is not necessarily coherent but is highly reflective of China's most urgent foreign policy goals. China's Middle

East policy is highly complex, and in many ways it can be contradictory. One only needs to consider the paradox that while China has a growing relationship with Israel it also maintains a friendly relationship with Iran. One of the most pressing domestic issues for China is its energy security. Since China's 1993 switch to net oil importer status, the Middle East has become a crucial part of China's energy security strategy. China would rather not procure the majority of its energy resources from the Middle East, but for the near future this is unavoidable. So, China's support of Palestine and the popularity of this policy among Arabs can assist China in its efforts not only to procure but also to secure its energy supply. However, this "energy diplomacy" only helps explain China's position on Palestine. China also needs to guarantee its own national security. Modernising and expanding its military capabilities is crucial, and this is where building a relationship with Israel is equally important. Therefore, China is forced carefully balance its policy in the Middle East in order to serve its most vital interests.

So, how should we expect China's policy on Palestine to look in the future? Even if China's support for Palestine was driven by nothing other than the goal of creating a fairer world system, it is unlikely that China will be able to counter US policy over the Israel-Palestine issue in the future. The United States' status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council means that even though China has a growing influence within the organisation, it cannot prevent a US veto. Furthermore, China infrequently comments on the "internal affairs" of other countries. This policy is not only true when such criticisms contradict China's national security goals, but also when the same criticism being applied to one country can also be applied to China. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not far different from China and Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang. Given that the Chinese Communist Party closely links its legitimacy to these issues, it is hard to imagine China setting a precedent which can be used against it in the future. This alone makes it difficult to envision Chinese rhetoric in favour of Palestine becoming a consistently practiced policy. The Chinese decision to vote against approving the 2009 Goldstone report is just one example. The bottom line is that China can and will push Israel and the US, but only to the extent that it is willing to be pushed regarding its own human rights questions and territorial disputes.

Regardless, it is possible that as China's role in world politics grows some changes may occur in the way the Israel-Palestine issue is addressed. This may have a favourable impact on the Palestinian refugee situation. In order to achieve its broader Middle East goals, a more powerful China could push for an immediate settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem, separate from a peace agreement. Israel insists that the issue of Palestinian refugees can only be solved as part of a peace agreement. However, China can use its economic relationship with Israel as a bargaining chip to insist on the resolution of the issue in the general UN forum. This would favour both China's interests with Arab countries and with Israel. However, this is pure speculation, and it is difficult to predict how China's Middle East policy will evolve. Much will of course depend on whether the Palestinians themselves can first move refugees and the other crucial "final status issues" up the agenda. In the meantime, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic that China may modestly help improve the situation for Palestinians, but a strong stance from China that would dramatically change the existing US dominated situation is harder to imagine.

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Martin Linton\*

## Palestine and the UN

When Mahmoud Abbas stood up to deliver his speech to the United Nations in September, he addressed them “on behalf of the Palestinian people in the homeland and in the diaspora” and he told them not only that it was time for the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence, but that the time had come to end the plight of “millions of Palestine refugees in the homeland and the diaspora, to end their displacement and to realise their rights”.

Before his speech, and still to some extent since, a few leading Palestinian refugees in this country and in the US have questioned whether President Abbas was seeking Palestine’s admission to the UN on behalf of all Palestinians, or just on behalf of those living in the occupied territories, and have likewise questioned what benefit, if any, would come to the refugees if a Palestinian state based on the occupied territories were admitted to the UN.

There’s no doubt that it’s a balancing act for Palestinian politicians to represent three different constituencies: the 3.5 million living in the occupied territories, the 1.2 million living in Israel and the 6.5 million living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Certainly the recognition of a Palestinian state on 1967 borders will have more direct impact on the 3.5 million living in the occupied territories than the refugees or the Palestinians inside Israel, but it will be a huge benefit for all Palestinians because it will help them realise – for the first time since 1948 – their moral and legal entitlement to a Palestinian state. It would be an extraordinary counsel of perfection to suggest that they should turn this down because it does not represent the whole of historic Palestine.

There are legal points to be resolved, but the more pressing point is political. Without a state encompassing at least a part of the Palestinian nation, there is a danger that the world will in time forget the Palestinians. Statehood creates a focus and legitimacy for a national identity both within and beyond its border. Ask the Armenians if the Armenian republic, whose population is dwarfed by the much larger Armenian diaspora, helps or hinders their national identity. Indeed, ask the Israelis the same question.

The point is not just that the perfect can be the enemy of the good – perfectionists don’t make good politicians – but that the best strategy for recovering the rights of Palestinians, all Palestinians, including the refugees, may be through statehood. None of us can predict what will happen in the

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long term. But what is pretty certain is that a secure and economically viable Palestinian state with a seat in the United Nations would be able to advance the interests of Palestinians in Israel and in the diaspora far more effectively than the Palestine Liberation Organisation can today.

A Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza should not be seen as an alternative to the right of return. The right of return is a right enshrined in UN resolutions for refugees to return to the place they were forced out of and not allowed to return to. President Abbas has said many times that he neither will nor can negotiate away that right. It belongs to individual people, given to them by the UN.

The Israelis would obviously expect the refugee issue to be part of a final status agreement. They see it as a vital issue. Abbas also sees it as “one of our core issues... We have five million refugees expelled from Israel, including myself.” But he points out that both sides are committed to “a just and agreed-upon solution for the refugees”, laying particular stress on the words “agreed upon”. The ideas that were discussed in the Palestine papers were proposals that would have had to be submitted to Palestinians for their agreement. That proviso was written on every page of the Palestine papers: “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. Too little is known about the form in which a proposed final settlement would be put to the Palestinians to accept or reject to be able to say for certain that they will be satisfied with the process, but if every Palestinian has a vote, they will greatly outnumber the Palestinians in the OPT and should therefore be in a position to ensure that the settlement is fair to them.

The Israelis would like them to be offered “return” to the OPT only. But, as the refugee organisations point out, that would be resettlement, not return, for most of the refugees and they would still be entitled to compensation for their lost land and homes in Israel. The nakba involved not only massacres and intimidation that put hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to flight, but also theft on a massive scale. Wealthy Palestinians in Jaffa and West Jerusalem were fleeced not just by the armed gangs who forced them to flee but by the nascent state of Israel that refused them both the right to return and the right to reclaim their houses, land and possessions. In a sense the real outrage was not forcing the Palestinians to flee, but refusing to let them return, and that outrage was committed not by armed gangs but by a state. That, according to the supporters of Israel, makes it legal.

One of Brecht’s characters remarks: “Why rob a bank when you can own one?” No doubt the Haganah and the Irgun asked themselves a similar question in 1948: “Why break the law when you can make the law?” If they had simply taken over the orange groves of rich Palestinians in Jaffa and the town houses of rich Palestinians in West Jerusalem, they would have been guilty of theft. However, they turned themselves into an army and they turned theft into military conquest when Israel declared its independence. The state of Israel then passed a law refusing the right of the original owners to return and another law, the Absentees’ Property Law, legitimising the government’s seizure of refugees’ property on the pretext that they had ‘abandoned’ it. The UN, founded to end the taking of land by military conquest, recognised their state but also recognised the original owners’ right of return.

How will all this affect the Palestinians living inside the state of Israel. A Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza can never be an excuse for forced population transfers or land swaps. Israeli citizens have a perfect right to continue to live in Israel if they wish, regardless of their ethnic origin, and, considering the Israeli state has stunted and starved the economies of both the West Bank and Gaza, it would be understandable if they preferred to continue living in a developed economy such as Israel rather than moving to, or being moved to, an economy that has been artificially stunted. In any case if there were proposals for any part of Israel, such as western Galilee or the so-called ‘triangle’ to be





transferred to another state, the population of the area would have to take the decision themselves in a UN-run plebiscite.

At the moment the PLO is the only body that can represent the interests of Palestinians. It is the PLO that has speaking rights at the UN General Assembly. It is the PLO that negotiates on behalf of the Palestinians if and when there are talks. It has a democratic structure that is meant to represent the interests of both the diaspora and occupied territories. Its democratic practice leaves a lot to be desired, but PLO elections have been promised for 2012 and a civil initiative is underway to register Palestinian voters in the refugee camps.

When President Abbas spoke at the United Nations, he introduced himself as “President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization” and made it clear that he spoke “on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” and not as the President of the Palestine Authority which is elected solely by Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza and does not in any case have any responsibility for foreign affairs. It is certainly possible to question the right of Abbas or indeed any Palestinian politician to speak on anyone’s behalf as their mandates have all run out. A British minister or MP whose mandate had run out would not be allowed to act as a minister or MP. But by the same token no other Palestinian can claim a better right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people.

If the UN were to recognise the Palestine Authority as the representative of a Palestinian state based on the West Bank and Gaza, that would disenfranchise the Palestinians in the diaspora. The Oxford law expert Guy Goodwin-Gill raised this issue in his legal opinion published in August 2011, suggesting that if the UN admitted the ‘State of Palestine’ as a member it might mean the PLO ceased to be their representative. This was taken by some to suggest that Palestine’s statehood bid was against the interests of Palestinian refugees, even a betrayal of the right of return, which did a lot to undermine the Palestinian campaign to win support for their statehood bid at the United Nations in September.

But the purpose of the Palestine Liberation Organisation was always to liberate Palestine and it has always been envisaged that the state, when liberated, would be called Palestine, not the PLO. At a seminar in London in November Goodwin-Gill suggested a way round this problem – if it is a problem. He said it would be “most unusual to have a State of Palestine and a Palestine Liberation Organisation both representing the Palestinians, but it would be open to the General Assembly to require that the PLO continues to be the representative of the Palestinians in some way.”

It would be a tragedy for the Palestinians if the momentum they have gained with the statehood campaign since September were dissipated in a legalistic argument, so let us hope that this formula enables all Palestinians to stand “on the right side of history”.

Undoubtedly the statehood campaign has been a powerful weapon in winning support for the Palestinian cause. Twenty years of negotiations always put the Palestinians on the back foot, in a defensive posture, even when they were under attack, and now at last the Palestinians have found the right way forward. It may still take a while to get full membership of the UN, but it is a positive strategy that has some chance of success and success will come. The Israelis will never deliver anything of their own accord. Obama, for all his fine words, will never deliver anything. It’s the international community that has to deliver the solution, and it’s the Europeans who have to take the first steps – because they alone have the power to put economic and political pressure on Israel.

