

**The Impact of the Syrian
Revolution on Palestinian Refugees**
Tareq Hamoud

**Accounts of Palestinian Refugees
in Syria Following the Syrian
Uprising**
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Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon
and New Challenges Following
Syrian Uprising**
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**What Now for Norway's
Palestinian Refugees from Iraq**
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**Legalizing theft of Palestinian
resources**
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**The Future of Palestinian Refugees
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state of Palestine**
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**Meeting Palestinians Liberated Me:
My Journey Away from Christian
Zionism**
Linda Ramsden

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Designer: Omar Kachouch

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Majed Al Zeer

From the Director

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

It's not often you find detailed analysis of events faced by Palestinians shared directly by Palestinians. We are committed to bridge this gap by bringing views and opinions of Palestinians confronting the many challenges in their struggle for human rights and justice.

With the Middle East still going through a period of great uncertainty and turmoil, I am please that this edition will pay special attention to the plight of Palestinian refugees from Syria.

As with the Palestinians from Iraq, who also fled terrible violence and persecution, we are dedicated in supporting the Palestinians from Syria.

In our recent documentary, *Displaced in the Diaspora*, we put together a moving account of the plight of Palestinians from Iraq, which we've compiled through our close monitoring of their situation and working with various states and global institutions.

Like their Syrian brethren, Palestinians are also bravely enduring the terrible atrocities in the country. While we can only hope and pray that the unrest in Syria comes to a speedy end, we must make sure that crimes against humanity never escape our attention and, if not governments, than non-governmental organizations must bring whatever means is required, even if it's just shame, to lessen the repression.

We will be coordinating a number of events here in the UK and in Europe to support the work done in this journal in the coming months. We hope you will join our events and support our work.

While the Middle East is going through revolutionary flux, there is a constant in the treatment of Palestinians. The Syrian unrest is contrasted by the constant of Israeli occupation and the Ongoing Nakba.

In addition to offering our readers with ongoing accounts of the Nakba, including exile, expulsion and land theft, I am delighted that this edition also marks the start of a review of the Oslo agreement.

2013 marks 20 years of Oslo and PRC will lead the way in providing a detailed review of Oslo, including a two day conference in London in September.

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

Our latest documentary is appropriately titled *Displaced in the Diaspora*, which perfectly illustrates the precarious existence of Palestinian refugees.

Though its main focus is the plight of Palestinian who fled the terrible violence after the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, it reflects a universal truth about Palestinian refugees.

Since their Nakba in 1948, when half the Palestinian population fled violence or were forcefully evicted, millions of Palestinians have found themselves in a cycle of ongoing violence and exile.

The unrest in Syria is another illustration of the tragic fate of Palestinians, and the challenges they are confronted with in the diasporas.

Palestinians in Syria fared relatively better, socially, economically and politically than fellow Palestinians in the region. Although they were never given full citizenship, access to education, health and various other social provisions were not blocked. In fact, politically, Palestinians even occupied high political positions.

It is however one of the sordid aspect of Middle Eastern politics that the plight of Palestinians is recurringly used as a political football; to be utilized to garner public support or to deflect political pressure.

As the Syrian crises began to unfold, the Assad regime, which ostensibly supported the Palestinian cause, and made terrific leaps to prove to the world that it is fighting global hegemony and resisting Israeli occupation, its first survival instinct was to blame the Palestinian refugees, as the foreign element that was instigating political unrest.

Palestinians, in the early phase of the uprising faced a unique threat to their position in Syria, as life around them started to become increasingly precarious.

With events unfolding uncontrollable and the regimes brutal suppression of demonstrators, its feeble claims to any legitimacy was washed away.

The early accounts of this development, which has become a minor subplot in the civil war in Syria, is recounted in great detail by Tariq Hamoud, Coordinator of the Action Group of Palestinians in Syria.

As his article highlights, the evolution of Palestinian position vis a vis the Syrian regime as well the different political considerations by the Palestinian factions clearly demonstrates the precarious relationship of Palestinians in the diaspora and the host state.

The focus on Syria is supported by other articles relating somber accounts of Palestinian families as well as the pressures felt by neighboring Lebanon in trying to accommodate the flow of Palestinian refugees into the country.

In not so dissimilar to the discrimination experienced by Palestinians fleeing Syria into neighboring countries, as highlighted by Tariq , Dana Mahmoud, a Human Rights activist in Norway provides another glimpse of problems of being displaced in the diaspora, with her look at the immigration policy in Norway that is causing much grief to the Palestinians who fled Iraq.

An abiding feature between the occupier and the occupied is the sporadic, intermittent violence of the occupied and the constant violence of the occupier. Shamefully, this fact is lost in mainstream reporting, which fails to highlight the shadow of constant and routine violence faced by Palestinians. We are given a window into this by Akram Natsheh, a journalist from Hebron, who discusses the small Nakba that's undergoing in Hebron.

Charlotte Silver also provides a detailed look at the theft of resource from Palestine by Israel to, again, demonstrate the routinization of theft and violence in Palestine.

This edition marks the start of a year of intense examination of the Oslo accords whose 20th anniversary will be marked in 2013. Renowned Palestinian scholar Dr Muhsin Saleh is joined by other fellow Palestinians who present strong opinions about Oslo which will be fleshed out over the course of 2013.





Tareq
Hamoud*

The Impact of the Syrian Revolution on Palestinian Refugees

The civil war in Syria shows no sign of abating. Amidst the tragic death and destruction is the story of Palestinian Refugees in Syria struggling with the Syrian people to free their country from repression and injustice. Theirs is a unique story because, as refugees, they are on the one hand host of the regime, which has shown good faith towards the Palestinians, and on the other, they are part of Syrian society and live with the Syrian people, which cause conflicting loyalties.

This article describes how Palestinians have navigated through this complex situation and have emerged as loyal supporters of the Syrian people. It provides a breakdown of the Palestinian composition in Syria; their history and their political position and describes the considerations of the different Palestinian factions during the Syrian uprising. The plight of Palestinian refugees in Syria, during the unfolding civil war, provides a clear glimpse of the many challenges faced by Palestinian refugees and it is hoped this article will help bring this to our attention.

Much of the findings are based on field surveys and personal examinations by me. In addition, news reports about the conditions of Palestinian refugees in the Syrian camps are included as a primary source of information. However a conscious effort was made to filter out information that has inundated news channels and social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, primarily because the Syria regime used the same channels of information for the porpoise of propaganda.

The numbers and statistics of Palestinian casualties in this report are based on the most recent published data. This article tries to give an overall analysis of the unfolding events and does not focus on any single event in detail. We focused on the most significant events within the Syrian uprising in Daraa, Latakia, Al Yarmouk Camp and Damascus; all of which are considered as key areas in sketching the conditions of Palestinians in Syria. It also briefly looks at the other small camps inhabited by Palestinian refugees.

* Tarek Homoud is a Palestinian activist and journalist born in Syria, Diraa City in 1981. He is member of Palestinian Writers and Journalists Union. Homoud is also an expert in the issue of Palestinian refugees particularly in Syria. He has published a number of studies, researches articles in different media outlets. At the moment, he is the coordinator of Action Group for Palestinians of Syria.

Historical Background

The Syrian-Palestinian relation, in comparison to others, is quite exceptional. The relationship between the two peoples is inextricably linked historically, socially, economically and of course geographically. Historically, due to geographical proximity, they shared many similarities culturally. This proximity encouraged families from the two countries to intermarry and live between the two countries. Following the Sykes-Picot agreement in the early 20th C families were divided across borders. However, traditions, and social values between north of Palestine and South of Syria remained similar. Such similarities, naturally, lead many Palestinian refugees in 1948 from the north of Palestine to move to Syria and Lebanon. Around 55% of the current Palestinian refugees in Syria came from Safad city and its surrounding areas, while 27% of the refugees descend from Tabariya and its neighboring areas(1) .

Following their expulsion, Palestinian refugees in Syria, were distributed into different locations in the first Five years of their exile. Bedouin tribes that arrived from the plains of Tabariya, Safad and Al Nazareth lived in the Golan Heights, which contained vast pastures and was suitable for Bedouin life style of livestock herding.

As for Damascus and its countryside it was a safe haven for Palestinian refugees who came from Safd, particularly for those who had industrial training, craftsmanship and earned their living through trade. In the north of Syria, the coastal city on the Mediterranean, Latakia, was a refuge for the people of Haifa and Tantura cities, whose lifestyle was based around fishing.

Homs and Aleppo refugee camps were established without any specific socio economic background in mind. They were populated by Palestinian refugees who fled to Lebanon and where taken by force in trains and displaced to northern parts (Homs and Aleppo) of Syria. It is possible that the mechanism of transferring those refugees in this manner was linked to resettlement plans made by successive military governments in Syria in return for political support for these regimes.(2)

Groups of Palestinian Refugees in Syria(3)

Palestinian Refugees in Syria are distributed into Thirteen separate camps. They are located in the northern and south western parts of the country in Aleppo, Damascus and Daraa. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) recognize ten camps(4) while the other four camps are recognized by Syrian government. UNRWA doesn't recognize these camps as they were established without its consent(5) and supervision(6) . There are a number of Palestinian residential compounds, not classified as camps, estimated at Twenty, located mostly in Damascus and its countryside.

Palestinian Refugees in Syria are classified into many categories that are based around legal factors, history and economic conditions. The five groups are as follows:

1- The 1948:

This category represents the vast majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria comprising of 85 % of the refugees. It enjoys good legal conditions as it falls under law number 260 issued in 1956 which equates them with the Syrian citizens in terms of rights and duties, except running for elections or voting(7). Males in this category aged 19 or over were obliged to carry out mandatory military service for a year and a half(8) . A decade earlier this was two and a half years. The law gives opportunity for this group of refugees to employment and access to all public sector jobs, even at high management positions.

2- The 1956:

The populations of this category are residents of Akrad Al Baqara and Al Ghanama towns who were expelled in 1956 towards Syria. They were estimated to be around 2000, documented by General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GCPAR)(9) . This category enjoys the same rights as the first category, apart from compulsory military service. They are also not allowed to work in the public sectors unless they have short-term contracts.

3- The 1967:

This category arrived in Syria following the 1967 war with Israel. Most of them came from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They hold Egyptian and Jordanian travel documents and are treated as foreigners before Syrian law.(10)

4- The 1970-1971:

This category has a very complicated situation as they don't have any legal ID documents. They migrated to Syria following the incidents of Black September in 1970-1971, between the Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Most of them hold expired Jordanian passports as they were not able to renew them due to security reasons. This category receives educational and basic health services from UNRWA. Yet, they face a lot of difficulties in the labor market as a result of their legal conditions. They also can't travel out of Syria.

5- The 2006

Include those who were forced to leave Iraq following the 2003 War. The Syrian government allowed waves of Palestinian refugees from Iraq to come to Syria in 2006. Some entered legally and others illegally. Their numbers are estimated at 4000 to 5000, who are registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This category suffers from a very complicated legal and security conditions. They don't have the basic civil rights and they are similar to the 1970 category in terms of legal status.

Numbers and Statistics

Official numbers and statistics of Palestinian refugees in Syria issued by UNRWA and the General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GCPAR)(11) , are considered as a representative of their minimum numbers. Bearing in mind that UNRAWA statistics are different to those issued by GCPAR. There are some refugees who are registered at the GCPAR but not the UNRWA due to the fact that UNRWA had its own terms and definition(12) . GCPAR is an official governmental body that is responsible for documenting Palestinian Refugees on the land of the Arab Syrian Republic. It adopts a similar mechanism to that of UNRWA but with fewer restrictions. GCPAR included records of the refugees who came from Akrad Al Baqara and Al Ghanma in 1956. It also included individual refugee families from the year 1967. Furthermore, it works with those who held valid or expired Jordanian passports in accordance with the Syrian law towards Arab refugees. This was the same with those who held Egyptian travel documents.

The most recent statistics released by UNRWA early in 2012, showed that Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA totaled at 487,000(13). Meanwhile, the statistics of GCPAR records showed that there are 494,819 refugees registered at 18th August 2012(14). It is estimated that from the number of Palestinian refugees who came to Syria in 1948, numbering around 90,000, 75%(15) of them are residing in Damascus and its countryside. Meanwhile the rest of the refugees are distributed in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Daraa and Latakia. Around half of the refugees live in the major refugee camps, while the rest are distributed in the Syrian residential neighborhoods and other cities.

Relatively, Palestinian refugees in Syria enjoy the most preferable legal status compared to their Palestinian refugee counterparts in other places. This is reflected in the fact that great numbers of Palestinian refugees live in Syrian neighborhoods where they share common values and traditions with the local inhabitants. It became very hard to differentiate Palestinian neighborhoods from the Syrians due to the social relations and the integrations between them over the past 60 years.

The services provided to Palestinian refugees in the camps made it hard to differentiate them from other homes in the neighborhood. The camps are in better conditions compared to other Palestinian refugee camps in other Arab countries. However, these camps are still overpopulated and Syrians were also amongst its dwellings. It was noticeable from the recent statistics that the number of Palestinian professionals who worked in the different sectors in Syria had increased. In 2005, the number of Palestinian academics in Damascus University reached 100, some of them professors or lecturers (16) and many Palestinians occupied high ranking posts(17) in the state. The trade, economic and industrial contribution of Palestinian refugees in Syria is strongly present within the Syrian market.(18)

Palestinian Refugees in Light of Syrian Revolution

1- What is the revolution

Before featuring in details the state of Palestinian refugees in Syria, we ought to briefly highlight the Syrian civil war. This will support our understanding of the conditions of Palestinian refugees and their position regarding the future of the country.

Arab revolutions began in Tunisia, extended to Libya and Yemen. The common element in all these uprisings, as agreed by observers, is the internal social conditions. Meanwhile, external elements like the extent of the support of these countries to Arabic causes were a contributing element. This was clear in the chanting and slogans expressed by protestors within these revolutions. It was apparent; the Palestinian cause was not a fundamental theme for Arab protestors as their main concern was local and social concerns. It is instructive, that, some of these repressive regimes shaped its internal policies under the pretext of protecting national security and the central cause of the Arab nation, which is Palestine. Such attitude was more of a slogan for the people but things started to change with the rise of communication and social media, where the new generations were able to distinguish between slogans and the real policies of the regimes.

In Syria, Daraa city was the stronghold of the revolution. A number of children were arrested and brutally tortured for writing juvenile slogans on their school walls. The over reaction from the government towards those children was a provocation for the tribal community of Daraa, which later poured on to street. The conduct of the government against what happened in Daraa aggravated other social classes across the Syrian society from the north to the south where a popular demonstration started to appear. The uprising of the people was the consequence of repressive, internal conditions over the past Four decades.

To conclude, the Syrian revolution is a social and local uprising that was triggered due to domestic causes only. Political and external elements, like the strong relation between the regime and the Palestinian cause, has delayed the uprising in Syria. The curtailing of freedoms and political repression within Syria is more than other Arab countries. Syria can be considered as the most repressive regime of all. Syrian regime has miserably failed to capitalize from its political and national accomplishments (in terms of supporting Palestine) in dealing with the street uprising within the country. State security services and apparatuses were unsuccessful in solving the crisis peacefully, before it snowballed into a civil war. For example the demands of Daraa people which were sent to Syrian president, Bashar Al Assad, were simple and could have been granted.(19)

2- Palestinian involvement in Syrian Revolution

- Daraa City

Syrian revolution was triggered on the 18th of March 2011, through a protest in Al Imari mosque, after Friday prayers to condemn the arrest of 11 children from Daraa town. Worshipers in the mosque included a number of Palestinians, as Palestinians live close to the areas so they often come to the mosque. As events unfolded, security forces responded to the protests brutally which left many dead and wounded. Protests then spread and thousands of protesters burned Syrian security premises on Monday the 21st of March 2011. One official building, Al Qasr Al Adli (Justice Palace)(20) which is 200 meters away from Palestinian refugee camp of Daraa was burned. Therefore, security forces authorized to eliminate protests in the area and accused Palestinians in the camps of participating in the events that erupted on Monday. This was confirmed later in a news report published in Al Watn Newspaper(21), which is close to the Syrian regime. It had published a detailed report on Daraa events which accused Palestinians of causing what it described as a riot. It claimed Syrian people; residents of Daraa who participated in the protests were a few(22). The paper also stated that meetings between Syrian security services and Palestinian leaders from the different factions met with Hisham Bakhtyar,(23) Head of the Syrian National Security Office, who rebuked and held them responsible(24). Despite these accusations, the paper failed to present any name of those accused of igniting the protest. On that day, the number of Syrian protesters exceeded 15 thousand(25) whereas the total number of Palestinian refugees in Daraa camp doesn't reach 10 thousands including women, children and old people.(26)

The accusation that Palestinian refugees(27) were behind these events raised alarms for Palestinians. They realized they were the most vulnerable group and open to abuse. The state security services wanted the Palestinians to be the scapegoat for the crisis. Desperate attempts were made to place the blame on Palestinian refugees for the Daraa protests, but the cycle of protests had spread after few days. The new spot was Al Raml neighborhood in the southern part of Latakia city. Unluckily, this area was adjacent to Al Raml refugee camp, populated by Palestinian refugees. Protestors attacked a number of official buildings.

Accusing Palestinians became a routine. In a press conference on the 26th of March 2011, Bothaina Shaban, Media and Political consultant for President Bashar al Assad held Palestinian groups in Al Raml refugee camp responsible for the commercial buildings' sabotage. She also accused them of initiating what she described as "conspiracy project". This was the first statement from a high ranking Syrian official, which came early, and indicated clearly that Palestinians are behind the protests.

The claim that Palestinian refugees in Daraa were behind the protests quickly vanished as protests

swept across other Syrian cities and villages not inhabited by Palestinians. This was the main episode regarding the involvement of Palestinians.

The other episode of Palestinians' involvement appeared when the Syrian army invaded Daraa governorate, end of April 2011, following a tight siege especially on Daraa town, which was the stronghold of the revolution. The siege affected all aspects of the town and caused food, drinking water and power shortages(28) . As a result, some Palestinian refugees volunteered for relief work from Daraa camp. They established a humanitarian passage to transfer food in addition to providing medical assistance to wounded Syrians. They also promptly established a modest field hospital inside the Daraa camp to save the wounded. A number of the volunteers became well known in the city like, Mousafa al Tafouri, who was executed at the hands of the Syrian army after he was arrested in Daraa town. Tafouri was killed due to his humanitarian role of smuggling food supplies into the besieged town to help people as well as helping other affected areas. The work of Daraa field hospital grew in becoming the biggest field hospital in Syria until it was destroyed on May 2012.

3- The Militarization of Daraa Refugee Camp

Armed groups were formed in Daraa camp amid great controversy between the rebels. There were two different views, the first group preferred launching attacks to defend and support the Syrian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who arrived from the Golan area, adjacent to the refugee camp. While the other group proposed to remain in the camps and carry out their humanitarian role only. But with the escalated military campaign by the regime against the camp; the first group became more prominent and a military group was formed. The military brigade formed, was named "Brigade of Martyr Tahir al Syasna" it was named after its first victim.

The camp was bombed for two and half months resulting in the fleeing of most of its residents. Later, in July 2012, it was stormed by the regime after the bombing, which nearly destroyed the entire camp.

The constant bombardment of the camp caused mass exodus and resulted in a huge humanitarian crisis on many levels. A number of Palestinian refugees were killed in the fighting which caused tension in the camp and pushed some Palestinian refugees, who were soldiers in the Palestine Liberation Army, to defect and join the Free Syria Army (FSA).(29)

1- Latakia

With the outbreak of protests and military confrontations in Daraa and Latakia cities, Palestinians were affected as they were officially accused of initiating these events. It led to confrontations in Al Sakntory locality, Al Raml neighborhood in the southern part of Latakia city. The regime then destroyed Al Raml refugee camp in August 2011 and carried out its largest military operation in Daraa against the camp. Syrian army sent warning to the residents of the camp to leave. Thousands of its inhabitants left immediately in different directions. The sport city in Latakia city opened its doors to the IDPs. The bombing that took place targeted the Syrian neighborhood and not as what was described officially which was that the Syrian' armed boats shelled Palestinian camp. Only small parts of the camps were shelled when fighters entered it. This resulted in three persons being killed in the camp. The destruction was limited and some houses were exposed to live bullets.(30)



2- Al Yarmouk Camp and Damascus Explosion

On the morning of the 11th of July 2012, people in the camps woke up to the shocking news that 16 recruits of the PLA were kidnapped on their way home from their training centre, where they were in a compulsory military service. Their corpses were found weeks after their kidnapping. The perpetrators of the crime are still unknown. Both sides have accused the other for the incident(31) .

On the 14th of July 2012, protests from the mosques in Al Yarmouk camp took to the streets after Friday prayer, in condemnation of the massacre that targeted Aleppo. All the protests came to an end peacefully except one in Palestine Street. Syrian army opened fire against protestors leaving Four Palestinians dead; this caused some opposition fighters to intervene resulting in confrontations that lasted a day. The number of casualties increased and the Al Yarmouk camp became the centre of events. Armed clashes spread to other quarters and Palestinian refugee camps like Al Hajir Al Aswad, Al Tadmon, and during the following day in Al Qadm. This expanding scale of the conflict displaced many Syrian families living close to the camp, where they took refuge in al Yarmouk camp.

Al Yarmouk camp has continued giving humanitarian support to thousands of Syrian families who took refuge and protection inside the camp. The camp is providing financial support to residents who were killed, wounded or arrested. The number of those killed from the refugees in the camp is 140(32) , three quarters were in the last three months. The camp is exposed to snipers that target its main roads and junctions that lead to Syrian quarters like Al Hajir Al Aswad, Al Tadmon, Yald and Bibela.

Palestinian Political Stance on Syria Crisis

1- Stages of Palestinian Positions

The political stance of Palestinians falls into three stages:

- Stage 1

The first stage was total “silence” that lasted for two weeks from the beginning of the revolution in March 2011, until Hamas movement issued its first press release on the 2nd of April 2012. All other factions within the PLO(33) and allies’ factions(34) remained silent.

- Stage 2

The second stage is best described as a “neutral stage”. It extended from the end of the first stage until Hamas left Syria. Press statements of Palestinian factions(35) sounded neutral. However, individual press statements of some factions adopted the point of view of the regime, especially Popular Front to Liberate (PFLP) Palestine –General Command(36) . Also, an official from Popular Front to Liberate Palestine (PFLP) in Diaspora, Maher Al Tahir, made statements on the Syrian TV in which he supported the position of the regime.

During this stage, one could make a distinction between the different Palestinian factions. The official press statements of the factions seemed to be very neutral especially the factions affiliated with the PLO in Syria. This is due to the fact that these factions are loyal to the regime and have strong ties with it. They also share similar views with the regime with regards to the peace process between Palestine and Israel.

The factions that were loyal to the regime adopted a position closer to the regime. This was very clear in their statement when the Syrian army bombarded Latakia in August 2011. They condemned a press release issued by UNRWA who expressed its concern that some Palestinian refugees were killed or wounded in Latakia due to a military operation.

- Stage 3:

This is where the positions of the different factions became clearer. The Islamic movement (Hamas) which is the biggest in Syria pulled out of the country and refused to cooperate with the regime. Their withdrawal from Syria meant, pushing away the political cover the regime enjoyed as defenders of Palestinian goals. This step by Hamas was a turning point and divided the allies' factions. As Hamas left Syria, which was neutral, the leadership of the coalition factions was dominated by Popular Front to Liberate Palestine – General Command along with Al Saiqa (Thunderbolt) faction.

The PLO in Syria remained neutral, although some of their officials criticized the regime. Their neutrality is mainly because the PLO and the Syrian regime do not have good relations. Following the attacks on Daraa, PFLP Command formed security committees. These groups were formed despite the refusal of most of the coalition.(37)

Meetings of the groups continued with attendance of all members and factions of the PLO. The only absentee was Hamas(38) . Hamas was also absent from the meeting when the security committees were formed.

Generally, the political position that was adopted by Palestinian was to remain neutral, recognizing the rights of Syrians to shape their political future. This was clear in the press statements issued by most of them. The position of Palestinians was, was however, controversial for some of the revolutionary groups who's short term goals were very different to the Palestinian position. They refused any political position that did not clearly and loudly adopt their point of view.

2- Palestinian Divisions over the Syrian Revolution

The Palestinian political position is not limited to Palestinian factions only. There has been an increasing disconnection between Palestinian factions and their popular base, the Palestinian mainstream in the camps. This was very clear in the funeral of those who were killed in the Naksa day in 6th of June 2011(39) by Israeli army. During that funeral, Palestinians chanted against Palestinian factions and the Syrian regime held them responsible for the massacre carried out by Israel on the Naksa day. Mourners in the funeral besieged Al Khalisa compound where head of PFLP – General Command and Dr. Talal Naji was inside(40) . The building was burned and 5 people were killed including two bodyguards affiliated to the PFLP – General Command. One of them is Abu Al Abd Nasir(41) head of Syria branch. Those in the building including the officials of PFLP – General Command were rescued from imminent death by Syrian security.