The battle is for public and parliamentary opinion is in European countries and that is where the

campaign for recognition of a Palestinian state is gaining ground. The politicians will follow too slowly of course, but the arguments for recognising a Palestinian state are so overwhelming – especially with European support for the tide of democracy sweeping the Arab world – that they must prevail in the end.

How can we support self-determination in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria without also supporting it for the Palestinians? That is the question the Palestinians need to keep putting to the Europeans. Sooner or later, the right answer must come.



Sonja Karkar\*

## TALKING PALESTINE TO POWER

Today, there is no excuse for not knowing the truth about Palestine. Even taking the disinformation spread in mainstream media, there are enough glimpses one gets of an oppressed people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem that should compel us to ask questions. This has been considerably aided by the internet. Where once Israel could manipulate the media narrative, now millions can see videos and read witness accounts of Israel's occupation in all its terrifying ugliness. Global initiatives, like the daring Free Gaza flotillas, force the mainstream media to report this news, however fleetingly. Consequently, people want to see for themselves what is happening in Palestine and come back with stories that have shaken them to the very core of their being.

Stories of endless queues of people at checkpoints waiting for permission from armed soldiers who decide if they should pass; devastated families making sense of the rubble that was once their homes as Israeli bulldozers move on to the next calculated demolition; heartbroken farmers grieving over their centuries-old uprooted olive trees and scorched earth orchards; already traumatised children wondering if the next missile or bomb will this time wipe out their families or friends; terrified citizens waiting for the sound of army squads coming to arrest who knows who in the early hours of the morning; and the shadow of that rapacious Wall darkening the landscape even as it closes off the world to the Palestinians it imprisons.

And these are only the obvious signs of Israel's apartheid plans as it moves to cement an exclusively Jewish state in a land that is home to almost an equal number of Palestinians and millions more in exile waiting to return home.

The alarm bells should be ringing when this information filters through, and yet there is a wall of silence while our political leaders declare undying fealty to Israel, cavalierly wear it as a badge of honour or indulge in junkets to Israel. And those bells should be all the more alarming, when documented reports of Israel's war crimes by human rights groups and official enquiries are virulently attacked and then ignored.

But the world lacks courage. People are terrified of being labelled anti-Semitic. Even Palestinians, who are themselves Semites, are often afraid of being further shunned and disadvantaged in countries that give them refuge. Not only do people fear repercussions, but speaking the truth or even just hearing it has a way of taking people out of their comfort zones. They fear

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their Today, there is no excuse for not knowing the truth about Palestine. Even taking the disinformation spread in mainstream media, there are enough glimpses one gets of an oppressed people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem that should compel us to ask questions. This has been considerably aided by the internet. Where once Israel could manipulate the media narrative, now millions can see videos and read witness accounts of Israel's occupation in all its terrifying ugliness. Global initiatives, like the daring Free Gaza flotillas, force the mainstream media to report this news, however fleetingly. Consequently, people want to see for themselves what is happening in Palestine and come back with stories that have shaken them to the very core of their being.

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This then is the challenge for advocates the world over. How does one talk Palestine to power if one cannot even talk Palestine to the people who are in fear of the powerful?

In the face of Zionist saturation media and the new "Brand Israel" campaigns, many people wanting to advocate for Palestine might feel defeated, but time and again we see that the individual talking truth to power can be enormously effective.

The now deceased scholar and public intellectual Edward Said, showed more than anyone else that individuals can make a difference in the public defence of Palestine. He particularly saw the intellectual's voice as having "resonance". In fact, it is so powerful that intellectuals have been subjected to all kinds of vicious campaigns against their persons and positions for speaking up for Palestine, just as Said was himself.

Of course, one does not need to be an intellectual. Said's words can just as aptly apply to any one of us. He said avoidance was "reprehensible" and described it as,

"that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming



too controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is . . . to remain within the responsible mainstream . . .”(1)

As an intellectual, Said had his academic record, his professional standing, his research and his publications to give weight to his pronouncements, but it took no less courage than it would for anyone else to challenge the accepted paradigm. The challenge arises out of knowing the truth; the courage arises out of a commitment to principle in the face of collective condemnation. This is just as true against the Zionist barrage of lies as it is against convenient explanations mounted by those who accommodate the powers that be for their own ends.

In 1993 when almost everyone else thought the handshakes on the White House steps would seal the negotiated Oslo Accords and at long last give the Palestinians their freedom and bring peace to the region, Edward Said saw that these accords would merely provide the cover for Israel to pursue its colonial expansionism and consolidate its occupation of Palestine. However, he knew to criticise Oslo meant in effect taking a position against ‘hope’ and ‘peace’. His decision to do so also flew in the face of the Palestinian revolutionary leadership that had bartered for statehood.

Although Said was denounced for his views, he was not prepared to buy into the deception that he knew would leave the Palestinians with neither hope nor peace. And just as he predicted, each fruitless year of peacemaking finally exposed the horrible reality of Oslo as Palestinians found themselves the victims of Israel’s matrix of control, a term used to describe the situation by the Israeli activist Dr Jeff Halper in 1999.(2) And this domination of one people over another without any intention of addressing the injustices of the Palestinians ethnically cleansed from their homeland, has undeniably reduced Israel to an Apartheid state.

The Palestinians have nothing left worth calling a state and they are facing an existential threat on all fronts. Yet, intellectuals are still talking about a two state solution in lock step with the politicians, a mantra that is repeated uncritically, even mendaciously, in the mainstream media. Media pundits argue that it is Israel facing an existential threat, but it is becoming evident every day, that against Israel, which is armed to the teeth with nuclear and conventional weaponry, the Palestinians do not stand a chance. They have never had an army and have no acceptable means to fight off their own ongoing dispossession and occupation of their homeland. It is no wonder the two state solution became the panacea to the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

This pandering to an idea for twenty long years has been undermined by the furious sounds of drills and hammers reverberating in illegal settlements throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the catastrophic societal ruptures engineered in Gaza. Now those sounds are muffled by the rhetoric of “economic peace”, “institution-building”, “democracy”, “internal security” and “statehood”. These words must be challenged at every opportunity, for they are not only words, but dangerous concepts when isolated from truth on the ground.

It is no use talking about “economic peace” if you fail to understand that industrial estates built for Palestinian workers are intended to provide Israel with slave labour and cheap goods. It is useless to support “institution-building” when Israel continues to undermine and obstruct those programs already struggling to service Palestinian society. It is a lie to speak of “democracy” when fair elections in 2006 had Israel and the world denying Hamas the right to govern. It is a charade to accept “internal security” when arming and training Palestinians to police their own people covers for Israel’s and America’s divide and conquer scheme. It is hollow to speak of “statehood” when Israel keeps stealing land and building illegal settlements that deprive the Palestinians of their homes and livelihoods while herding them into isolated and walled-in ghettos.

Regrettably, Edward Said was proved right.

Now, it is our turn to speak the truth and act fearlessly, regardless of the censure we are likely to encounter. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer is believed to have said that truth passes through three stages: “first, it is ridiculed; second, it is violently opposed; third, it is accepted as being self-evident.” Today, we are at the third stage: the 11 million Palestinians living under occupation, as second-class citizens in Israel, as stateless refugees and others in the Diaspora, are the living truth. That is Israel’s Achilles’ heel and Israel knows it.

The Palestinians are no longer the humble shepherds and farmers that Zionist forces terrorised into fleeing to make way for the Jewish state of Israel. A new generation wants justice and it is demanding it eloquently, non-violently and strategically. Their message: no normal relations with Israel while it oppresses Palestinians, denies their rights and violates international law. And boycotts, divestments and sanctions are the legitimate tools for challenging a state that claims exceptionalism and which perpetrates extreme and criminal actions to ensure that status.

People, of course, are always tempted to opt for the path of least resistance, especially when they simply cannot empathise with those who have been so successfully misrepresented and demonised by the Western media. However, the world is changing, and slowly people are realising that they too are vulnerable as Western societies begin to crumble under the weight of government power, which is burgeoning out of control without checks or balances. Universal human rights and principles of international humanitarian law that once were the mainstay of our democracies have been cast aside in the stampede to fight the “war on terror” and few have been brave enough to challenge the current system.

It is indeed possible for all of us to “squeeze out of reality some of its potentialities”(3) , the stuff that University of Melbourne Professor Ghassan Hage says is found in those utopic moments that come from challenging our own thoughts, fears and biases. In that space lies the untapped power we seek to speak the truth without fear or favour. In that space lies the potential for political change. In that space, there will always be those who resist and speak Palestine to power.

Endnote:

1- Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage, 1994, p74

2- Jeff Halper, “The 94 Percent Solution: The Matrix of Control”, Fall 2000, *Middle East Report* 216

3- Ghassan Hage, “The Real, the Potential and the Political”, an essay presented at the 2004 Res Artis Conference, Sydney, 10-16 August 2004





Alice  
Rothchild\*

## Avidgor's Ascent

The ascension of Avigdor Leiberman, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's overtly racist foreign minister, is not only disastrous in its own right, but also represents a culmination of longstanding Israeli policies. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who represent almost 20 percent of the Israeli population, have over 60 years of experience with Israeli-style discrimination.

Take for example Sami Abu Shehade, a postgraduate student at Tel Aviv University and community organizer from the "mixed city" of Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv. I joined his "alternative tour" of Jaffa in late October 2008 and again in January 2011; Sami began by explaining that the Old City of Jaffa is thousands of years old. It was a natural port located high on a hill, surrounded by fertile agriculture land, and occupied over 30 times, dating back to ancient Canaanites, up through the Ottomans and British. By the end of the nineteenth century, the thriving city of 50,000 was the cultural and commercial centre of Palestine, exporting millions of famed Jaffa oranges and importing foreign labourers from all over the Arab world to work the orchards, vineyards, sugar cane, and tobacco fields. In 1909 Tel Aviv was established with 60 Jewish families as two small northern neighbourhoods, with the intention to build the first modern Hebrew city. By 1948, Tel Aviv, with a population of 200,000, was the biggest city in Mandate Palestine.

After years of attacks and counterattacks, political betrayals among Arab forces, mostly youthful resistance, and civilian massacres by the Stern Gang, with the departure of British Mandate forces in May of 1948, armed Zionist forces occupied Jaffa and the population shrank from 100,000 to 4,000. Entire neighbourhoods, families, and human connections were destroyed as Palestinians fled, some dying during the expulsion. Sami noted that the psychological trauma of this catastrophe lasted for decades, but the "Second Nakba" occurred in 1949 with the Absentee Property Law instituted by the new "very Jewish democratic" Israeli government. The Palestinians who stayed in the "mixed cities" were under military control, herded into barbed wired neighbourhoods referred to as "ghettos" by the Jewish soldiers in command. The Jaffans were forced into an area called al-'Ajami, guarded by soldiers and dogs, while officials surveyed their forcibly abandoned properties, declared the owners "present absentees," laid claim to

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the properties, and gave the homes complete with furniture to olim, desperate new Jewish immigrants. Most of the Arabs still in Israel remained under military control until 1966, living in constant fear of the Shin Bet, the Israeli internal security service.

Sami explains that the “Third Nakba is what is called coexistence, bringing Arabs and Jews to live together.” He notes that the Palestinians not only lost their property to the new Jewish immigrants, but frequently the Palestinians were hired to work in their former orchards as labourers, or as factory workers in businesses they once owned. They would visit their pre-1948 homes and bargain with immigrants from Bulgaria in an effort to retrieve some of their family possessions. Sometimes Arab houses were subdivided, so a home might be partitioned, one room to a Moroccan family, one room to a Romanian, and one room to the original Arab owner. These families shared one kitchen, one toilet, and no common language or culture. Sami explains that many Palestinian men, dispossessed, humiliated, and depressed, turned to alcohol, opium, and criminal activities. Thus his grandfather’s generation lost its family, its property and its pride as Palestinians, the Arab neighborhoods became increasingly marginal, and the population was blamed for its own downfall. In 1950 Jaffa became part of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality. Tel Aviv has never built an Arab neighbourhood, school, or mosque.

For Jaffa, the Judaizing of the city meant changing the names of the streets as well as expunging the history; Israeli textbooks do not mention the legacy and losses of the indigenous Arab population. Avenues that were once named after rich Palestinian families were changed to biblical miracles or Zionist leaders who “liberated” or “ethnically cleansed” Jaffa. Luxurious homes overlooking the Mediterranean, built by wealthy Palestinians before 1948, are now Jewish mansions or rented to the Danish ambassador. Additionally, the descendants of the 4,000 Palestinians who were forcibly brought to the al-‘Ajami neighbourhood, legally do not own their apartments; they are owned by the State according to Absentee Law. The State is now using legal action against the tenants because sometime in the past 60 years, the inhabitants built a balcony or added a room and thus violated the contract and can legally be evacuated. Although the al-‘Ajami neighbourhood is socially and economically depressed, its northern area is one of the most expensive real estate ventures in Israel, so there is tremendous investing, building, and renting to high-end clientele, at the expense of the local Palestinians. Sami notes that the Israeli architect, Ilan Pivko, easily obtains building licenses, but, “If you are an Arab in al-‘Ajami and close your balcony, they will destroy it in 24 hours.”

Ironically, the al-‘Ajami neighbourhood started in the early nineteenth century when Persian Sheik Ibrahim el Ajami, came to Jaffa and built a mosque. To be blessed, people built homes surrounding his grave and the al-‘Ajami neighborhood grew up around the mosque. After the ghettoisation in 1948, the area also fell victim to urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s, with destruction of whole neighbourhoods and neglect and lack of services in the Arab areas. In the ensuing decades, this also became a “frozen zone” in terms of building permits for the local population, with plans on paper to build fancy beach hotels and neighborhood villas. As the neighbourhoods were neglected, Jews moved to nicer areas and the Palestinians stayed. The Tel Aviv municipality destroyed more than 3,000 apartments and allowed the demolitions to be buried on the al-‘Ajami shore. “All people began to throw all their garbage on our beach, now it is called the garbage mountain.” Sami remembers a sign warning children not to swim in the waters off of the garbage area. Adjacent to the garbage dump was an old neglected cemetery; because the Tel Aviv municipality did not rebuild a wall, the sea gradually eroded the soil and graves began falling into the sea. “So for kids, it was much more traumatic to swim with bones than garbage.”

Sami notes that the current plague is “gentrification,” what some perceive as an apolitical force



involving the private market rather than politics. “What can you do? Poor Jews can’t compete either.” The problem with this argument is that al-‘Ajami Arabs who are able to sell their homes, cannot buy a home in Tel Aviv. Also all Arab families have legal problems due to earlier renovations and Sami cites some “500 families have orders for demolition or eviction. When they brought us coexistence in 1950, if you owned your house, they divided it and gave part of it to the Bulgarian family. When the Bulgarian family left, the Arab family gave them money to leave and then they destroyed the wall and regained the house. But the Israeli government didn’t recognise this, so you also have to buy the house from the Israeli government... If you are very close to the sea, they say you had a loan from 1960, then compound interest, now you owe millions to the government.” This is the “new liberal mentality, most planners are upper middle class, know nothing about poverty. If you are poor it is your fault.” So in the Tel Aviv municipality, nearly 40% of the Palestinians living in the al-‘Ajami neighbourhood are living on welfare in extreme poverty and owe the State millions. “So we are stuck. This is the private market, supply and demand, ‘nothing to do with Arabs.’ The problem is that the Arabs in al-‘Ajami have no choice to live elsewhere.”

Sami takes us to an old Jaffa synagogue, Or Yisrael, Light of Israel, empty for decades and now under renovation. He notes that a number of NGOs are bringing rightwing Jewish settlers once in Gaza and the West Bank into “mixed cities” to “Judaize the area.” In the midst of this secular neighbourhood, a group of Jewish settlers, the “most extreme and violent soldiers in the Israeli Defense Force,” have already increased tensions. Sami recounted that they had recently yelled “Death to the Arabs” to a group of teenagers who responded violently, were arrested, and “disappeared” in the hands of the police for two days. “They are small in number, but they will grow much stronger, and if an Arab opens his mouth it will be very dangerous. How the West was won.” An NGO, Harosh Yehudi, the Jewish Head, is now looking for 200 empty apartments for extremist Jewish families to strengthen the Jewish, “suffering in Jaffa from Arab violence and racism. This is the language.” David, an Israeli activist, comments, the problem is that, “we are not dealing with a bunch of racists. The problem is that the vast majority of the Jewish population believes in this settler discourse and agrees.”

Sami sees the long-term consequences of this psychological, political, and economic divide: a sense of internal defeat. “So the high aspirations for Arabs here are to sell humus to the Jews, prepare their cars, sell falafel, give them services... people are used to being on the margins... When you tell them why not an Arab mayor, they think you are crazy. They don’t dream for equality.” Ultimately, he argues, this is about racism. Israeli universities are filled with research on demographics and the devastating consequences of an Arab majority in Israel. Then the discourse turns to transfer and land exchange, or liberals dream of educating Arab women so they will marry later and have fewer children. “You hear this as legitimate news.” He adds that Arabs are welcome in Israel, if they “are willing to serve but do not expect equality. If we continue doing the construction, the restaurants, they will be democratic and nice to us. But don’t tell us democracy, or marry their daughters.”

These political contradictions and ethical challenges are seriously problematic for a country that purports to be a democracy. One can certainly argue that Leiberman lifts the mask from the myth that a country that privileges Jews over Arabs can also be a land where all its citizens find justice and equal opportunity. Perhaps it is time to have an honest conversation. How can a country demand civil loyalty when it cannot guarantee civil rights? What are the long-term consequences of this potent mix of exclusion, paternalism, discrimination, poverty, and alienation? How can Palestinians reconcile the painful contradiction that the Peres Peace Center was built on confiscated Jaffa refugee property?

Perhaps when Jewish Israelis proudly sing their national anthem, Hatikvah, with the stirring lines, “Our hope is not yet lost, The hope of two thousand years, To be a free people in our land, The land of Zion and Jerusalem,” they need to imagine how these words sound to 20 percent of their fellow citizens who still remember the glory days of Jaffa, “The Bride of Palestine.” Avigdor Leiberman is not an aberration; he is saying out loud what his fellow citizens have thought and done for more than 60 years.



Gaza- Al-Jeel  
Press\*

## Houses and Streets Drown: Rain Water Pours on to Gaza Refugee Camps

As rain stops and clouds dissipate, Um Ahmad hurried to prepare her four children to go to school. After saying them good-by, she vented a sigh of relief and went on with her morning house chores. Few minutes later, she heard insistent knocks on the door, she opened it only to find her children standing before her dipped in mire and their clothes wet right to the innermost layer.

With sad eyes Um Ahmad said, "In rainy days there would be no schools and no universities, water covers everything and sometimes gets into our houses. And if ever our children ventured to leave the house and go to school, they return home five minutes later with their clothes wet and splattered with mud." While she was changing her children's clothes rapidly so that they don't get cold she continued, "I won't send them to school so long as there is rain, I don't want anything bad to happen to them or they drop into any of the many rain water pools in the [refugee] camp". In agony she added, "Our life here in the refugee camp is terrible, no well-paved streets or adequate sewage system. Even our houses are unfit for human beings to live in. But what we can do?! We are still patient and endure our life Allah ordained for us".

Heavy rain and gusty winds on Gaza since the beginning of winter exposed many of the refugee camps' defects which summer had previously concealed. Gaza didn't know that the coming of winter will reopen its winds, and that high winds will uproot the quasi-houses common in the refugee camps. This is not to mention the unpaved streets, and the poor sewage system that are incapable of enduring the continuous rain.

### The refugee camp is gone

University student Firas Salama, a resident of Shati' refugee camp, struggles every morning to leave his home and go to the university, but once he leaves, he returns home, despondent, with his arms weighed down after his many attempts to cross the street covered with water.

While rubbing his wet clothes, he said angrily, "how long will we remain under these conditions? Everybody in the world gets jubilant with the falling of rain in winter and we in the refugee camps hate it and hope it will never come because our streets and houses would drown in water". He continued, "Our life here in the refugee camp is so simple and our houses are crudely built; any strong wind will uproot the [asbestos or tan leather] roofs that shelter us. We live in situations which are dire, difficult, and cruel, which no human being should endure. Above all, we suffer from the [Israeli] siege that has made many youth stay at home without work."



On the reason of this suffering by which the camp is afflicted every winter he said, “The reason is the non-rehabilitation of infrastructure to make it adequate to endure the flowing rain water that invaded the streets and narrow the lanes of the camp. The roads are not properly paved, which made the problem worse; and houses are so dangerously close to each other that one cannot tell them from each other.”