This incident created a tense atmosphere in Al Yarmouk refugee camp, (the capital of the Palestinian Diaspora) between the two parties. The first (popular masses in the camp) supported the Syrian revolution but its support was only notional. Meanwhile, the second party supported the Assad regime and is represented by PFLP – General Command. It was apparent that some independent groups in the camp started thinking about forming divisions to help the Syrian revolution.



The presence of Fatah in Syria is very weak. This is due to a historical rivalry between the Syria President, Hafiz al Assad and Yasser Arafat which emerged during the civil war in Lebanon. This rivalry caused Fatah to adopt a neutral position. The movement participated in all events organized by the PLO factions in Syria. It is also worth stating that Fatah took their own independent neutral position and did not support the regime due to the sensitivity of Palestinian presence in Syria, as well as the Palestinian internal dispute. In general, Fatah was not excited about the Syrian revolution as it was with other Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Therefore, press statements issued by Fatah, especially those coming from its offices in Syria were neutral.

Hamas' position was the most complicated, critical and controversial of all. This is due to the assistance provided by the movement by providing shelter to Hamas leaders. The regime facilitated the political and media work and perhaps the military work of Hamas movement. The relation between the two sides developed and reached a peak in the past few years before the revolution. But despite these facts, Hamas's position towards Syrian revolution moved from silence, to neutrality to public condemnation of the regimes practices, until finally, the movement decided to leave its Syria headquarters. On the 30th of September 2012, in Ankara, Khalid Mis'hal, head of Hamas Political Bureau, on board of the conference of Justice and Development Party, in Turkey, stated clearly that the political position of Hamas is to stand by the Syrian people. Observers considered this position as the straw that broke the camel's back between Hamas and the Syrian regime. Generally speaking, Hamas's neutrality concerning the Syrian revolution, for a considerably long time, contributed to the fact that other factions stood by the regime, especially those in the block headed by Hamas.

3 Palestinian Casualties

Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, Palestinians were killed along with Syrians. Until the 12th of October 2012, the number of documented Palestinian killed in the revolution is 511(42) . There are also many unknown numbers of undocumented victims due to security reasons concerning the safety of their families. Palestinian organizations have not documented the names of those killed and the figures used in this study are based on our own field reports. On the 23rd of March 2011, the first Palestinian was killed in Daraa while providing first aid to wounded Syrian in Daraa al Mahata town.

By looking at the general number of Palestinians killed, we notice the following:

- The number of documented Palestinians killed in the revolution is 511 which represent 1.38% of the total victims. This percentage exceeds the rate of Palestinian refugees in the camps which represents 1.2% of the total population.(43)
- The ratio of Palestinians across Syria in general is 2.1% out of the total Syrian population. There is also a similar ratio to the number of Palestinian victims compared to the Syrians.
- More than three-quarters of Palestinian were killed during the last five months, compared with 60% of the Syrian victims in the same period.
- Palestinian victims were targeted mostly in Damascus and its countryside where 75% of Palestinian refugees are based. The rest was in the Daraa region.

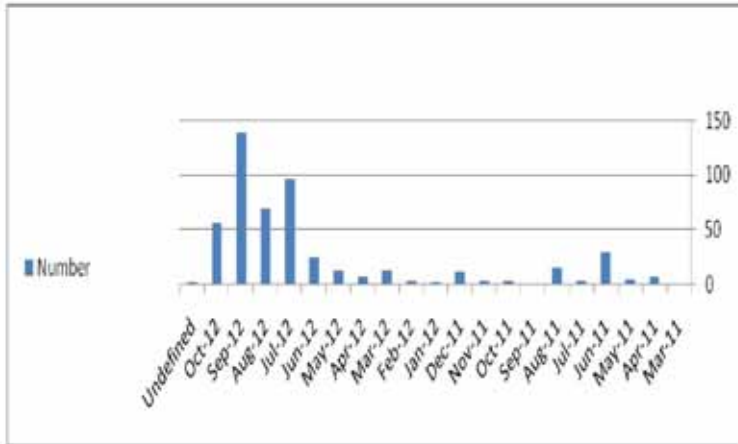
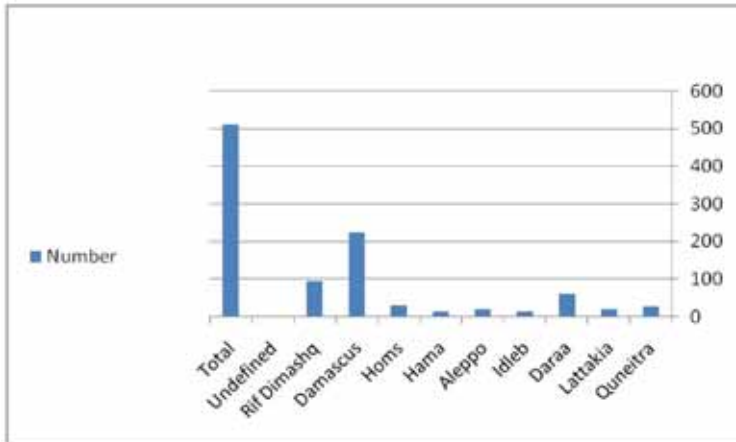


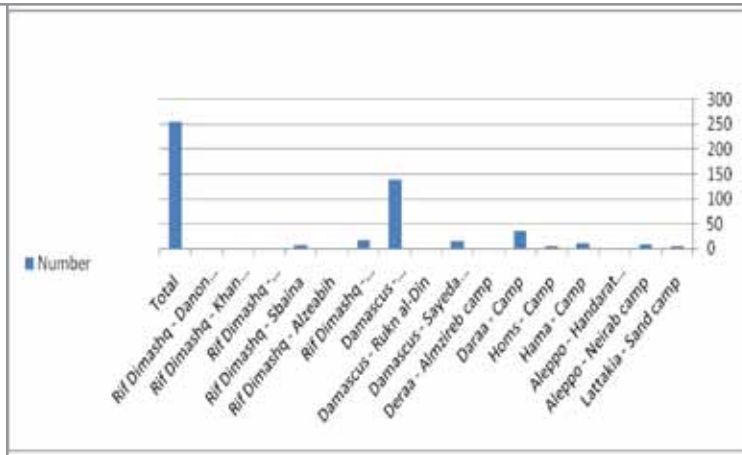
Chart of the number of Palestinian victims for each month

- Al Yarmouk Camp which is a home to more than a quarter of the Palestinian refugees recorded the highest number of Palestinian victims.

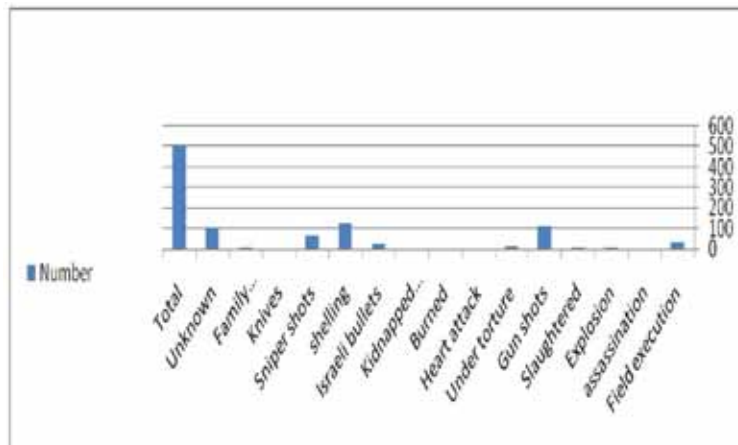


A chart explains the distribution of Palestinian victims across Syrian cities

- Most of the victims were killed by bombings and not from direct bullets during protests, crossfire, or killed by snipers.



A chart shows the distribution of Palestinian victims across Palestinian refugee camps in Syria



A chart showing the mechanism killing which claimed the lives of Palestinian refugees' victims

The ratio of Palestinian deaths in the revolution reflects the following:

- The number of Palestinians killed as a proportion is similar to that of the Syrians.
- The ratio of Palestinian refugee victims ended the controversy over Palestinian position with regards to the regime. The dead Palestinians spoke louder about their position all the than political statements.
- The ratio of victims reflected the social cohesion between Palestinians and Syrians where they lived together for over 6 decades.
- The parentage of Palestinian victims is the highest amongst minorities in Syria.

4. Palestinian Refugees in Diaspora Again

A- Palestinian Refugees in Syria flee to Jordan

In the early days of the revolution, a number of Palestinian refugees with other Syrian refugees fled Daraa city towards Jordan. However, Palestinian refugees needed a visa to enter Jordan; some were forced to enter Jordan illegally.

As the crisis in Daraa and the rest of Syria escalated, thousands more Palestinians and Syrians, fled to Jordan. Palestinian families were separated from their Syrian brethren, once they arrived in Jordanian territories, and special rules were applied against them. For example they were deprived of sponsorship (a scheme that allows Jordanians to sponsor a family) scheme(44) . The scheme was allowed for Syrian families only. Such treatment caused Palestinians further suffering and they were threatened by the Jordanian government with refolement(45) (return to the country from which they fled). The government also proposed to transfer Palestinian refugee to the occupied Palestinian territories in case large numbers(46) came to Jordan. It even proposed to the Egyptians to transfer those refugees (who hold Egyptian Travel Documents) to Gaza strip via Egypt. However, their proposal was refused by Egyptians.(47)

Despite the calls of International Humanitarian organizations to give Palestinian refugees their rights in accordance with International law, the Jordanian interior ministry refused to change their policy towards the Palestinians.(48)

B- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Lebanon

Hundreds of Palestinian refugees escaped to Lebanon through al Masna' border crossing, between Syria and Lebanon. They settled in Palestinian refugee camps and were hosted by their friends and relatives. Some families rented temporary houses. By the 24th of September 2012(49) , the numbers of families which arrived in Lebanon reached 2,370. This was not the actual number as it only consists of those who came to the camp. But the fact is that there were other families that lived in Lebanese neighbourhoods. Unlike Turkey, the Jordanian and Lebanese government lacks a clear policy in tackling the influx, which made documentation difficult.

C- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Turkey

Ten Palestinian families fled to Turkey. Most of them arrived on August 2011 when Al raml refugee camp in Latakia was bombed. There were others who arrived in Turkey by air using official visas granted by Turkey. These families are not considered refugees. Palestinian refugees were also prevented from entering turkey unless they obtained visas unlike their Syrian counterparts. This reality encouraged illegal immigration and Palestinian refugees became a commodity. They paid large sums of money to enter Turkey, as much as 12.000 Euros(50) . In some cases the refugees pay with their lives on their journey(51)

D- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Gaza Strip

Dozens of Palestinian refugee families who hold Egyptian travel documents and Palestinian passport arrived in the Gaza Strip through Cairo airport(52) . These families were originally from the Gaza Strip and have been living in Syria for the past few years(53) . The total number of families who arrived in Gaza is 104.(54)

E- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to other places

Following the Syrian revolution, fleeing out of Syria became a major goal, regardless of where it would lead. They wanted to escape the killing and repression in any way possible. Unfortunately, for Palestinians leaving and entering another country, became considerably more difficult. Some families have managed to travel to Libya and other Scandinavian and European countries to seek asylum. There are no accurate numbers for those yet.

Conclusion

Palestinians in Syria experienced a favorable position compared to other Palestinian refugees. The Syrian regime even boosted its standing by displaying support to all the different Palestinian factions. Such a relation gave the regime legitimacy. The Syrian revolution was not opposing the regime for its foreign policy but due its domestic repression and injustice.

Right at the outset of the conflict, the Palestinians were pulled in different directions and as a consequence most wanted to remain neutral, hoping that it would quickly fizzle out. They shared common goals and objectives with both sides. From the foreign policy perspective, it is undeniable that the regime has supported the Palestinian cause and Palestinian rights. At the same time, it is very hard for Palestinians to deny the fact that Syrian people should have their rights, freedom and social justice.

However as the military repression escalated with growing number of fatalities, Palestinians were no longer able to remain neutral and had to take a position and deal with the consequences. Palestinians found themselves naturally supporting the Syrian people who have been hosting them since the Nakba. This decision proved fatal as Palestinians were killed and injured with their Syrian brethren. The leadership of some factions, like Hamas, given their support for the people, had to flee.

Palestinians also fled with Syrians into the neighboring countries, but they experienced different treatment by officials in the country of refuge. Jordan and Lebanon proved harder to enter and take refuge than other countries. Jordan used discriminatory laws and Lebanon, due to the general level of hardship and discrimination felt by Palestinians, they struggled to find security. Palestinians also fled to Turkey and as far away as Scandinavian countries to escape the violence unfolding in Syria.