### Cold and sickness

While trying to fix again the tan sheets which had flown away from the roof of his dilapidated house due to the ruthless winds and heavy rains Abu Khlid said, “here in Jabalia refugee camp the situation is disastrous and intolerable; we have become fearful of winter, because it doesn’t leave us and inflicts us with sickness and afflicts our children. The continuous rain drowns all of our house furniture”. With a somber face he went on, “in winter the real face of our poverty and calamity unveils; our houses that shelter us are unfit for humans to live in. Every night our children shiver from cold and we sink in water”. He added painfully, “I have nothing to give for my kids who are in pain from the stings of cold and catch many illnesses. My work is barely sufficient to feed them and I can’t purchase a new house or even improve one room to make it fit for human habitation”.

His wife picks up the subject matter of our dialogue and says while rubbing her palms to generate warmth, “all what we dream of is a house far from the camp lanes and the smell of moisture and rotteness, far from insects and sickness in summer and the rain that wets our furniture in winter”.

Poor families who reside in the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip feel despair and anguish when rain water flows like a bolt from the blue into their houses and wreaks havoc through their tiny spaces and leave them suffering cold and sickness”.

### Houses drowned

His neighbor Abu Ibrahim Hamid, a father to eight children and unemployed for six years, lives with his children in two derelict rooms that barely shelter them. Every rain season he covers the windows with nylon and sheets of cloth so that his family wouldn’t drown under rain water at night while they are asleep. He says bitterly, “I’ve no money to refit the two rooms and stop water’s leaking into our house every year. I am barely able to feed eight hungry mouths and satisfy their needs for food and clothing. We depend on the UNRWA’s aids which don’t satisfy the minimum portion of our needs.”

In a windy night neighbors were awakened by Abu Al-Walid yelling for help: rain water gathered inside his three-room tan-roofed house, and his children were about to drown. Recollecting that dreadful night Abu Al-Walid said, “If it had happened that my neighbors delayed for minutes, I would have lost two of my children after flood water broke into my house while we were in deep sleep. The level of our house’s terrain is low and the sewage was over-filled, that’s why water got into our house.”

Jabalia refugee camp, north of the Gaza Strip, is counted as one of the largest among the eight refugee camps in the Strip with a space of 1.4 square kilometers and a population of 104,000 registered refugees who suffer the scourges of poverty.





Mahir  
Shaweesh\*

## Popular resistance: strategic or tactical

Popular resistance is entering into the Palestinian milieu, particularly during the current stride towards Palestinian reconciliation. As a concept, popular resistance has achieved moral authority by the precedent set by Gandhi's civil and peaceful resistance to the British Crown in India and the African National Congress (ANC) defiant stand against Apartheid in South Africa. The proposed question here: does the promotion of peaceful resistance come within the context of a Palestinian strategy, or is the adoption of it merely tactical move designed to compel the Israeli occupation to freeze settlement and, hence, resume the serial of absurd negotiations?

In both cases, the issue is in need of discussion. If what the Ramallah Authority (PA) proposes an adoption of popular resistance as a strategy, which is very unlikely, then the cheerleaders of popular resistance in Palestine need to give an explanation to their own statements and practices on the ground. Above all, this tendency needs an unequivocal Palestinian political stance, not just an expression by random participants and prominent names in marches and meetings here and there.

We are not here in the task of checking the suitability of words to deeds, or whether the Palestinian Authority's experience shows its adherence to this principle or not, or the fact that it called for it only at critical moments like the Israeli war on Gaza for example. But it is sufficient for us here to remind everyone that the holding of this banner of popular resistance entails bringing the Palestinian people into the centre of the action. Needless to say it requires such a move to unite the experiences of the Palestinian people in their confrontation of the numerous forms of Israeli aggression.

But if the proposition is tactical, it would be imperative here to highlight that despite the fact that popular resistance is an important device to galvanize people into resisting Israeli occupation, than limiting this goal to this method only is a clear demonstration of a defect in our understanding of the conflict imposed on the Palestinian people.

The military colonial template manifested through Zionism differs from the Indian-British model. "Israel" is not equivalent to the "East India Company" which Gandhi was able to put pressure on through local markets and resources and further pressure it to leave. This stance was assisted all along by the consumption and production by the people itself involved in civil disobedience. Similar levers was employed in the Palestinian case during

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\* Writer and researcher in Palestinian refugees issue.

certain stages of the conflict, but insisting on them as the only option cannot formulate a coherent strategy of resistance that is able to respond to the many different fronts in the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

There is a hidden flaw in the current discussions on popular: there is a party which believes in two contradictory things: they combine popular resistance while at the same time cooperating with occupation that has been ongoing for decades. It is totally bizarre and morally inconsistent for those who suppress protests against occupation while holding the slogan of popular resistance.

It is clear that some voices are seeking to champion the term but not escalate mass activism against the occupation, and even to displace the concept of comprehensive resistance out of the scene. According to this perspective, people are expected to demonstrate in silence holding candles and moving soberly around and to go home afterwards, without wielding any real pressure against the face of aggressions on a daily basis on people, land, sacred places, households and resources. The Palestinian people, according to this strategy, are supposed to expose reality of occupation in its abstract form. It is not acceptable to demand of the Palestinian people adherence to a single form of resistance and take away all other cards without any tangible return. It is better to say that people's, or popular, resistance means only the beginning of all other resistance options.





Legal Dept. at  
PRC

## Palestinian Refugees in Iraq “Displaced in Exile”

### **Introduction:**

The formation of the occupation state of Israel created on ongoing crises for Palestinians. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were turned into refugees following attacks from Jewish Gangs in 1948. They were forcibly driven out of Palestine into surrounding areas and eventually found temporary settlement in refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Gaza and West Bank. Many more are distributed in different regions of the world. The entire estimated number of Palestinian Refugees is comprises of more than 7 millions. According to UNRWA statistics, The 1948 registered refugees and their descendants now number 5 million, and mainly reside in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon or Syria. There are Palestinian Refugees who are not registered with UNRWA and distributed either in “un-recognized camps” in the host Middle Eastern countries or other countries worldwide. Other countries with a notable number of Palestinian refugees include Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Gulf States and EU states. Thousands of Palestinian Refugees left Iraq following waves of violence in 1948, 1967 and 1991.

### **Background**

#### **a) Palestinian Refugees in Iraq**

Palestinian refugees came to Iraq fleeing war in several waves. The first group came from Palestine and reached Iraq in 1948. The second group arrived in Iraq after the 1967 War, and a third group arrived in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War when Palestinian refugees were forced to leave Kuwait. Palestinian refugees in Iraq, unlike Palestinian refugees in the region (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza strip and West Bank) were not registered with the UNRWA. The previous Iraqi government, before the US lead invasion, took responsibility for the protection of Palestinian refugees and gave them rights to employment, health care, education and other government services. But they were not granted Iraqi citizenship or the right to own assets, although many of were born in Iraq.

Following the Anglo-American invasion in Iraq, the life of tens of thousands Palestinians have dramatically changed. Some were massacred and other fled Iraq to avoid persecution. They became the target of violence from different political and religious groups. They were threatened by armed groups and became an easy target for those looking for some ‘foreign’ element to blame. The media which was mainly directed by sectarian groups also played a catalytic role as it tried to connect the Palestinians to the bombings in Baghdad at the time.



During the period of extensive sectarian violence they all had to go through an embarrassing process of renewing their residence permits, even though most of them were born in Iraq or lived there nearly all their life. Most also wanted to leave the country due to the insecurity and potential human rights abuses, including murder, torture and other ill- treatment.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared that there were 34,000 Palestinians residing in Iraq prior the 2003 war. This number has diminished significantly due to sectarian violence. Most fled and sought refuge in make shift tents in the Syrian and Jordanian deserts before they were given another temporary resettlement.

Many were concentrated in four separate camps, Al-Walid Refugee Camp, Al-Tanaf Refugee Camp, Al-Hol Refugee Camp, and Al-Ruweished Refugee Camp. Recent 2012 UNHCR studies estimate the remaining number of Refugees in Iraq are at best 10,000. Most reside in the capital, and another 210 or so in Al Walid Camp in Al-Anbar governorate in Iraq.

The Jordanian government has refused entry to Palestinians from Iraq except few for a hundred. Syria in turn, after admitting hundreds of Palestinian refugees, has closed down its borders. As a result, there were hundreds of Palestinian refugees stranded on the Iraq/Jordan and Iraq/Syria borders and found them abandoned without any basic provisions. They lived in tents, in squalor, with little hope for better life. The Al-Hol, Al-Tanaf, Al-Ruweished and Al-Walid refugee camps in the Iraqi desert were terrible examples of their catastrophic situation and continuous suffering .

After nearly four years, these camps were closed and a number of countries have accepted them as refugees. But their relocation was not well planned which created another depressing situation for them. This process led to the separation of immediate families and some found themselves in very bad conditions in host countries.

## The situation of Palestinians inside Iraq

### a) Security Conditions:

Many Palestinians in Iraq were exposed to systematic killing and kidnapping operations carried out by sectarian militias. The attacks started directly after the American invasion of Iraq. The American troops also attacked Palestinian residential areas where many were killed and others arrested or wounded. The violence has continued even after the instalment of a new Iraqi regime. International Human Rights



Organizations expressed their concerns over the attacks. Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report entitled, "Iraq: Palestinians Under Attack, But Unable to Flee" (<http://www.hrw.org/news/2006/09/09/iraq-palestinians-under-attack-unable-flee>) the report described the sectarian violence which ripped Iraqi and Palestinians apart. The report claimed that Iraqi government was also responsible for the attacks and harassments.

The report appealed to the neighbouring countries to receive Palestinians due to the risks they are facing in Iraq, "Countries in the region such as Jordan and Syria must open their borders to Iraqi Palestinians at risk, and the international community must urgently respond to their plight by providing financial assistance to the host countries and third-country resettlement opportunities on a humanitarian basis." Added the report.



HRW published another report in September 2006 that cited the killings of Palestinian Refugees. It stated that in February 2006 several attacks were carried out against Palestinian housing projects in Baghdad. The report stated that, “ at least 10 Palestinians were killed, among them were two brothers of the former Palestinians attach in Baghdad, who were kidnapped from their father’s home on February 23 and found dead at a morgue two days later, their bodies mutilated. On the evening of the Samarra bombing, unidentified persons murdered Samir Khalid al-Jayyab, a fifty-year-old Palestinian, hitting him over the head with a sword and shooting him some twenty times. On March 16, unidentified armed men strangled to death Muhammad Hussain Sadiq, a twenty-seven-year-old Palestinian barber, together with two Sunni Iraqis in the Shu’la neighbourhood of Baghdad.”

HRW’ cited to Shia militias as the instigators of the attacks against Palestinian Refugees. It stated that “Ahlo al Bait Revenge” was behind the attacks. It made threats demanding Palestinians to leave Iraq within 72 hours and told them that Palestinians have no place in Iraq.

### **b) Legal Conditions**

According to Muhamad Al Mauhamadi, a Palestinian researcher specialized on the issue of Palestinian Refugees in Iraq, Palestinian Refugees in Iraq are the responsibility of Iraqi government. Following the American invasion of Iraq, a new ministry called “Ministry of Displaced and Migrants” was established. Palestinian Refugees were registered with this Ministry that was directed to serving them.

For residency purposes, The Interior Ministry issues them passport and other papers. However, there are enormous delays in dealing with simple requests. There is also a number of Palestinian Refugees who are not recognized and do not possess any documents or papers.

Within the Interior Ministry, there is a special division that deals with Refugees in Iraq. That division categorized some Palestinian Refugees, those who came to Iraq after 1967 as seeking Political Asylum Seekers and granted them yellow Identity cards. Others who came prior to that date obtained red Identity card and accepted as Refugees.

Palestinian Refugees hold Iraqi travel documents valid for a year. Yet, many Iraqi embassies abroad refuse to issue or renew these travel documents although it’s a basic right of the Refugees.

### **c) Social Conditions**

Many of the Palestinians in Iraq are facing challenges in renting homes. Some of them were forced out of their houses. Additionally, the working conditions for them are extremely difficult where many are not able to work due to discrimination and administrative restrictions. This has led to chronic financial difficulties for the families leading to depressing living conditions. There is no fixed assistance for many of the refugees by Int. NGOs. A few are registered with UNCHR which is providing assistance in different ways. Security factors diminish the opportunities of Palestinians in securing employment. For example some Palestinian workers were killed at markets. Furthermore, many of their business and shops were either destroyed or closed. Unemployment rates are estimated at 90% due to grave insecurities. Some refugees previously worked at governmental posts but following the installment of a new government they were all sacked.

### **d) Educational Conditions**

The security conditions as well as the ill-treatment of Palestinians in Iraq impaired their education. Some families abstained from sending their children to schools and universities fearing a risk of their lives. They are seen as “terrorists” due to unfounded allegations circulated by the local media outlets. Many families

reported different incidents like this. One family reported that the treatment of their children at school changed after they were recognized as Palestinians. In other incidents, some children were kidnapped while going to school. Palestinian graduates and university students are discriminated also. For example some of them were told at one college that “Iraq is for Iraqis and no one else”. College admission is not easy for Palestinians as they are asked to prove they are Palestinians. This is extremely difficult as they have no documents to prove this especially for the new generation born in exile.

### **Refugees and Protection: Iraq Government’s Role**

Following the WW2, a refugee protection agreement was reached known as the 1951 Refugee Convention. It aimed at tackling the problem of mass displacement during the war. Later the scope becomes wider and it was recommended that the convention serve as the basis for an international legal regime designed to protect the rights of refugees. This purpose was served by combining the 1967 Protocol for refugees. Signatory states are committed to protecting refugees on their land if they acceded to the 1951 Convention.

Article 3 of the convention titled “non-discrimination” states that: The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin. Palestinians in Iraq, as highlighted above, are discriminated in several ways. Iraqi government is neither giving them proper security nor alleviating the discrimination they face in basic provisions and accessing services. Iraqi media is also inciting hate and bigotry against a vulnerable group. The violence against them is based on race and is certainly sectarian.

Article 7 of the convention titled “wage-earning employment” state the following: In any case, restrictive measures imposed on aliens or the employment of aliens for the protection of the national labour market shall not be applied to a refugee who was already exempt from them at the date of entry into force of this Convention for the Contracting State concerned, or who fulfils one of the following conditions:

Based on the witnesses and information mentioned by Palestinian Refugees in Iraq, they are being discriminated and marginalized when it comes to the labor market. They are being ignored by official bodies and denied employment although some of them are qualified for certain posts. This resulted in more than 90% percent of unemployment leaving Palestinian families in vulnerable conditions especially as there is a lack of sufficient support from concerned organizations.

Iraq is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. Nonetheless there are other international instruments that apply:

- The 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of War: article 44 of this Convention, whose aim is the protection of civilian victims, deals with refugees and displaced persons. Article 73 of the 1977 Additional Protocol stipulates that refugees and stateless persons shall be

### **Protected persons.**

- The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons: defines the term “stateless person” as a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law. It further prescribes the standards of treatment to be accorded to stateless persons.
- The 1967 United Nations Declaration on Territorial Asylum: this Declaration of the United Nations General Assembly lays down a series of fundamental principles in regard to territorial asylum. It states that the granting of territorial asylum “is a peaceful and humanitarian act and that, as such, it cannot be regarded as unfriendly by any other State.” It upholds the basic humanitarian principle of non-refoulement and recalls articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which spell



out, respectively, the right to leave any country and to return to one's country and the right to seek and enjoy asylum. UNHCR has been present in Iraq since the 1980s even while it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. It has hosted, with UNHCR assistance, Palestinian, Iranian, Turkish and Syrian refugees.

### **The international protection**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created on the 14th of December 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The UNHCR Agency is mandated to guide and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and seek durable solutions for refugee problems worldwide. The main intention of UNHCR is to defend the rights of Refugees. It tries to ensure that anyone fleeing persecution can exercise the right to seek asylum, find safe place and return home voluntarily. This articles framing the international refugee regime, identifies the relationship between States and UNHCR. Under this article, the UNHCR is afforded a supervisory role and States have an obligation to cooperate with it in order to achieve the most favorable outcome and coordinated application of the Refugee Convention. An important part of the mandate of this international organization is to seek a durable solution for refugees. In this respect, the UNHCR usually relies on three types of solutions or alternatives: The first alternative is voluntary repatriation to the original country safely and in dignity. The second alternative or durable solution is integration in the country of refuge. To be an appropriate solution, the host country has to help refugees to integrate into local communities and treat them same as its own citizens. The refugees themselves should have the likelihood of staying in the country of refuge for a foreseeable future where they have opportunities to integrate to a new society and build a new safe life without any prospect of repatriation to their country of origin. When the first and the second solutions mentioned above are not possible, the UNHCR move on to consider resettlement to a third country as the third and the least ideal durable solution for the refugees' situation. The UNHCR has made resettlement criterion for refugees to qualify for this solution for example: refugees whose lives are threatened in the country of asylum, unaccompanied children, survivors of torture and trauma. Because there is a limited quota from the recipient countries, only the neediest refugees are given the chance to resettle to a third country. We conclude from the above that the Palestinian refugees in Iraq meet all the conditions to receive the international protection and look for urgent solutions to them.

According to UNHCR, the organization worked with many partners like UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the Palestinian Red Crescent and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. This coalition helped to ease the suffering of Palestinian Refugees at many levels. UNHCR states that Israel refused to admit Palestinian Refugees to their own lands and villages they descend from. Also, Arab countries refused to hose them except Syria and Sudan. Alternative shelters were sought for those Refugees in different parts of the world. Some of them are in Europe, India, Brazil and Malaysia. UNHCR statistics shows that 1,300 Palestinian refugees who had lived at different times in the camp, more than 1,000 were relocated to third countries, including Belgium, Chile, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

### **International community's role in the protection of Palestinian refugees in Iraq**

The Palestinian refugees in Iraq are not registered with the UNRWA, and the UNHCR has a mandate to protect Palestinian refugees not falling under UNRWAs working definition. They consequently fall within the UNHCR's competence by virtue of paragraph 2 of Art.1D of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. So what has the UNHCR done to protect them?

It has indeed assisted hundreds of Palestinian families who found themselves without homes in Baghdad and called on numerous occasions on the Iraqi government and the International forces to afford improved security and legal protection for the Palestinian refugees in Iraq. The UNHCR has issued many statements calling for urgent humanitarian assistance and immediate relocation for those refugees. The Agency had expressed its deep concern over the cruel conditions faced by Palestinian refugees who were living in camps on the Iraq-Syria border and expressed that resettlement to third countries is the temporary solution for these needy people. UNHCR has repeated its appeal to all concerned parties to solve the problem of thousands of Palestinian refugees and to protect them from persecution and find durable solutions for them .

However, there are no significant results for the UNHCR appeals. Just few countries have offered help and accepted limited numbers of Palestinian refugees for resettlement while the rest of them are still suffering without any help . The Iraqi government and the Multi National Forces have failed to provide Palestinians protection as requested by the UNHCR. The latter in turn still needs more help from donors to carry on with its assistance to those refugees. Almost nine years on very little has changed in the Palestinian refugees' situation. They still face persecution and terrorism on a daily basis One of the Palestinian refugees said "The international community and neighboring countries only issue statements about our plight," he added "I want to tell them that their statements do nothing for us.

### **Displaced in Diaspora: Palestinian refugees in India**

The difficulties Palestinian Refugees face in India is an example of the suffering of Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq looking for safe place. Some were forced to remain in India as a temporary measure until UNHCR is able to locate a permanent solution. UNHCR registered them as refugees and tried to relocate them in western countries such as US, Canada and Sweden.

The problem is that India has not signed the Refugee Convention. Therefore, the Indian authorities did not recognize the Palestinians from Iraq as refugees requiring their protection and support. As a result the Palestinian refugees in India are not allowed to work and are denied support from either the Indian government or United Nation bodies. They are also deprived of the basics of health and social care. They have to live in depressing conditions until they are relocated in another country which may take six years. The relocation is very difficult and can take couple of years where results are not guaranteed.

According to Om shams, a refugee mother who spoke of her suffering after being forced out from Iraq to Syria then India, she was hoping to have some relief from the years of suffering after moving to India. Her hope was shattered as she moved from one form of oppression to another. Some of her family members are still in Sweden while she is in India. She lives in India by herself and relies on the goodwill of others. Om Shams hopes to be able to live in security and join her family as she has a little girl with her.