Palestinians in Syria have joined the people of Syria in defending their freedom and dignity. Those that fled continue to face the precarious and uncertain future that all Palestinians experience as a people who are still struggling in their own pursuit for freedom and dignity.

References:

- 1- Palestinian refugees from the early begging were supporting the Syrian people through their political position and relief/aid tasks they carried out.
- 2- For more information look at Al Salm Al Dani, Ridwan Zyada, First Chapter
- 3- Cited from a module about Palestinian refugees in Syria, Palestine Academy for Refugee Studies, Tariq Homoud
- 4- UNRWA recognizes 9 Palestinian camps, it deals with Daraa and (Aideen and Tawri' camps) as one camp only. Daraa was established in 1950 while the second in 1967. Both of the camps are merged together in terms of buildings and can't be discriminated
- 5- Al Yarmouk camp is the biggest in the Palestinian Diaspora after Al Baq'a camp in Jordan then Al Raml camp in Latakia and then Handrat refugee camp in Aleppo.
- 6- There is no actual difference between recognized and unrecognized camps by UNRWA except in hygiene services. Unlike the unrecognized camps, UNRWA provides services in the recognized camps.
- 7- Law number 260 considered Palestinians living in Syria as Syrians in terms of work, employment and military service in the same time, they should keep their citizenship.
- 8- The compulsory Military service was performed by Palestinians within the Syrian Army until 1964. Then, the Palestinians started to do it within the Palestine Liberation Army. Syrian Army however, had the right to keep Palestinians within its divisions if they are suitable for them. The Palestine Liberation Army is subject to the laws and regulations which organize the work of the Syrian army. The branches of this army are attached to the by Syrian military according to geographical distribution.
- 9- General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees is the official body responsible for Palestinian refugees from the documentation and recording side. It is attached to Syrian Social Services and Labor Ministry. The commission supervises the managing the refugee camps in terms of services as well as overseeing the work of UNRWA
- 10- There are some individual cases that managed to obtain the merits of the second category after registering with General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees through personal relationships.
- 11- General Commission for Palestinian Arab was established In 1949 according to law 450 and was attached to Interior ministry then Social and Labor Affairs Ministry. Since 1963, it was run by a Palestinian nominated by Baath party leadership.
- 12- UNRWA's definition of Palestinian refugees "Those in Palestine refugees are people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.", source: www.unrwa.org
- 13- UNRWA's Official Website: <http://www.unrwa.org/atemplate.php?id=100>
- 14- General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees' Website: <http://www.gapar.net/ar/statistics.html>
- 15- Public Poll by PRC
- 16- Tarek Homoud (2005), Palestinian Competencies in Syria, Field Study, Palestinian Refugees Civil rights, Damascus
- 17- Major General, Mahmod Azam and General Hazem Al Khadra headed consecutively the leadership of the Syrian Air Force through the 1980es and 1990es.
- 18- Like the company of Awad Amora for Aluminum, Asia Clothing which are famous products in Syrian market.
- 19- Look at Al Watn Syrian Newspaper, issue 21st March 2011, Damascus
- 20- The camp is located 300 meters from Daraa down town
- 21- Al Watn Daily Newspaper is the only private newspaper in Syria funded by Rami Makhlif. Its positions close the



state funded newspaper while tackling mainstream issues.

- 22- Look at Al Watn Syrian Newspaper, issue 22nd March 2011, Damascus.
- 23- Hisham Bakhtyar, Head of the Syrian National Security Office, was killed later in a bombing that targeted Syrian security leadership.
- 24- From a witness statement of member of a Palestinian delegation that visited the Syrian security leadership.
- 25- Researcher Tarek Homoud witnessed the protestors who came from Al Bald and Mahta areas. They were mostly Syrians.
- 26- Look at UNRWA's website, Palestinian refugee numbers in Daraa camp, <http://www.unrwa.org/atemplate.php?id=405>
- 27- Syrian people know that local Syrian media can't broadcast any detailed report about the side which was behind the event unless the regime approves it.
- 28- Water supplies in Daraa town were cut by the regime though the source which is the water springs in Almazarib town, 11km far from Daraa. One third of Almazarib town's populations are Palestinians. The populations stormed into the Water station in the town, kicked regime forces and reopened Water supplies to Daraa.
- 29- Palestinian youths perform military service in Palestine Liberation Army, they did not participate in any field operation along with the regime.
- 30- Personal Investigation in the camp following bombing, August 2011, by researcher Tarek Homoud.
- 31- Leadership of Palestine Liberation Army as well as the regime accused armed gangs of carrying out the massacre, look at Gulf Newspaper, 12/07/2012, about the statement of leadership of Staff of the army. Also see the statements of Major General Tariq Al Khadra for Sana News Agency on the 13/07/2012. The opposition accused the regime of doing the massacre as the soldiers defected then arrested, look at Al Sharq Newspaper on 12/07/2012, also look at the Syrian National council statement on the incident, 12/07/2012.
- 32- Unpublished statistics prepared by the Action Group for Palestinians in Syria.
- 33- It includes Fatah, Popular Front, the Democratic Front, Al Nidal (Struggle) Front, Fida Movement, and Palestine Liberation Front and People party.
- 34- Islamic Movement of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front to Liberate Palestine –General Command, Al Nidal (Struggle), Al Saiqa (Thunderbolt), Fatah Al Intifada and the communist party.
- 35- Look at the condemnation statements of PLO's factions and the allies' factions within that period, especially the statements of Aleppo and Damascus bombings.
- 36- Look at the interviews of Anwar Raja, head of media department of the PFLP- General Command with Al Dunia TV and Syrian state TV published on YouTube.
- 37- From a speech for Ahmed Jibril, Forward Magazine, August 2012-11-10
- 38- This statement drew wide criticism from Palestinian factions which support the revolution despite the fact the language of the statement was moderate. Yet, it came at a time where Daraa and Al Yarmouk refugee camps were exposed to the heaviest bombing since the start of a revolution. Thus, Palestinian groups which support the revolution issued statements to condemn that statement.
- 39- 24 people were killed by the Israeli army on the border on that day.
- 40- Al Khalsa building is headquarter of PFLP – General Command in al Yarmouk camp.
- 41- Abu Al Abed Nasir was killed by knives as a group arrested him while he tried to calm them down. He was stabbed 50 times. One of the building's guards was killed by burning alive in his corner.
- 42- This includes the number of Palestinians killed on the borders in Golan Heights whose number is 27.

- 43- From the website of the Syrian Martyrs Database, . www.syriansshuhada.com, however the website did not document all names of Palestinian victims as it the database relied on information coming from groups out of the camps.
- 44- Jordanian Authorities created the Sponsor Scheme for Syrian refugees who came to the camps, northern of Jordan. It has allowed any Jordanian citizen to sponsor any Syrian family in return of a symbolic sum of money. The scheme allows them to move freely across the country. While on the other side, it deprived Palestinians from this scheme.
- 45- Look at Human Rights Watch about conditions of Palestinian Refugees who escaped from Syria To Jordan, 4/07/2012, www.hrw.org.ar
- 46- Donya Al Want News Website: Jordan vows to transfer Palestinian refugees if huge waves come, 23/09/2012, <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2012/09/23/318931.html>
- 47- Look at the United Press International, Amman: An Egyptian Diplomat state that transferring Palestinian refugee families from Jordan to Gaza needs profound security examination, <http://arabic.upi.com/News/2012/08/30/UPI-56051346325729>
- 48- Al Arab Al Youm, A decision circulation in the Jordanian Interior Ministry of preventing the sponsor scheme for Palestinian refugees, 25/07/2012.
- 49- Report of PLO Popular Committees which supervises the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, 24/09/2012
- 50- In three separate meetings with three Palestinians who fled Syria to Turkey waiting to be smuggled to Europe.
- 51- Al Arab Newspaper, Doha, 6/09/2012, <http://www.alarab.qa/mobile/details.php?issueld=1731&artid=206570>
- 52- Quds Press Agency, 23/07/2012, Al Khalej Newspaper, Shariqa, 24/07/2012
- 53- Al Khalej Newspaper, Supra Notes 1
- 54- UPI, Supra Notes





Ibrahim Al-Ali

Accounts of Palestinian Refugees in Syria Following the Syrian Uprising*

Yarmouk refugee camp is home to thousands of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Many of the Palestinian families who fled Palestine still hold keys to their homes, in the hope of returning one day.

After nearly seven decades of exile what now? What will happen next? Such questions are in the mind of the old lady, Om Asim. She fled her home in Palestine when she was only a 12 year old girl. Now again, during the summer of 2012 and in her old age, she was forced to flee violence and persecution in the city of Homs to the Yarmouk refugee camp, where she fled after being attacked by Syrian forces. Her house in Homs was destroyed and her keys of the old Palestinian house are lost.

Om Asim narrated her story, "I'm a Palestinian from Homs, we escaped during the middle of the night. I have lost everything; I lost my sons, I lost my husband and all my possessions. I'm a mother of Five children who have all disappeared now. I also have two daughters who fled with their children to Lebanon, their only hope of survival. I also have Eight grandchildren with whom I have not had any contact since I fled Homs. I don't know where they are. During our flight from Homs, my husband died of heart attack. I was unable to hospitalize him. He died in my hands. Now I am all alone in this world."

In another corner of the Yarmouk Camp, we met Sana, a teacher of Arabic language. She spoke about her flight with tears pouring down her eyes for the loss of her family and husband. "What is the wrong we've committed that we have to pay such a heavy price for this war? Our children became a target for the snipers, I lost everyone. My husband, father, brother were killed all at once in one day. Who will compensate me of this great loss? Will they give me money or house? No, I don't want anything. All I want is my family and husband. I need nothing but to join them!"

We hear similar stories as we tour the camp. We met another old woman called Haja Om Ihsan. Luckily she managed to escape with her life but her sister, who lives at Palestine refugee camp, escaped and took refuge at a nearby school. But later, she returned to her house and was shortly killed along her husband, sons. "I lost them all, I lost those 5 family members." Stated Om Ihsan

Om Salah is another Palestinian refugee who was totally broken. She lamented that she no longer tastes the happiness of this life. We are not happy

* This articles was originally published in Arabic in Al-Awda magazine year 6, edition 61.



even when we are giving birth to new babies. Those babies will be labeled as refugees from birth and their life will be full of problems. "What is their fault that they have to live as refugees?" she said. Om Salah told us how schools became hospitals in order to receive new born babies. "Today, there was an extremely strange incident. One baby was born at this school. His birth coincided with the destruction of his family home in one of the Syrian towns called Al Hajr al Aswad. It was extremely odd for us to hear that following the devastation the father named the child Musiba, which means disaster. This was ofcourse a terrible thing for the child so we protested vehemently until we convinced his dad to re-name him to Rida, which means content and satisfaction"

Stories continue...

Om Sobhi is another woman who tasted the bitterness of the war in Syria. The woman seemed to be exhausted and burning with extreme sadness across her face. When we spoke to her, she was barely able to speak. It was even harder to understand her words. As I assured her and gave her some support; she started to speak. Like many others in the camp, she fled her house along with her sons at midnight. She escaped taking nothing but the clothes she was wearing while her city, Al Hajr al Aswad, was being heavily shelled.

I listened to her intently, "We were terrified, and we hurried and escaped as death was chasing us from all sides. In fact, we didn't know if we were running towards death or escaping from it. Thankfully, we managed to escape and survive. Later, I wanted to bring essentials from my house but my son Nafiz, 17, persisted on going alone without me. I tried to prevent him but I failed.

Frantically I looked for him everywhere but did not find him. Later, my brother in law was visiting Palestine hospital and saw a mob gathering. He looked closer and was horrified after seeing Nafiz was killed. He was covered with blood. My brother in law phoned and told me about what he saw. I came to attend his burial. He was buried with a number of martyrs in a paupers grave. I said farewell to Nafiz and my heart was buried with him".

According to Nafi'z mother. A friend of her son who survived death came and narrated how Nafiz was killed. "A group of us friends, went to Al Hajr al Aswad area. All of the friend including Naifz entered the neighborhood then each went to their houses. Nafiz entered his house and found everything destroyed. He tried to take a few of his family's belongings and returned to the group. As we tried to leave, we faced heavy shooting. Nafiz was shot in the leg, as he tried to walk, he was shot in the back. He tried to walk again and then he was shot in the head".

We continue to listen to more stories within this school. It seems everyone has a story to tell, no matter the age or gender.

We met Hasan, a young boy who survived death in Alqadam area in Damascus. Bombing was very heavy in the area. Hasan's mother tried to protect him and his sister. As bombing and shooting intensified, the mother tried to find a safe haven for her kids. She covered her daughter and son with her body. She asked them if they are safe or not. The mother died as she tried to protect her children.





Mohammad Abu
Laila*

Provision of Education for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and New Challenges Following Syrian Uprising

For almost 64 years, since the Nakba, and according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) statistics released last year; Palestinian refugees' number in Lebanon is estimated at about 465,798. They are distributed in 12 camps recognized by the Lebanese government, in addition to 54 residential areas across Lebanon. This massive distribution created a problem for the UNRWA in terms of educational services. UNRWA was criticized over its performance within the education field of Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. Here is the question: What is the likelihood that UNRWA will improve its educational performance this year?, particularly given that the school year has just started in September 2012 and is not going to accommodate Palestinian refugees from Lebanon but also Palestinian refugees who fled Syria to Lebanon due to the ongoing crisis.

UNRWA's Educational Policy, statistics and Numbers 2000-2012

According to UNRWA's yearly statistics, the number of students in the year 2000 was 41,153 spread across 75 primary and secondary schools. In 2005, the number of students decreased to 39,290 while the number of schools increased to 87. As for the last and most recent UNRWA statistics released in January 2012, the number of students decreased to 32,213 and schools were estimated at 68. In a very simple comparison, one could deduce that there is an alarming decline in UNRWA's performance, and perhaps the key reason for this retreat is a school dropout for male and female students. In twelve years time, the number of students is expected to fall to only 8900, merely 28% of the total number of students.

Such a fact poses various questions for UNRWA with regards to its educational policies, the fate and future of those students.

UNRWA's Policies at Schools

There are a number of mistakes committed by UNRWA regarding the educational services provided. For example, some students are automatically pushed up to higher levels. This means hundreds of students are being transferred from one level/grade to another even though they

* Mohammad Abu Laila, freelance journalist.

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don't obtain the required success level. Another policy which contributes to the decline of educational services is UNRWA's issuance of a new law which prevents teachers from imposing strict discipline in class. The impact is that students are not afraid of misbehaving, being disruptive, and feel no need to complete their homework.

It is also important to take note of the fact that there is the lack of fund and budget deficit of UNRWA. This forces UNRWA to limit projects and change policies to the detriment of Palestinian refugees, for example, the Agency is no longer providing new school books and study materials but instead provides only used books. In addition, the number of teachers have decreased while schools also suffer dilapidation.

Challenges exacerbated...

Palestinian Refugees from Syria arrive to the camps in Lebanon

Since the beginning of Syrian crisis, Palestinian factions and Palestinian refugees in Syria took a neutral positions. However, things turned for the worse as the Palestinian refugees started to become targets of the Syrian regime. Up to 500 Palestinians were killed in Syria. This has caused a new refugee crisis as Palestinian refugees in Syria began to stream into Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, following the bombing of Yarmouk Refugee Camp and after the general Palestinian refugees in Syria became a target.

These attacks have created great challenges for the UNRWA as they struggle to accommodate great numbers of refugee students streaming in from Syria. Despite this, the Agency promised the Palestinian refugees arriving from Syria the best possible educational services to students. This challenge presents another question as to whether UNRWA is capable of meeting its expectations. Is it really prepared to accommodate hundreds of refugee students?

Added to this is the fact that the curriculum that was being taught to refugees in Syria is different. So, UNRWA has to bear in mind this issue and consider a solutions.

There is a saying associated with the pursuit of education and knowledge: "As much as you exert you will receive, and those who aim at the summit will remain sleepless at night" Such a saying will only apply for students who live in safety and happily within their homeland. But, Palestinian refugee students are not able to improve their lives and the lives of future Palestinians due to their forced exile.





Dana
Mahmoud*

What Now for Norway's Palestinian Refugees from Iraq*

Twenty-five Palestinian refugees who managed to escape persecution in Iraq and find their way to Norway are living in harsh conditions after their asylum applications were refused; some have deportation (“forced relocation”) orders pending. The Norwegian immigration service based its decision on a June 2012 report issued by its land information branch, stating that Iraq is now safe for their return. The report quoted Mohamed Abu Bakr, charged with managing the file of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, who said that “the living conditions for Palestinians in Iraq is now much better than it used to be back in 2003.” He added, “Palestinians today have the same citizenship rights as the Iraqis.”

However 2012 has witnessed a significant increase in violence against Iraq's Palestinians as political conflict intensified in the wake of the American retreat from Iraq in December 2011 and the rise of the Iraqi security state. Eighty-two attacks against Palestinians in Baghdad were documented during the first five months of 2012 alone -- a rate of four attacks a week. It is clear that the Palestinian minority that remains in Iraq continues to be exposed to physical threats and discrimination that is endangering their lives. These regular attacks on the ground occur in the absence of any official Iraqi action in response. But safety issues aside, could Iraq's Palestinians actually return to the country?

According to a report issued by the UNHCR advisor on Iraq, on July 26, 2006, about 226 Palestinians successfully escaped from the violent events in Iraq -- most of them women and children. They sought asylum in Syria, but were banned from entering and were forced to stay in a camp on the border. Iraqi security forces accused the Palestinians of being terrorists, warning them not to return to Iraq.

In 2011 a Norwegian land information office report quoted the former director of Baghdad's airport as saying that “Iraqi authorities refuse to receive Palestinians returning to Iraq whose asylum applications were refused abroad.” The Iraqi embassy in Stockholm, Sweden, confirmed in a telegram made available to Euro-Mid Observer that “Iraq's Palestinians who left for six months or more are not allowed to go back in.”

Thus, it is clear that the return of Palestinians to Iraq through legal means is not welcomed by Iraqi authorities.

* She is a Palestinian human right activist in Norway.

* This is an abridged version of an article that appeared in Euro-Mid Observer for Human Rights Report 2012

Reasons cited for deportation

According to testimonies given to Euro-Mid Observer, the technical reasons cited by Norwegian authorities for refusing asylum have included:

- Failure of the language test.
- A belief that Iraq is now safe, and that torture no longer occurs.
- A belief that some of the refugees who traveled to Norway via the UAE could find a home there.

It is difficult to find a judicial source for these judgments. In order to obtain the court's decision, the asylum seeker must sue the immigration service in a civil court and petition for the records to be opened to the public. This process is lengthy as well as expensive; filing suit in civil court costs the asylum seeker a fee that ranges between \$7,000-\$10,000. Yet, asylum seekers are typically unemployed, since they are not allowed to hold jobs once their applications are refused. Note as well that in 2004, Norway stopped issuing temporary work permits for those with expired documents.

The "UAE option"

Of the 25 Palestinian refugees with Iraqi travel documents who have sought asylum in Norway, three traveled via the United Arab Emirates. Thus, the Norwegian immigration service recommended that they return to the UAE. However, their Iraqi travel documents have expired and the UAE Ministry of Interior prohibits the entrance of any foreigner without a valid passport or alternative travel document that allows him or her to return to the country that issued it. Although the Palestinian embassy in Oslo could issue a Palestinian passport to these refugees, the document would not allow its holders to return to Palestine – and thus would not satisfy the UAE requirements. Before any deportation is ordered, Norwegian authorities must assure that the refugees will be accepted.

In a document dated May 23, 2012, UNHCR advised Palestinian refugees not to travel to the UAE unless they have the necessary travel documents.

The future of Iraq's Palestinians in Norway

When their asylum applications are refused, Palestinian refugees can continue to live in Norway as illegal immigrants. However, they live with the constant threat of deportation to a land that does not welcome them. Living conditions are difficult for illegal immigrants.

Health care

Routine medical care is not available to illegal immigrants. With the exception of a new health care clinic in Oslo that is sponsored by a mission church and the Red Cross organization and offers free care to this population, illegal immigrants must rely on health care workers who assist these patients on a charity basis.

Euro-Mid discovered that of the 25 Palestinian refugees from Iraq who are now living in Norway, 11 no longer seek help from the refugee reception centre because they are afraid they will be deported. This fear deprives them of what health care assistance that does exist.¹⁹



Residence

When it comes to housing, it is clear from the testimonies and interviews with NGOs that residential aid is lacking for this population. Most have to depend on their own meager resources. Since illegal immigrants are not allowed to work and earn an income, this is next to impossible. Most have to live with friends.

Illegal deportation across Europe

According to international and European law, Palestinians who hold Iraqi documents and who were forced by inhumane conditions and persecution to look for asylum may petition UNHCR for protection and assistance. The countries where they seek asylum must provide secure shelter, “regardless of the matter of their resettlement,” until their final status is determined.

Given the conditions in Iraq, the countries where Palestinian refugees seek asylum should consider their applications with sympathy. Article No. 33 of the UN agreement on refugees states that “it’s not allowed for any registered country to expel a refugee or deport him to a region where his life or freedom is threatened because of his race, religion, nationality, membership of any particular social group, or political opinions.” This mandate applies to Palestinians seeking asylum from Iraq.

Ultimately the responsibility for the protection of Palestinian refugees inside Iraq is primarily the Iraqi government’s. It must halt the human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and torture, and punish the perpetrators. The Iraqi Government should also take quick steps to restore law and order, and assure the safety for Palestinian refugees still living in Iraq.

The government must halt discriminatory acts against Palestinians by the Ministry of Interior and other governmental authorities. Provide food and shelter to those in need, particularly Palestinians who have been forced to take shelter on Iraq’s border with Syria and Jordan.

The government must also repeal the onerous registration requirements imposed by the Directorate of Accommodation in the Ministry of Interior.

For long term prosperity it must open up job opportunities for Iraq’s Palestinians. Facilitate the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations.

There is also a wider responsibility for the countries in the Arab world, especially those that border Iraq. They must assure Palestinians safe shelter and basic services.

They must acknowledge that Iraq’s Palestinians are specifically threatened, and thus must join with others to guarantee that no Palestinian refugee is the object of forced relocation. Palestinians should be treated humanely at all times, guaranteeing freedom of movement and protection from arbitrary detentions and arrests.

Internationally the jurisdiction of UNRWA must be immediately expanded to include Palestinian refugees in Iraq, registering them to include these individuals in its records and providing basic services as soon as possible. If there must be any lag in taking action, UNHCR should step forward to serve this population in the meantime.

The crisis of Palestinian refugees in Iraq requires a regional solution. All of the countries in the region (including Israel and the Gulf countries) must shoulder part of the burden by sheltering Palestinian refugees who are forced to flee Iraq, arranging re-settlement elsewhere or assisting financially.

That said, the situation of Palestinians refugees in Norway, has again highlighted the deficiencies that exist in Europe in the protection of Palestinian refugees. The Norwegian government has an obligation to see that the human rights of refugees in its country is not violated, that Palestinians are not denied access to protection at a whim. It must, above all, take the recommendations of UNHCR on board.



Akram Natsheh*

Hebron; The small Nakba

Ever since Israel first occupied the West Bank and Gaza, military rule has been applied throughout the occupied territories. In addition, occupation forces have worked out special policies for each area in order to implement settlement projects.

Hebron is located in South of West Bank. Like Jerusalem, it was given special status relating to settlement policy because of its religious and historical symbolism.

Over time, settlements sprang up like mushrooms around Palestinian villages and towns all over the West Bank. However, the situation in Hebron was more problematic. Instead of being constructed in the surrounding neighborhood, they were constructed in the heart of the city, with many adverse affects on the structure of the city. The city has been reshaped according to the settlement projects.

Hebron is subject to a special agreement, known as the Hebron Agreement, which has divided the city was into two parts. The first, H1, came partially under the control of Palestinian security forces and mainly comprises the suburbs of the city. The other, H2, came under full Israeli control. This includes the city centre, the market and the Old City. Together with the settlement of Kiryat Arba', located in the Eastern part of the city, there are currently present five settlement outposts in the area.(1)

Currently Hebron's city centre and its market are closed to Palestinians, who are prohibited from entering the area, especially those adjacent to the settlements. In these zones Palestinians are strictly forbidden from practicing any social and economic activity and passing through streets like "Shuhada Street" or the Old al-Khudar Market (Vegetable Market). Hundreds of Palestinian homes have been cleared. At least 1,014 Palestinian housing units had been vacated by their occupants. This number represents 41.9 percent of the housing units(2) and those who still live in the area are subject to a rigid policy of racial separation.

Walking through the Old City of Hebron reminds one of walking through one of the destroyed villages of Palestine in 1948. What is happening in Hebron is a small-scale Nakba, which took place in Palestine in 1947/48 causing the forceful displacement of nearly a million Palestinians. However, the Nakba of Hebron takes place in the heart of the city itself. Palestinians have been

* Akram Natsheh a Journalist and reporter at al-Quds satellite channel.

relocated from the centre to the suburbs in order to make way for Judaization plans for the city, which has become part of the settlement of Kiryat Arba’.