Mustafa, young Palestinian refugee, is still seeking to have opportunities of a just and secure life. He has been denied his request to relocate in US after a long wait and is now waiting for another chance. He does not know when it will come "My friend, Ahmed al Helo, came with us. He was hoping to live here in India and have the chance of a better life. However he died after a battle with chronic disease due to a lack of basic health care."

### **Palestinian refugees in Brazil**

Palestinian refugees in Brazil fled the war in Iraq, to Ruwaishd and Walid camps in Jordan, from where they were temporarily resettled in Brazil. They were brought to Brazil through United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) program, to alleviate their suffering and provide some basic health



and social service. Upon their arrival to Brazil, instead of finding a more hospitable situation they faced tortuous conditions

All the promises given to them appeared to be untrue. Promises of minimal, health care, education, security and work were untrue. They appealed to Brazilian authorities to either give them shelter and assistance or send them back to Palestine or any country that is able to provide basic humanitarian services. According to Human Rights organizations that PRC met in Brazil, the country doesn't offer any programs for Refugees support. Health services are not offered for those refugees who do not work or own any assets in their new settlement location.

Tragedy of Refugee Luay Sameer Oda: Luay's health situation started to deteriorate upon his arrival to Brazil. He was not able to breathe except with the help of a special breathing apparatus that is connected to him at all time.

Luay spoke in great detail about his extreme health condition saying, "I have lived most of my life in Iraq and spent a few years in the stormy desert. Our tents were damaged many times. I never required the use of external oxygen support despite these conditions. But after arriving in Brazil, my health deteriorated and turned worse. Doctors told me that if I don't undergo a surgery in my lungs, then within 3 years my lungs will cease to function. At the moment, I'm alive with only half a lung and with the help of this medical oxygen machine. Sadly, UNCHR and Brazilian officials denied me basic medications. They don't want to provide me with the required health care. Simply, they are killing me!"

The refugees have tried their utmost to raise awareness of their plight. They spoke with media outlets and sent many appeals explaining their living conditions. In an appeal published in various media outlets they stated: "Many of us are sick but no one extends a hand of help for us... the ESAF organization that supervise us isn't fit to care for animals let alone caring for human being? This organization pays no respect to the simplest human needs... if they promise they tell a lie, and they rarely visit us... they don't mind what happens to us... The UNHCR which is the sponsor of all this program specified a period of two years for a humanitarian program it had planned for us since we left Iraq, but the period has expired now, and they told us to manage our own affairs from now on... We are foreigners here, and we have a culture, language, and traditions which are different from that of Brazilians that must be taken into consideration before anyone ask us to manage our own affair" (Palestinian refugees in Brazil live in miserable condition, Palestine Information Centre 2011)

Problems extend to all areas including health, social welfare and employment opportunity. Bearing in mind they don't speak the language and they are not even offered opportunity to learn local language. UNCHR should meet its obligations by securing them a proper place for living as well as providing the basic services. While for example Luay family was promised to have free medications for 2 years in Brazil, however they obtained none of the promises.

### **Palestinian refugees in Europe**

There are 2,800 Palestinian refugees from Iraq residing in Cyprus. The condition of these refugees is still very bad as they have no access to basic health, social and other services.

A delegation from occupied Palestinian city of Ramallah went to Cyprus to investigate the conditions of those refugees. They also met with refugee individuals. Husam Abdul-Hafith Al-Madi, in his fifties, explained the main concerns and difficulties facing them:

"we sought refuge in this country, and endured hardships until we arrived in Cyprus hoping to start a better life." He said the lack of support from the Palestinian Authority was partly to blame... After we arrived in Larnaka, Cyprus agreed to grant us temporary asylum for humanitarian reasons, without

giving us citizenship. However, our situation worsened gradually as we weren't allowed to work at all. The absence of any Palestinian support, even moral, added to our suffering and we were left alone to face our fate...We are on thin ice...The situation will become even worse when the lease expires and we lose the humble building used by the community as a gathering place and school." (Maan News Agency)

Palestinian Return Center (PRC) visited the refugees in Cyprus and investigated their conditions. PRC General Director, Majed al zeer, met around 70 members of the new refuge community in Cyprus, where he discussed with them the problems and hardships they faced upon their arrival. The refugees have complained about the marginalization. The main concern of the refugee community now is education. With the absence of any source of income, Palestinian families are unable to educate their children at universities or colleges.

## Recommendations

- 1- Iraqi Government should protect Palestinian Refugees residing in its territories. It should also grant them residency permit as well as improving their social, security, and economic conditions. The Government should also stop any media campaigns against them and ease their freedom of movement from and into Iraq.
- 2- Arab States should claim their responsibility to protect Palestinian Refugees in Iraq and help them solve their problems.
- 3- UNHCR should ensure that refugees resettled in other countries obtain basic health and social care.
- 4- If host countries like Brazil are unable to secure decent living conditions for those refugees, then UNHCR should find alternative temporary resettlement places.
- 5- UNHCR as well as host countries should attempt in reuniting the families of Palestinian Refugees.

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## The 10th Palestinians in Europe Conference

### Reaffirming the right of return and launching Palestinian prisoners campaign

The annual conference of Palestinians in Europe is an important initiative determined in empowering Palestinians to reach their utmost goals of freedom and self-determination. It is a major event amongst Palestinians in diaspora, drawing crowds of up to ten thousand every year in May. Since its launch in 2002, the conference has continually reaffirmed the Palestinians unwavering desire to return to their land and launched numerous campaigns to address ongoing injustices against Palestinians.

The Palestinian Return centre (PRC), based in London, initiated this very important project. It has been on the agenda of the PRC since it took the position of the Secretariat of Palestinians in Europe. These conferences provided a central meeting point, every year, between delegations from all across Europe, representatives of parties and NGOs, and representatives from the occupied lands.

The issue of Palestinian Refugees (expelled by force and by ethnic cleansing in 1948 from their own lands, farms and properties) is the core of the Palestinian cause. Solving the issue of Palestinian refugees is the central issue in ending the conflict. Abandoning this central plank, as is shown, turns the conflict into an insoluble political problem.

The Right of Return for Palestinians in the Diaspora is a key aspect of the Arab – Zionist conflict. The projects of resettlements of refugees in the Arab world and elsewhere undermine their human right. These attempts are misguided as they free Israel from their legal and ethical obligations towards the plight of Palestinian refugees.

A key objective of the conference is to ensure that Palestinian refugees have their chance to express their honest views regarding ongoing political attempts to impose a political solution that bypasses their human rights. The conference aims to silence those trying to relinquish human rights and turn rights into a political bartering process.

The initiative was originally called for by PRC in London. The first conference, drawing up to ten thousand people, was held in London. It was the first of a series that followed in a number of European countries coordinated by local Palestinian refugee communities. Within the second conference in Vienna, the General Secretariat of Palestinians in Europe Conference was formed to supervise the organization and the preparations for future conferences.

These conferences have become a bridge for communications and interaction leading to theoretical and practical decisions and steps. Many documents and charters are issued via these conferences carrying the wishes of Palestinians living in Europe. It also expresses their views regarding the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian territories, especially when it comes to the right of return.



### Other major achievements of the conference include:

- Raising the profile of Palestinians in Europe who refuse to give up the Right of Return.
- Protecting the Identity of Palestinians in Europe.
- Creating a forum where social bonds can be strengthened.
- Activating and developing Palestinian activism and work in Europe.
- Connecting and linking with Palestinians inside occupied Palestine.
- Contributing to break the siege imposed on Palestinians after 2006 elections.
- Highlighting the suffering of Palestinians in occupied Palestine.
- Exposing Zionist crimes against Palestinians like settlements and the apartheid wall.
- Enabling Palestinians in occupied lands to have their voice heard.
- Working on achieving Palestinian unity.
- Taking care of the young generation and giving them space to work for their cause.
- Reviving the Palestinian cause in international and Arab media.

The 10th Palestinians in Europe Conference was held in Denmark, Copenhagen on Saturday, 28th, April 2012 under the title “Our Spring blossoms our Return”. The Tunisian President, Mohammed Monsif Al-Marzouqi, delivered a televised speech where he supported the struggle of the Palestinian people and the right of refugees to return to their homes and villages in the occupied historical Palestine.

The conference discussed key issues like the Palestinian Refugees in Iraq and Nahr al Bard Refugee camp crisis, where calls have been made on the Lebanese government to improve the refugees living conditions.

Numerous speeches were given by distinguished guests. In addition to the Tunisian President, the Tunisian Presidential Bureau Director, Emad Al-Daimi, delivered a speech in which he expressed the support of Tunian people and their leadership for the Palestinian cause.

Former British Minister and MP, Clare Short expressed her joy in speaking on behalf of thousands of Palestinian Refugees. She spoke of her support in offering the Palestinian Refugees their full rights especially the right of Return. She also held Israel responsible for the failure of any peace talks in the Middle East due to its expansionist policies.





From the occupied Palestine, Dr. Mustafa Al-Barghuti, a Parliamentarian and President of Palestinian Initiative, attended the event where he described the apartheid practices of Israel in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Al-Barghuti, emphasized popular resistance as a necessity in supporting all other legal methods of resistance in fighting Israeli occupation.



Palestinian Parliamentarian and Head of Popular Committee against the Siege on Gaza, Jamal Al-Kohdary, delivered a speech where he called on an immediate action to lift the siege on Gaza and unity of Palestinian movements in a step to challenge Israeli occupation.



Other key speakers included Dr. Muhammad Yasin Amro, Chair of Academy of Palestinian Refugee Studies and also, Basim Kayed, chair of Palestinian Scholars league in Lebanon.

The conference launched a campaign titled, “European Campaign to Release Palestinian prisoners” where a number of organizations have agreed to unite efforts to create pressure on the European Union and its officials. This campaign is the major outcome of this year’s conference. Palestinians in Europe united in solidarity with Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli jails.



The conference recognised that the plight of Palestinian and Arab prisoners in Israeli occupation jails is passing through a critical moment that requires immediate European and International intervention as thousands incarcerated begin hunger strikes.

Thousands of Palestinian and Arab prisoners are deprived of their basic rights while incarcerated in Israeli prisons which are lacking in basic standards required in any jail. They have endured many unjust practises inflicted by the Israeli government which is violating its own commitment to International law and the Charters of Human Rights. These violations are committed with total impunity and International accountability.