I don’t want to elaborate the formal definition of “Nakba” or its cultural concept here. Instead I will stick with the definition given by Salman Abu Sitta who described it as “The separation of the people from their lands”(3) . What is happening in Hebron now is in fact a separation of Palestinians from their land through methods and techniques not much different from those employed in 1948, be it in terms of the underlying motivation for the settlements or the resulting cultural, social, political, and economic impacts.

The Settlers in Hebron hold an ideology adopted by the new Zionist movement, which is an exclusive, fundamentalist, and religious movement that believes in the intrinsic holiness of the land as source of identity.(4) These settlers believe that Zionism has to continue until the whole West Bank is occupied and all of its former inhabitants expelled. Hebron is one of the most sacred and holy places in Judaism, therefore, according to this view, Israel must complete the occupation of the entire West Bank through ethnic cleansing of the region, they state. Zionists justify the settlement enterprise in Hebron with biblical texts like, “Then Abraham removed his tent, and came and dwelled in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar to the LORD”.(5)

Based on such myths, the occupation policies towards the city of Hebron reflect the goal of emptying the city from its inhabitants and replacing them with Jewish settlers, who usually display a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the Palestinian residents. The implementation of these policies shines through in the different policies adopted in the city. These strategies include:

- **Settlers violence and military actions from side of the occupation forces**

Since the beginning of the settlement movement, settlers have proven to be extremely aggressive towards the local population. Most of them are members of the Kakh and Gush Emunim movement (The Block of Faithful) established in 1973, based on the teachings of the rabbi “Zvi Yehuda Kook”. This movement represents the national and religious base of the settlement movement and relies on extremist Zionist ideas.

This movement is also responsible for most of the condemnable acts of violence undertaken by settlers against Palestinians. Between 1980 and 1983 the movement has carried out several attacks, including the planting of explosives in Hebron’s football stadium and a neighboring mosque, in which more than ten Palestinians were injured. In 1983 the Islamic College in Hebron was attacked. Three Arabs were killed and another 33 injured.(6)

Violence against Palestinians concerns all social classes, children included. A report released by Defence for Children International mentions the case of Cordoba school, located in Shuhada Street and other incidents where children routinely had to face attack and intimidation while passing through checkpoints.

At the end of the report, it states that the occupation forces work in collusion and are unwilling to uphold any law and order against the settlers, a fact that creates a climate of fear for the Palestinian residents and sends a clear message of impunity to the settlers.(7)

Violence is used to scare away Palestinians from Hebron and make the city free for Judaization. This has allowed thousands of Jewish families to move into the city from their houses near the settlements.

- **Killing of Palestinians and massacres (Hebron massacre)**

What is happening now is a copy of what happened between 1947 and 1948. On 25/02/1994, during prayer, a massacre was carried out in Ibrahimi mosque during which 29 Muslims were killed. Ibrahimi Mosque is believed to contain the grave of the patriarch Abraham.

The massacre marked a watershed in the history of Hebron and the beginning of the Nakba of Hebron. A new wave of Judaization began. It is reminiscent of 14/05/1948 in Palestinian history. Shortly after the massacre, the occupation forces adopted measures that made the Judaization of the city a fait accompli. These measures included the division of Ibrahimi mosque between settlers and Palestinians.

Shuhada street, which connects the southern and northern part of the city as well as the market, were closed. The presence of settlers was legitimized and made the life of the Palestinians more difficult than ever. These developments heavily impacted Palestinian families who had no other choice but to leave their homes in the Old City in order to escape threats and intimidation and even death.

- **Closures**

This strategy is an intrinsic part of the expulsion of Palestinians from the heart of the city into other areas. There now exists as many as 123 obstacles surrounding the restricted areas and another 18 checkpoints continuously guarded by soldiers. 12 additional checkpoints are placed along with 57 barricades. 512 Palestinian shops inside the restricted area have been closed due to Israeli military orders. Another 1100 shops have been closed due to heavy measures imposed on customers and suppliers(8) .

As we have seen this discriminatory policy has led to the displacement of many families, who found it extremely hard to reach their homes, especially as they are forced to pass through humiliating checkpoints on daily basis or sometimes have no other option but to pass through their neighbors' houses in order to reach their home.

- **Judaization**

Renaming of landmarks, streets and other public places into Jewish names. This includes declaring Ibrahimi mosque as a Jewish heritage.

The following examples demonstrate name changes in the city:

- o Shuhada' Street => King David Street
- o Ibrahimi Mosque => The cave of Macvilla
- o Tel Rumeida => Ramat Yashai
- o Osama School => Beit Rumano
- o Al-Dabouya => Beit Hadassa
- o Central vegetable market (al-Hisbe) => Ibrahim Abino
- o Jabir's neighborhood => Prayers' alley

These name changes represent another aspect of the Judaization of Hebron. Similar ruination of history also took place in the aftermath of the Nakba. All of these cities were given Hebrew names instead of their original Arabic names in accordance with Judaization plans.

On 21st February 2010 the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared the Ibrahimi mosque as Jewish heritage and thereby gave green light to the implementation of a number of Judaization projects inside and around the area of Ibrahimi mosque.

These Israeli measures had a huge impact on the city and affected all aspects of life – all equally important. Many international reports have been filed which outline these impacts.

- **Economic Aspects**

The economic aspect is certainly one of the most disastrous in the life of the city. As mentioned earlier, there are at present 1500 closed shops, a number that clearly illustrates a huge economic loss. What makes it worse is the fact that the now closed areas have always been the commercial centre of Hebron and its surrounding areas in South West Bank. In addition to these losses the last remaining shops have turned from grocery shops into ticket and souvenir shops for tourists visiting the Ibrahimi mosque.

- **Cultural and Social Aspects**

The occupation measures also have serious cultural and social impacts. Numerous festivals and religious ceremonies have disappeared. Funeral processions that used to pass through Ibrahimi mosque have stopped due to the Israeli measures in the aftermath of the massacre.

The former cultural and social centre of the city, Ibrahimi mosque together with the Old City, has become an isolated area. The area is impoverished and most of the remaining families are from a poor family background. The social texture has enormously changed with new families entering and long established families leaving the area.

- **Political Aspects**

Following the settler movement, a special agreement was made, known as the Hebron Agreement. This agreement, signed in 1997, provides the political basis for the present state and has reinforced the current situation. According to the agreement the city is divided into two parts, the first part is under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the other under falls fully under Israeli control. Many of the families that live in the Palestinian controlled part H1 have left the Old City due to Israeli repression and policies.

- **Daily Suffering**

Daily suffering concerns all, not only on the citizens of Hebron, but also those living in the areas threatened from Judization. The closure has restricted the movement between the different areas of the city. Shuhada Street and checkpoints are located in the heart of the city and hinder movement between the northern and southern part as well as those parts portioned off for new settlements. The combination of barriers and hundreds of Israeli soldiers in the area in addition to continuous settler assaults render the situation unbearable.

Until now no international party has decisively interfered. The displaced inhabitants are not given the status of refugees, despite the fact that many among them are not able to return to their homes.



The issue of emigration has been widely observed, without the occupation methods being denounced. Emigration flows from the Old City into the suburbs were explained as “natural emigration” due to the expansion of the city and increasing number of residents. Therefore, the issue has only been dealt with through humanitarian aid to some of the most affected families.

The only international party that has addressed the issue is the International Temporary Presence in Hebron, TIPH, which is a Hebron-based observer mission. The tasks of the mission was outlined in 1997 by Palestinian and Israeli authorities in order to support them in their efforts to improve the situation in Hebron. The mission’s aim is to develop security for the Palestinians and to promote stability. The mission produces reports on breaches of the agreements between Israelis and the Palestinians. In addition, the mission reports on breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights. However, reports are not made public.

Palestinians have been resisting the ongoing displacement through two different ways: official and popular. The official way is to work out a legal basis through which Palestinians can defend violations of their rights and stop demolitions of their homes. The second is popular resistance through non-violent means in the areas that are under the threat of occupation. Both methods aim to stop the displacement of residents.

Hebron Rehabilitation Committee is the main official body that tries to protect the city from Judaization. The committee was established in 1996 in order to protect the Old City through the restoration of buildings and the rehabilitation of former abandoned houses. It also rehabilitates the infrastructure, preserves cultural heritage and urban texture and improves living conditions through the restoration of houses. It also offers economic incentives for business in the city.(10)

Since its establishment, the committee has managed to restore hundreds of houses and return its residents. According the director of the HIRN, the number of residents in the Old City has risen from 500 in 1996 to 5500 people –the same Old City that was once inhabited by more than 10 thousand people with a similar number of customers visiting its markets.(11)

However, the committee’s work is still controlled by the Israelis, who frequently prevent HRC from restoring houses especially in Shuhada Street and the surrounding settlement outposts.

A key development was to include plans to include the Old City of Hebron to the UNESCO heritage list. After the admission of Palestine as full member to UNESCO it is possible for international authorities to put pressure on the Israelis and prevent the systemized Judization process that’s taking place.

On the popular level, youth and voluntary organizations work hand in hand. Youth against settlement is one of the main organizations and follows several strategies. The first one is to put pressure on the occupation forces to reopen Shuhada Street. An Open Shuhada Street campaign was launched three years ago and more than 10 organizations from different countries participated. Since last year, Youth against Settlement organized 35 campaigns around the world and protest actions and demonstrations in Hebron. They have often been violently met by Israeli soldiers.(12)

Activists from Youth Against settlement also support people living in the targeted areas. They organize olive harvest concerts and restore places that are difficult to reach by official bodies.

Most of the human rights organizations in Palestine have their office in Hebron. They document daily violations against residents in the area. Recently human rights organizations distributed cameras to residents under threat in the area to better monitor human rights abuse and other violations(13) .

Activists and residents are working hand in hand when it comes to defending houses against settler attacks. During attacks they stay with the families. The solidarity with people inside the targeted homes, together with the presence of visitors, remains the most important method to protect the city from Judaization as well as from the harsh measures undertaken by Israeli authorities.

Conclusion:

The Israeli measures in Hebron have created a situation similar to the Palestinian Nakba. Palestinians have been dispossessed from their lands. They are neither allowed to enter or inhabit the Old City, nor are they able to follow their social and economic activities. The heart of Hebron has been emptied and transferred from the Old City to the suburbs due to settlement projects. Hebron's history and former characteristics have become nothing more than a memory.

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Dr. Mohsen Saleh*

A Critical reading of the Oslo accords

Much debate, studies and researches have been carried out regarding the Oslo accords, it's no exaggeration to say there are thousands of such studies. In this instance, I will make a number of key points as a matter of critique of this peace agreement.

First, Palestinian Liberation organization (PLO) recognized the right of existence of the state of Israel and its occupation of the lands occupied in 1948 which represent 78% of the Palestinian land. Consequently, with this recognition, all the land occupied in 1948 was excluded from any negotiation. Subsequently, any negotiations would only be based around the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Second, Israel recognized PLO as a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, it did not recognize the right of Palestinians to own west bank and Gaza strip. There is no commitment whatsoever from Israel to withdraw from Gaza or West Bank.

Third, the accord doesn't refer to the Gaza Strip or West Bank as occupied territories. Therefore, such an approach emphasizes the belief that these areas are "disputed lands". This consideration was reflected on Israel's position over the past decades where the status of illegal settlement issue and land swaps became a primary issue.

Fourth, PLO made a commitment that it will stop armed resistance as well as the Intifada. PLO thus committed to nonviolent methods and also removed the statement from its charter, which called on destruction of Israel and the full liberation of Palestine. Such was the foundation of PLO, which was established in 1964, before the Gaza Strip or the West Bank came under occupation. The removal and amendments of these items (article 62 and 33) happened in 1998 and 1996.

Fifth, PLO committed to developing the Palestinian Authority (PA) through non-violent means (negotiation process) which meant severe repression and banning of armed resistance in the areas under its control. As a result, it was caught in the middle, between Israel and the Palestinian people, who refused the peace process and wanted armed resistance. This volatile atmosphere made PLO and PA appear, to all parties, as though they were Israel's instrument of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. PA was pressured into stopping any form of resistance by any political faction. Israel

* Professor Mohsen Saleh is a chairman of Al-Zaytuna Center for Studies and consultancy

had succeeded in making the PA play the role of a colonial agency. There is no doubt that this issue improved the image of Israel around the world, as it was able to suppress Palestinians from a distance and with an aura of legitimacy.