### **The Israeli violations of human rights of prisoners include:**

- Methods of torture and use of psychological terror and techniques for degradation of human dignity as well as practices of blackmail against prisoners. Prison authorities use torture to obtain confessions which are then presented during unfair trials.
- Prisoner’s families are deprived from visiting their relatives beyond acceptable period. This is unfair and a collective punishment policy against prisoners. Some prisoners were prevented from seeing their families for 10 years and many others it was 7 years.
- Administrative Detention: Israeli authorities imprison Palestinians indefinitely without trials, some for many years.
- Solitary Confinement: Many prisoners are detained in very small cells removed from any interaction for long periods of time, even years.

- Medical Negligence: Prisoners are deprived basic medical care resulting in critical and chronic diseases that risk their lives. This includes prisoners who already suffer from chronic diseases.
- Military Trials and Detention: A collective punishment policy of detention is practised against civil society, students and activists for organising non-violent protest in their communities in support of Palestinian rights. Members of Parliament were not immune to such draconian methods.



Thousands of prisoners were exposed to the above inhumane practises regardless of their genders or ages. Mothers were jailed with their children, youth, university students, elderly people, minors, Parliamentarians, political leaders and even patients. The conditions listed above have driven thousands of prisoners to go on hunger strike to end the Israeli violations and draw the attention of the International community to their cause. It's also hoped that the hunger strike will break the silence of the International community. They started their hunger strike despite the terrible health risks associated with such a desperate tactic.

All the organisations signed a petition dispatched all over Europe announcing their solidarity with the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. They called for the following:

- International community, European Union state members should work towards ending the plight of thousands of Palestinian prisoners whose rights are continually violated.
- Launching wide-scale solidarity and awareness event in support of Palestinian prisoners across Europe until they are addressed.
- Initiating European investigation committee that is mandated to visit and inspect the conditions facing prisoners in Israeli jails and ensure appropriate intervention is made by the different EU commissions.
- Enabling the International Red Cross and the various Human Rights organizations to look into the conditions of prisoners immediately.
- Compelling Israeli authorities to stop its arbitrary detention policy practised daily against Palestinian civilians. And also to stop the policy of torture and collective punishment policies and allowing them to see their families.
- Imposing punitive procedures and actions against Israel if it doesn't abide by International laws and Human Rights Charters.



### **Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World: Realities and Prospects”, Doha - Qatar, 14 – 15 April, 2012**

Al Jazeera Centre for Studies and the Palestinian Return Centre in London organized a research seminar entitled “Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World: Realities and Prospects” in Doha on Saturday and Sunday, 14 – 15 April, 2012. The event was attended by a number of researchers, academics, experts, journalists, politicians and Arab ambassadors. The seminar presented a chance to discuss the issue of Palestinian from diverse perspectives. The event provided an opportunity to highlight the social, legal and political conditions of Palestinian refugees in some Arab countries in light of Arab spring. A set of recommendations was also made for future planning.

This event succeeded in highlighting vital issues facing the Palestinian people in the Arab world that were clearly highlighted in the Arab uprisings. Majed al Zeer, General Director of the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), emphasized that the Palestinian Refugees cause is the core Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel has tried to dissolve this issue and the right of return from the political lexicon of the region.

In the two day conference there were six seminars focusing on six different issues. During the first seminar Dr. Salman Abu Sita, the General Coordinator of Right of Return Conference and chair of Palestine land foundation in London presented his paper on how the refugee return is a fact awaiting implementation.

For Palestinians, the Nakba was the most critical event in the modern history. Neither the International Community nor the Arab nations have found a fair solution for the problem of Palestinian refugees and their right of return. He argued that the the legal frame of Right of Return of the refugees is clear. Similar cases of refugees solution implemented in Kosovo, Bosnia, Abkhazia, and Uruguay, Uganda and South Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan can be implemented in Palestine. There are vivid examples of International mechanisms to do likewise.

Other seminars focused in the crucial role played by UNRWA and the many difficult challenges its facing as a result of funding shortage. It was unanimously agreed that if UNRWA is to be disbanded, the ensuing crisis will not only effect Palestinian Refugees but also the Arab countries which host refugees. This will also cost them huge sums of money to fill the void left by UNRWA.



There was a very interesting seminar on “Palestinophobia: the fear of a demographic growth of the Palestinians” The terms has become common across some Arab host countries. Many examples of this were shown in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

One seminar discussed the significance of the Palestinian cause within the Arab Spring. The Arab youth made it clear that Palestine is still the issue. As Arab spring started, the Palestinian cause returned to being a popular agenda amongst the Arab people. Many actions took place like the “Return March” which aimed at driving towards Palestinian national reconciliation and emphasis on the Right of Return. In the very early days of the Syrian revolution, the Palestinian organizers of the Return March refused to employ the issue by any Palestinian faction or the Syrian regime.

### **Another seminar focused on State Judaising, seen as a deathbed of the Right of Return**

State Judaising or a recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as a condition for any negotiations poses a risk to the Right of Return. It means, if conceded that the Right of Return is buried and a new Nakba will follow resulting in the expulsion of more Palestinians who live in 1948 land. This demand seeks to obtain consent for being a racist state as Dr. Azmi Bishara, director of Arabic research and Political studies centre highlighted.

### **Different Conclusions and Future Vision**

The seminar concluded that the issue of Palestinian Refugees in the Arab world must be given more attention. The conditions of Palestinian Refugees in light of UNRWA's financial problems should be diagnosed and the needs of refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza and West Bank should be known to tackle them.

An official Arab stance is important to solve the issue of refugees. The stance should be developed which will guarantee the Right of return. It also encouraged civil society organizations to interact by making use of new media and other information sources.

Participants affirmed on the idea of documenting the Palestinian Refugees names by making use of technology. Carrying out studies is not as costly as it used to be with the technology and communication advancement. Documenting Palestinian refugees names and their origins and creating a connection with them is vital and should be done without any factional conflicts.

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### **UN says Israel destroys Palestinian Bedouin homes (1)**

UN agencies in the occupied West Bank said on Sunday that Israel destroyed 21 homes of Palestinian Bedouin refugees, making 54 people including 35 children homeless.

A joint statement from the refugee agency UNRWA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs condemned the April 18 demolition of the structures at Khalayleh north of Jerusalem, along with the removal the same day of refugees from two houses in annexed east Jerusalem.

“The forced eviction of Palestine refugees and the demolition of Palestinian homes and other civilian structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law,” UNRWA's West Bank director, Felipe Sanchez, said in the statement.

“We urge the Israeli authorities to find an immediate solution to enable the Palestinian population of the occupied West Bank, to lead a normal life, in full realisation of their rights”, he added.

The European Union on Saturday condemned the east Jerusalem eviction, in which 14 Palestinians were removed from two houses in the Beit Hanina neighbourhood ahead of Jewish settlers moving in.



The EU's diplomatic missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah said in a statement that they were "deeply concerned by the plans to build a new settlement in the midst of this traditional Palestinian neighbourhood." The international community considers all Israeli settlement on occupied land to be illegal under international law.

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### **How the Israel Lobby's Favorite Senator Is Trying to Erase Palestinian Refugees (2)**

Critics of Senator Mark Kirk's drive to redefine who a Palestinian refugee is say the move is part of a strategy to take refugee rights for Palestinians off the negotiating table.

Palestinians in the occupied territories, the diaspora and in refugee camps protested earlier this month on the 64th anniversary of the Nakba, commemorating the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians by nascent Israeli forces in the late 1940s. Palestinians were sending a message to the world that the right to return to their homes would not be forgotten, and that millions of refugees are awaiting a solution.

One senator from Illinois, though, wants to write off those millions and change who is classified as a Palestinian refugee. Mark Kirk, a hawkish Republican whose political career has been boosted by right-wing Israel advocates, is leading a drive to fundamentally redefine who a Palestinian refugee is in the eyes of the United States.

On Thursday May 24, a Senate committee passed an amendment by unanimous voice vote that would require the State Department to differentiate between Palestinian refugees who were displaced first-hand and those born after to families who were refugees.

The senator behind the amendment was Kirk, who is close to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and has received over a million dollars from Israel oriented political action committees during his political career.

"This amendment turns reality on its head," said Randa Farah, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Western Ontario and an expert on Palestinian refugees and UNRWA. "The reality is that the number of Jewish settlers in Palestine turned it into a state of a Jewish majority, by displacing the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants."

Furthermore, Kirk's amendment rests on the wrong assumption that Palestinian refugee status is uniquely passed on through generations. In fact, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a separate agency that oversees refugee situations outside of Palestine, also gives refugee status to generations of family members who remain displaced. For example, the son of a Cambodian refugee registered with the UNHCR as a result of being displaced is also considered a refugee by the UNHCR. The amendment also does not address the fact that the 1967 war created 500,000 Palestinian refugees, with an additional 175,000 Palestinians registering with UNRWA as a result.

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### **Emerging economies to support Palestinian refugees (3)**

UNITED NATIONS: The head of the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees has appealed to emerging economies to step up support for the organization, stressing the need for continued humanitarian support as parties to the Middle East conflict seek a political solution.

UNRWA provides assistance, protection and advocacy for nearly five million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The agency is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN member states, and in January it launched an emergency appeal for just over \$300 million.

Grandi said the Israeli blockade of Gaza had caused an economic depression, noting that the economy there could no longer be sustained as it was in the past by a vibrant private sector that used to export into Israel and the West Bank.

The 2010 easing of the blockade had allowed the implementation of some of UNRWA's reconstruction projects. "Unfortunately since the middle of last year no more projects of UNRWA have been approved for implementation," Grandi said.

"We hope, and we have said this many times to our Israeli interlocutors, that situation of no approval will be soon be overcome and we will be able to again receive positive responses to our requests to build schools and build houses because these are the two key projects that need to be carried out in Gaza by UNRWA.

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### **EU and Arab League demand support for UNRWA's work engaging Palestine refugee youth in the Middle East(4)**

At a major international conference convened by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), there have been high-profile calls on the international community to support the UN agency that works for Palestine refugees.

At a two-day meeting in Brussels, Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, said, "We are gathered here because we have recognised the potential of the youth of Palestine. Against all the odds, they continue to learn, to work, to dream and aspire to a better future."