Sixth, the Oslo accord was not implemented fully as it left the door open for both parties to come together and make an agreement on further issues. There were few steps like establishing the Palestinian Authority and giving it some territorial control over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. But what about the other articles and parts of the agreement that was agreed by the two parties? In fact, there is no international binding mechanism to force Israel to abide by its obligations, thereby giving Israel an upper hand in negotiations.

Seventh, the agreement did not refer to the Palestinian right to self determination or establishing their independent state even on any part of Palestine.

Eights, the accord failed to refer to the role of the PLO concerning the protection of Palestinian territories external borders or security. It did not refer also to the PA's jurisdiction over Israeli settlers in West Bank or Gaza Strip. Added to this, PA would never be able to import without Israel's permission and oversight. This all adds up to a scenario where the PA is handcuffed on key issues regarding security practices, economic policies management of resources. Economically this strengthened Israel's grip on the lives of Palestinians as 70% of PA exports and 85% imports was directly with Israel. Furthermore, Israel controlled the freedom of movement and no one was allowed in or out without its permission.

Ninth, the disastrous decision to leave aside fundamental aspects of the conflict unresolved. This left the Oslo accords hollow and bankrupt from the very beginning. In any peace deal between two states, the key and most important issues will be addressed and solved. However, within the Palestinian case it was the opposite. The agreement started with minor issues and left key issues like Jerusalem, refugees, borders and water to later stages. No time limit or deadlines were set to solve these issues. This tragic mistake left Israel in control and subjected the peace process to Israel's mood and determination.

Tenth, PA has turned into a functional entity that is not tied with the Palestinian people. The stability of the PA is tied to the self interest of Israel. Therefore, Israel can exert political or economic pressure against the PA if it does not do Israel's bidding.

Eleven, the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Oslo accord without a mandate from the Palestinian people and the internal decision making process within the Palestinians. There was no proper mandate. Many of the executive committee of the PLO resigned in protest against the accord. It was three years later in 1996 that the agreement on Oslo accord and amendments to the PLO charter was agreed but only after 400 new members were added to the Palestinian National Council for the sole purpose of passing this agreement. Even the head of the Palestinian National Council did not have a clue regarding the names of the new members. It is worth pointing out that neither the Palestinian people inside the occupied Palestine nor those abroad were asked in a referendum for their view in undertaking such a dramatic change. Not to mention the fact that Fatah itself had many leaders who opposed the accord.

Many people and observers speak about the Palestinian division between Fatah and Hamas after the elections in 2005. It is important to state that this division was not new and began over 19 years ago when Oslo accord was signed. The agreement has also led to the creation of around ten factions which opposed the Oslo accord for various reasons. It is clear that the national split has negatively impacted the

Palestinian people as a whole. Such a fundamental division meant that agreements made between the PA and Israel was forcefully driven through without the legitimacy of the Palestinian people.

Palestinian-American thinker, Edward Said, commented on the Oslo agreement stating that Yassir Arafat, the late Palestinian president brought the Palestinian people into a trap (he means Oslo) from where they are unable to escape on top of agreeing to submit to Israeli and American demands.

Palestinian researcher, Hesham Sharbtli, accused the Palestinian leadership at the time of signing the agreement, especially knowing what it contained and what it meant for the Palestinian struggle. He claimed that the leadership doesn't know how to take a decision and is ignorant of the plight of the Palestinians and the central pillar of their resistance. He further said that the leadership has nothing to face the Israelis with.

Last, the deal paved the way for Arabic and Islamic countries as well as other states who used to support Palestinian cause, to normalize and build relations with Israel. This enabled the Israelis to improve relations with these countries

To conclude, Oslo accord is a failed project from within. It relegates the Palestinian entity to a servile role in the service of Israeli occupation, repression of Palestinians and land theft. It became an instrument of occupation and not an instrument of Palestinian aspirations. Sadly, forming a Palestinian state based on this agreement will not give the Palestinians the rights and freedoms they've been fighting for seven decades. It's flawed logic of nonviolent resistance gives Israel immunity in carrying out violence and aggression against the Palestinians.

Without a doubt, this agreement gives Israel a chance to manoeuvre and procrastinate forever. It also allows Israel to continue building settlements and to create facts on the ground. This accord has never sought to develop the Palestinian Authority but rather, to give a cover for Israel's expansionist goals.





Lubaba Zoqan*

Popular Protests in the West Bank: Economic Crisis Reflects Structural Flaws in the Oslo Accords

Many justifiably argue that the Oslo accords, signed on 13th September 1993, is a security agreement which recognized the occupying state of Israel and gave up on the rights of Palestinian refugees. To guarantee the success of such an agreement and provide an aura of legitimacy, the donor states supported the Palestinian Authority.

To accomplish this ruse to maintain Israeli occupation the Paris agreement, which sets out the economic agreement between the two parties was, finalized in April 1994, prior the entrance of Yasir Arafat to occupied Palestine and before announcing the Palestinian Authority in June of the same year.

The economic and financial framework, as set out in the Paris Agreement, organizes the work of the PA and guarantees its existence as an agency to carry out its duties in the interest of Israel. The agreement sets the framework and rules for imports, exports, industry, trades, loans, housing construction, customs and tariff administration and financial fees for services.

The Palestinian economy was connected with the Israelis. This relationship enabled Israel to take greater control of Palestinian economy, making it economically handicapped from the start by putting growth and prosperity of the occupied territories in the hands of Israel.

All imports that came through Israel, including petroleum was under Israeli control. In addition Israel was granted authority to collect tax and tariff on behalf of the Palestinian authority. Tax and VAT were also set by Israel according to its advantage despite the differences between the two economies as well as the differences in the incomes and GDP. Based on such a framework it was inevitable that only Israel would benefit from this agreement, especially as it placed the Palestinian economy under its interest.

Manipulation

The Palestinian Authority has been proud of the Oslo accord for 19 years, despite the unequal, unfair and unjust relation between the two parties. The Palestinian economy is controlled by Israeli occupation which controls everything. Israel can freeze any financial transfers, close crossings that are vital to imports and exports, suspend granting license for industrial facilities in addition to restricting and banning workers reaching their jobs.

* writer and journalist in Middle East affairs.



Palestinian economy is dependent on foreign aid from donor countries as well as loans which are estimated at around \$ 5 billion. PA pays from its budget more than 100 thousand employees in addition to 50 thousand security personnel. Furthermore the PA suffers from corruption. It has paid millions of dollars in return for political allegiances of some groups and to gain more power.

Excess and consumerism has spread across the Palestinian community in the last five years, during the time of prime minister Salam Fayad. Palestinian employees became increasingly dependent on bank loans to buy houses as well as cars and to fund a lifestyle that is unaffordable.

This growing trend was the result of an agreement between Fayad's government and the financial sector. Its primary aim was political as it tried to tie employees to jobs and obligations that are apolitical and diffuse political demands coming from the Palestinians living under occupation. During the time of Fayad's government corruption has been endemic across the PA. Many cases of corruption were placed against Mohamad Dahlan (charge of security) and Khalid Salam (Financial consultant). Losses resulting from corruption amounted to \$800 million were presented to the General Attorney who resigned recently.

Hollow Praise

despite the global economic crisis, the unqualified praise showered at Salam Fayad's is extremely perplexing especially given that the Palestinian people rallied to the streets in September 2012 in protest against Fayad and President Mahmoud Abbas, who were both accused of working for the benefit of America and not the Palestinian people. To Palestinians, their success story is nothing but a mirage.

Protests spread across key cities in the West Bank which was fervently dismissed as nothing but protest against Israeli occupation and lack of foreign funding, and not, as you might expect, the failure of Fayad to deliver on his promises which, as all Palestinians know, are not feasible within the context of Oslo.

Fayad stated that the "PA needs extra funds, we suffer a longstanding financial crisis due to the lack of external and foreign funds...We have not obtained sufficient funding during the past few years which has caused the recent riots. We are trying to increase revenue and improve the performance of tax and spending cuts. I have the absolute confidence that we will be able to meet our needs from our resources after the end of occupation. Occupation is limiting the opportunities of Palestinian economic growth due to its control and restrictions on crossings and elsewhere. In addition to the siege imposed on our people in Gaza"

Instead of laying blame where blame lay; the unequal relationship imposed through Oslo, Palestinian leaders are very keen on manipulating the occupation to excuse their own failure. Occupation is a problem, but Fayad's problems are not simply born out of the occupation, they are born out of greater structural problems which he is unwilling to admit.

Against Paris Accord

The important aspect of the popular protests in the West Bank is that it has pushed the Palestinian authority to finally confess that the Paris accord has negative consequences.

Apparently, the protests drove the PA to an official request from Israel to re-negotiate the Paris agreement. The request came amid protests against the economic policies of the government. In this respect, Husein Al Shiekh, Minister of the civil affairs at Fayad government clearly pointed out that,



“18 years have passed since the Paris agreement. It seems that this accord is a burden on the Palestinian people which has imposed on us tough financial and economic conditions.” Al Shiekh later confessed that he sent an official letter (based on a request from President Abbas) to the Israeli Defense ministry, asking them to open the accord for further negotiations and to form a special committee for that purpose.

Omar Al Ghoul, consultant to the Palestinian Prime Minister suggested that the economic crisis facing the Palestinians is beyond Salam Fayad. He further argued in a press interview with Al Hayat Newspaper that the Palestinian people and their economy are “like hostages” of the Paris agreement and Israeli restrictions on the territory. Al Ghoul demonstrates that the economic crisis sweeping the Palestinian territories is a reflection of developments in Israel where prices have skyrocketed.

Al Ghoul accused Israel of causing the deterioration across the Palestinian territories and he called on the donor countries, along with the Quartet Committee, to support the Palestinian Authority's budget.

To have a full picture of how Palestinian economy and the Palestinian people are affected by Israeli economy, in light of the Paris agreement, it is important to point out that the Israeli community revolted against its own government due to prices rise, especially basic products like bread, meat and eggs. Similar price hikes also appeared in Palestine, as confirmed by data released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which recorded the highest increase in the cost of livings in August 2012. This hike was the highest in 3 years.

The rise in the prices of fresh vegetables increased by 15.9%, and cigarette prices rose by 6.47%, while fuel prices increased by 4.51%. The index of consumer prices recorded an increase of 1.51% during August 2012 compared with the previous month which was 2.23% in the West Bank, and 1.58% in Jerusalem, and 0.35% in the Gaza Strip. When comparing prices during the month of August 2012 with August 2011, data indicate that the index of consumer prices rose to 5.11% in the West Bank, and 3.19% in Jerusalem, and 0.92% in the Gaza Strip.

Following the protests and financial crisis across the West Bank, and the restrictions placed on Palestinians through the Paris accord, we can conclude that the people's protests in the West Bank is a reflection of their frustrations against the Oslo accords and Paris agreement. It was clear from the chants of the people who were participating in the protest that they believed the Accord is their biggest handicap against economic prosperity.

They have also demonstrated tremendous awareness in not allowing genuine concerns to be utilized by the PA as a political football and deflect attention from their own failings by constantly blaming the occupation and the lack of foreign aid. They refuse to accept the argument that the occupation is the only problem and if only there was no occupation the PA would guide Palestinians to political salvation.

The very people who sold out the Palestinians can never hope to reclaim the rights of Palestinians when they are steeped in corruption and part of a process that has brought greater colonization, more occupation, and existential threats to the basic human rights of Palestinians.



Charlotte Silver*

Legalizing theft of Palestinian resources

“Some force is always making refugees. There is not a moment for Palestinians to reflect in a calm situation without being attacked and displaced; Israel annexes and displaces.” -- Amjad Alqasis, Badil Resource Centre.

It is often and rightly noted that the “conflict” between Palestinians and Israelis is not a static situation or a stalemate between leaders. Indeed, for Palestinians, the very opposite is horrifyingly true: change is constant, with terrifying speed and dire, profound consequences. The loss of Palestinian land and resources to a colonial settler movement with the inevitable generation of refugees continues.

Two complementary processes have marked Zionist settler colonialism in historic Palestine: the continuous creation of refugees and the appropriation of Palestinians’ resources. One feeds into the other in a cycle of colonization driven by the aims of an ethnocratic state.

The most dramatic example of the symbiosis between control of resources and the creation of Palestinian refugees is the Nakbah, when Zionists increased the land they controlled by ten-fold and expelled 750,000 Palestinians through a carefully designed and implemented military operation that took place from late 1947 to 1949.

The Nakbah created the largest number of homeless and stateless Palestinians in the history of Zionist settler colonialism. However, both before and after the Nakbah, Palestinians have been continuously displaced, albeit at a slower but steady and currently quickening pace.

After the 1967 military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the last pieces of historic Palestine were availed for Zionist colonization. The war created another 200-250,000 displaced persons and only a small fraction of these people was permitted to return.