The conference in Brussels was attended by over 400 delegates who heard speeches on behalf of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas. The Belgian Foreign Minister, Didier Reynders, and his Jordanian counterpart, Nasser Judeh, also spoke. Ronan Farrow, the youth adviser of US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, also participated.

"Over the coming years," Ashton continued, "the EU will continue providing support to UNRWA's General Fund as the Agency makes progress in its reform process. We believe that UNRWA is essential to the development and well-being of all the Palestine refugees and we believe that it needs strong support, financial support from all the parties that are able to do that."

Echoing Ashton's call, Nabil El-Araby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, urged the international community to pay attention to the rapidly-shifting reality of Palestine refugees by investing in youth.

If current trends continue, there will be 1.5 million young Palestine refugees between the ages of 15 and 29 by 2020, about one-quarter of whom are likely to be unemployed.

"There is no doubt that we are at a critical juncture. The intersection of forces -- political uprisings, conflict, the rise of social media, the unprecedented numbers of young people, economic uncertainty -- have all created volatility, and at the same time, great potential," said UNRWA Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi.

"For refugee youth, the broader transformations amplify the profound stresses of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian situation, of the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, of rights often violated or not granted, of the vulnerability and anxiety generated by lives in exile in a region plagued by repeated conflicts, even as we speak. At the same time, young people across the region have proven that they are not ready to give up - that in spite of all odds -- they have hope.



## PRC Campaigns in Europe in World Refugee Day

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) successfully ended its campaign marking world refugee day, Wednesday 20 June.

In marking this annual event, PRC held a number of events across Europe, including London, Oslo and Geneva. The London event, in Westminster, was chaired by veteran Labour MP, Sir Gerald Kaufmann, who was joined by three other parliamentarians, Andrew Love, Andy Slaughter and Jeremy Corbyn.

PRC representative and chair of the PRC Board of Trustees, Muhamed Hamid, spoke on the theme of this year's refugee day, "refugees have no choice you do". He reminded everyone that "7 million Palestinians share their plight with 44 million displaced persons around the world and that the choices of Palestinians were taken away 64 years ago. They have been uprooted and forced into exile and denied the choice that is a right of all human beings, to return to their land and home".

PRC Senior Researcher, Nasim Ahmed, visited Oslo to speak at an event organized in conjunction with The Norwegian Center against racism.

The Centre is spearheading the plight of Palestinian asylum seekers in Norway, who have been in limbo for two years. Mr Ahmed visited "The Palestine Camp", a temporary hut that used to be a tent previously in the Middle of a Park in Oslo.

He spoke to a number of its residents who described their mistreatment at the hands of Norwegian authorities, who have not giving them the protection recommended by UNHCR. Their desperate situation has even lead three of its residents to go on hunger strike.

Mr Ahmed described how, "The Palestinians are feeling the blunt end of a fresh wave of anti immigration, populist right wing policy sweeping through much of Europe. They fled persecution, threats and intimidation from settlers, Israeli air raids which destroyed their homes and a bleak future under occupation".

In his talk, at the Norwegian Centre Against Racism, he described the unique case of Palestinian refugees and the consequences of bypassing and ignoring the majority of the Palestinian population who are refugees.

"When it comes to Palestinians, it is expected that the vast majority of the Palestinian people can be ignored, marginalized even silenced in pursuing a political solution. However, can one imagine the same, where the vast majority of Israelis are ignored in the pursuit of peace? The Israeli government cant event ignore its settler community in pursuing peace. How than is it expected that the majority of Palestinians, 7 million out of a global population of 11 million, can be ignored. How can their primary concern be trampled over and expect to see peace"

Mr Muhammed Ethman, an activist from Palestine described in great detail why Palestinians continue to flee Palestine. "The occupation and a general state of hopelessness have gripped Palestinian youths. The apartheid conditions under which they live has forced them out" he said.

PRC delegates also spoke at a meeting at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. A number of international NGOs participated at the event which focused on the Palestinian refugees especially those in Iraq.

The meeting was chaired by American Human Rights acvitst Carin Parker where head of Media Department at PRC, Sameh Habeeb, spoke in details about the general conditions of Palestinian refugees particularly those in Lebanon.

Habeeb called on the participating NGOs to exert more pressures on the International community to force Israel achieve its obligations concerning refugees and UN resolutions in relation.

### The Forgotten Palestinians – Book Review\*

By Khalil Nakhleh

This is an important book about the nearly 1.4 million “forgotten Palestinians” who are the remnants of the indigenous Palestinians who lived in the land of Palestine until it was decimated by the Zionist settler-colonial onslaught in 1947/1948, and who continue to live today within the artificially-created Jewish-Zionist state of Israel.

#### The Book and the Author

Ilan writes as an astute and knowledgeable observer, and as a sympathetic occasional participant in some of the developments he narrates. His narrative of the evolving Palestinian identity in Israel over the past sixty some years, emerges considerate, sensitive, honest, and anti-Zionist, written in total solidarity with Palestinian dilemmas, and with deep understanding of these dilemmas. Furthermore, it is a gentle narrative reflecting, in my view, Ilan’s personality, as I know it.

He focuses not only on official policies, but on the complexity of the daily life of the Palestinians, and how they struggle and manage to live it, in a hegemonic Jewish Zionist state that insists with recurring persistence on not seeing them. By its nature, Ilan states, “this book aims to present a people’s history as far as possible and therefore the magnifying glass is cast more on the Palestinians than on those who formulated and executed the policies towards them” (p.13).

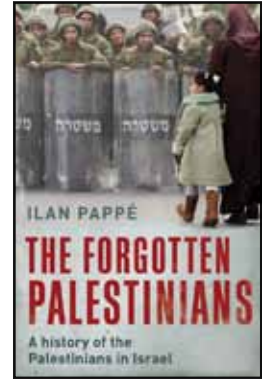
The book is a painful narrative of the evolution of my people’s persistent dispossession and unrelenting attempts at their exclusion and elimination. And how they learned to survive under an oppressive system of control that always maneuvered to expel them from their homeland, or, temporarily, forcing them to co-exist as unequal under its hegemony.

#### The Oslo Accords and Their Impact

Ilan described correctly the impact of the Oslo Accords on the Palestinian minority in Israel in the following words:

“What emerged was not that the community was unique in comparison to other Palestinian groups but rather that it had a unique problem. Zionism was the exceptional factor, not being a Palestinian in Palestine, or what used to be Palestine. The strong affirmation of the connection to the country and not to the state was the end product of a long internal Palestinian analysis of the predicament, crisis and nature of the community, which was followed by a prognosis and a kind of action plan for how to deal with the crisis being a national indigenous minority within the Jewish state. ... [T]he community went from a very hopeful and assertive period, 1995 to 2000, into a very precarious and dangerous existential period after 2000 and until today ... (pp.195-196; emphasis added).”

I assert, however, that the concerns of the “forgotten Palestinians” in terms of the “predicament” and the identity of the community, as “a national indigenous minority within the Jewish state”, started being



\* This is an abridged version. The full version is available here [http://palestinechronicle.com/view\\_article\\_details.php?id=17078](http://palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=17078)



driven home with the events culminating in the eruption of “Land Day” in 1976. Clearly, those concerns were not formulated with the same clarity then, as it became post the “2000 earthquake” (P.229 ff). Nevertheless, although the book presents a fairly detailed discussion of the circumstances leading to “Land Day”, the connection was not made as strongly, or as organically, as it should have been made with what has been termed “hubbet October” in 2000, and all the evolving events following that. I would have liked to see a deeper analysis about this connection.

If my claim is valid, and since I can say with certainty that Ilan recognizes this connection between the mid-seventies and today, why then was more focus placed on the “2000 earthquake”? Largely, I believe, it’s an issue of the availability of public and academically credible analyses and articulation of these concerns and predicaments post 2000, which were made available in English and Hebrew, primarily. The emergence of a substantial group of political and educated elites among the Palestinians in Israel over the last thirty some years made this feasible.

Although I agree with the generalization that:

“The political and educated elites of the Palestinians in Israel lost all beliefs in ‘coexistence’, liberal Zionist discourse or a future of change within the present parameters of the Jewish state (p.240).”

I maintain that this was abundantly and inherently felt in the aftermath of the savage Zionist attack on the indigenous lands in Galilee by official “security” apparatuses of the Jewish state, twenty-five years earlier, although not publically articulated in academic language. It was very clear then that “[t]he police legitimized in its own eyes and in the eyes of the public the killing of demonstrators [Palestinian citizens] as part of its response” (p. 239). Furthermore, it was very obvious, then, “the full support the Israeli media gave the police and the lack of any sympathy or solidarity with the victims and their families” (p. 239).

It is extremely important to refocus our attention, strategically, to the core and important conclusions of the book. In the concluding chapter—the Epilogue, under the title “the Oppressive State”, Ilan stressed that:

1. [T]he worst aspect of the minority’s existence is that its daily and future fate is in the hands of the Israel secret-service apparatuses (P.265);
2. It seems that in the last few years ... the Jewish state has given up on the charade of democracy ... and ... has escalated its oppression of the minority in an unprecedented manner (P.266);
3. [W]e expect either escalating state violence against the Palestinians, wherever they are, or further oppressive legislation (P. 274; emphasis added);
4. [T]he history of this community, despite the endless Israeli efforts to fragment the Palestinian people and existence, was still an organic part of the history of the Palestinian people (P. 200; emphasis added).

My conclusion from the above is crystal clear: the lesson that we should learn is to actively resist all attempts by the enemies of the Palestinian people, including the current Palestinian ruling elite structure, to fragment the Palestinian people and existence, and to re-institute and revive our struggle for a FREE, JUST, EQUAL, and DEMOCRATIC Homeland.

- **Title:** Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel [Paperback]
- **Author:** Abeer Baker (Editor), Anat Matar (Editor)
- **Paperback:** 282 pages **ISBN-13:** 978-0745330204
- **Publisher:** Pluto Press (6 May 2011) **Price:** £ 18.99

# THE PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE KEEPING THE ISSUE ALIVE



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

## OUR GOALS

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

## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

### UN Accredited NGO

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

### supporting Palestinian refugees

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

### Putting Palestinian Refugees in the Political Agenda

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

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

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



## SERVING PALESTINIAN REFUGEES



## RAISING AWARENESS

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

### Conferences

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

### Publications:

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

### PRC Online

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

### Conference of Palestinians in Europe

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

### Advocacy and Public Relations

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

### Exhibitions:

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

### Delegations

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



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