The next phase would be characterized by what Saree Makdisi has labeled “slow-motion” dispossession. This plodding but no less excruciating dispossession has been officiated by a military buttressed by a convoluted body of legal memoranda, laws and opinions, providing the whole business with a veneer of legitimacy.

* Charlotte Silver is a journalist based in San Francisco and the West Bank, Palestine. She is a graduate of Stanford University.



Historian Patrick Wolfe describes Israel's model of settler colonialism as an "Unparalleled example of deliberate, explicit planning. No campaign of territorial dispossession was ever waged more thoughtfully."

Israel came of age in an era when most colonial enterprises were in remission; the understanding of this context may help to explain Israel's methodical use of legal and official means to pursue its expropriation of Palestine- in contravention of international legal standards.

Israel vigorously endeavors to maintain its appearance as a western democracy that is respectful of international law. Amjad Alqasis, a legal researcher at Badil Resource Centre for Palestinian Refugees, describes Israel as "smarter and more eloquent" than other colonizers. "Israel is keen on having excuses for what they are doing," Alqasis proffers.

The dispossession and displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank has largely been at the hands of tactics that Alqasis calls "silent transfer".

"Under international law, forcible displacement can occur not just at gunpoint but also if you create an unbearable situation. Silent transfer describes this very kind of expulsion," Alqasis says.

Thus Israel's take-over of Palestinians resources has proven to be a key instrument to silently transfer Palestinian populations. By cutting off access to necessities including water, agricultural lands, homes, schools and jobs, those affected are forced to simply leave. The legal justifications for these expropriations are—and would seem explicitly intended to be - lethal to Palestinian rights to their land which, in turn, creates endless instability as well as a constantly renewed population of refugees - and, notably, keeps these refugees from ever returning.

While refugees may not be directly alluded to, they are implicit targets of Israeli policies that assume control over Palestinian resources.

Israeli mining in the West Bank

The recent decision by the Israeli Supreme Court which affirms Israel's right to mine Palestinian quarries in the West Bank flouts international law while codifying Israeli prerogatives to settle and control the occupied land.

In the decision, Chief Justice Dorit Beinisch argues that the international laws that govern a belligerent occupation should yield to the exceptional circumstances of Israel's prolonged occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In this case, the occupier's activity in question is mining: eight Israeli quarries operate in the West Bank today, extracting stone that is sold on the Israeli market at a rate that will see the resources depleted in the next thirty-eight years.

Israeli mining activity in the West Bank is, in the eyes of legal scholars and activists, a conspicuous violation of the law of the "usufruct rule" enshrined in Article 55 of the 1907 Hague Regulations that prohibits an Occupying Power from exploiting the natural resources of the occupied territory for its own benefit.

Yesh Din, an Israeli legal rights organization, initially petitioned the Supreme Court to challenge the legality of the quarries that sell up to 94 percent of stone and gravel inside the state of Israel, and thereby not in service of the "local population" as international law requires. However, Yesh Din's concern



about pillage and economic exploitation was swept away by Chief Justice Beinisch's conclusion that the "unique characteristics" of Israel's occupation require an "adjustment of the law."

Writing on behalf of the Court's decision, Beinisch says:

As has been held in many occasions under our rulings, the belligerent occupation of Israel in the Area has some unique characteristics, primarily the duration of the occupation period that requires the adjustment of the law to the reality on the ground, which imposes a duty upon Israel to ensure normal life for a period, which...is certainly long-term.

Beinisch upholds the State's defense of the quarries' activity, arguing the issue falls under the jurisdiction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)-Israel Interim Agreements of 1993. Critically, the court decision affirms the authority of the Interim Agreements without noting the expiration of these agreements: the quarries were supposed to be transferred to Palestinian control after eighteen months. However, that never happened. Furthermore, as the name asserts, the Interim Agreements were meant to govern a transition period with a scheduled end date of 1999.

Nevertheless, in this December 2011 decision, the Israeli court affirmed the agreements' otherwise expired authority, thereby also affirming the division of Palestinian land into its insidious and onerous hierarchy of autonomy that designates areas of the West Bank as A, B, or C.

The court's preservation of the Interim Agreements legitimates Israel's continued grip on Area C, which represents sixty percent of the West Bank. Significantly, Area C is currently the largest source of internally displaced Palestinians, and is a category created under the expired Interim Agreements. Moreover, Area C sees the infliction of the most devastating occupation policies and military orders. Rampant home demolitions, denial of access to water and electricity, and restrictions against building necessary infrastructure are the "legitimate" consequences of policies that all but directly expel Palestinians from the West Bank. Only the barrel of a gun could be a more emphatic tool of displacement.

Indeed, as a result of these policies, the number of displaced Palestinians continues apace. According to statistics compiled by the international aid agency Save the Children, in 1967 there were approximately 200,000 Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley, which is almost entirely labeled Area C. Today, there are only 56,000 remaining, the vast majority of whom live in Jericho, which is designated Area A.

Alqasis stresses: "As a Palestinian, you are either a refugee or on the edge of becoming one."

The number of Palestinians in the Diaspora is estimated to be 4.8 million; those living in the West Bank is 2.5 million and in the Gaza Strip, 1.5 million. Those Palestinians living in Area A, the only population over which the Palestinian Authority has even nominal jurisdiction, is even smaller.

"The Palestinian Authority's mandate is only Area A, a very miniscule and specific area," explained Alqasis.

Thus, by asserting that the authority of the Palestinian Authority and the Interim Agreements - which notably fail to address Palestinian refugees - eclipses the authority of international law, the court willfully sacrifices the rights of the largest sectors of Palestinians.

Who is indigenous?

To achieve and justify its aims, Zionism has asserted historic Jewish entitlement to the land and resources and thus also challenged Palestinians as the indigenous population of the area. The state actively asserts the region's Jewish history by a conscious harkening back to the Biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah-whether through its archaeological focus on King David's home in the heart of Palestinian East Jerusalem, or by labeling the West Bank as Judea and Samaria. As much as Israel forges a continuum of Jewish belonging to the land, it denies Palestinians their place anywhere on the land. It is documented that Israel has undermined the indigenous rights of as well as destabilized and displaced the Bedouin populations inside the state of Israel. Now we see the court doing the same to Palestinians in the West Bank.

Within the same decision adjudicating on Israeli mining operations in the West Bank, the court finds that the activity of the quarries serves the benefit of the "local population"-which includes Israeli settlers living in the West Bank:

It was held, inter alia, that the operation of the quarry was not inconsistent with the rules of international law due to the fact that some of its products also were used for projects within the Judea and Samaria area, thus constituting an action for the benefit of the local population or local needs. According to the State, some of the quarrying products in the case under discussion also are being used for projects within the territory of the Palestinian Authority, including the Gaza Strip.

This rather more subtle argument is buried within the folds of the more prominently objectionable permission to pillage, but is no less poisonous to the Palestinian residents. By iterating that Jewish settlers in the West Bank are just part of the local population - rather than Israeli citizens transferred and kept there by the government - Beinisch contributes to a legal lexicon that obfuscates Israel's colonizing role in the West Bank and continues to intentionally blur the state's actual boundaries.

Duane Champagne, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles in the American Indian Studies department, writes "Nation-states often fear indigenous communities' claims to self-government and cultural autonomy, which threaten the territorial and political stability of nation- states."

Indeed, it appears that Beinisch has taken aim at this threat of competing nationalism in order to protect the future and stability of the state of Israel.

While it is endlessly galling, it can surprise no one that Israel argues within its own courts the legality of its continuing and cruel dispossession and pillage of Palestinian resources. But the ruling surely must confirm to the international community that it cannot wait for Israel to willingly halt its illegal, immoral and decades-long colonization of Palestine. Nor can it expect refugees - current and future - to be allotted justice.

Admonishing, Alqasis says, "70 percent of Palestinians are refugees. It won't take another 60 years to displace the final 30 percent."





Hosam
Ramadan*

The Future of Palestinian Refugees in light of a U.N. non-member state of Palestine

The Palestinian Refugee issue is considered, by most, as the central plank in the Israel Palestine conflict. It is also the cornerstone of any political negotiations that aims to resolve Israel Palestine conflict. Since the birth of the refugee crises in 1948, Palestinians were subjected to shameful attempts to dismantle and fragment their plight as a political issue, yet, even after 64 years, it remains the essence of the Palestinian cause.

The plight of refugees has always been in the minds of the Palestinian people. They have resisted all attempts to compromise their fundamental human rights as refugees. Given the centrality of the right of return amongst the global Palestinian community, It is sad, and politically ill-advised, for some Palestinians (who don't represent Palestinians fully) to be part of the agenda to dissolve the refugee issue. They obligingly endorse projects or compromises which neglect, marginalize and surrender the right of return. The stance of such a people does not represent the Palestinians nor their sacrifice and quest for freedom.

The issue of Palestinian refugees and their right to return is one of the two fundamental pillars towards justice and peace in Palestine. The two pillars, representing the path to justice and peace in Palestine include:

- The Right of Return for Palestinian Refugees to their homes and villages.
- The Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Palestinian Resistance, led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), represented the main vehicle for the National Palestinian agenda. This resistance is a continuation of the resistance movement against the British mandate and the Zionist occupation. The establishment of the PLO, in 1964, was set to achieve the two pillars of the Palestinian movement; the right of Return and Self-Determination.

Following the Naksa (6-Day War in 1967) the National Palestinian project started to retreat. This continued in 1969, when the Palestinian National Council met in Algeria and agreed on the 10-points plan that centred around establishing a Palestinian state, on land freed from the grip of Israeli occupation. Their retreat to a new compromised position was a result of the persecution Palestinians faced in exile, which targeted Palestinian resistance in Lebanon and Jordan.

* Gaza's head of refugees affairs.



Israel refused to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians and looked for alternatives to the PLOs position, ideally a Palestinian entity to coordinate civil administration in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It was hoped, such an entity would not be a threat to Israel and its future but rather would protect Israel's interest and give up on key principals of the Palestinian resistance, self-determination and right of return.

Israel also refused to implement many articles enshrined in the first Camp David agreement signed with Egypt; these articles clearly demand Israel to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The denial of the rights of Palestinians and the refusal to recognize PLO was clearly a devious attempt to block the rights of return and Palestinian self determination. According to Israel, such a state would be built on the "promised land of Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus", which all belonged to the Jewish people.

Israel felt that the existence of a Palestinian state would endanger the future of a Jewish state. It also perceives peace with the Palestinians as an achievable outcome, only if the Palestinian entity dropped their right of return.

Israel is making gains from the fact that the peace process is not a path to peace but a process to maintain the status quo. It serves Israel's interest only, and does nothing to bring peace and justice to the region. Such sentiments were candidly expressed by the former Israeli Prime Minister, Isaac Shamir, who said, during the Madrid negotiations, that he will make sure negotiations continue endlessly for decades without any result. Such an approach was adopted by successive Israeli governments which refuse to uphold any of its obligations under the peace process, and more worryingly, obligations under international law. Such a one sided approach will not bring justice and peace in Palestine.

Palestinian Internal Differences:

The Palestinian political arena consists of two contradictory political paths. One believes the road to statehood is the ultimate goal and thinks a negotiated settlement will achieve this. This path does not have any problems in negotiating over key Palestinian principles like the right of return and borders. They are willing to concede where the vast majority of Palestinians are unwilling to concede, even though Palestinians continually compromise rights to facilitate Israel's needs.

The second believes that ongoing resistance and non negotiation of Palestinian rights is the way to protect Palestinian principles and its national aspirations. The past century has shown that negotiation between two unequal parties, with one party conceding rights and the other conceding merely a limit on expansion, will not work.

Mindful of the diverging positions, it is vital to mention a number of strategic points to achieve Palestinian national aspirations:

- Palestinian resistance is a vital / strategic tool to achieve our national goals.
- Palestinian resistance should be strengthened, as it is a tool to protect our fundamental rights.
- A unified Palestinian entity should be established that can unify Palestinian people towards achieving their national goals. One that does not concede rights for merely less occupation and not dictated by American and Israeli interests.



Securing membership for a Palestinian state at the United Nations will protect Palestinian negotiators from pressure from US and Israel. Without the UN recognition Palestinian negotiators are subjected to enormous pressure to concede fundamental rights in the areas of economy, security, settlement, and coordination of society. The membership will help to reduce the American monopoly of the Palestinian cause and will bring in other international players such as modern Egypt, Turkey and others. The right of return will remain a collective right for Palestinian people.

The project of a Palestinian state should be a step towards unifying Palestinians by protecting resistance and national principles like the right of return and self-determination. Even if Palestinians are divided at the moment, such a state will unify them in the future as long as they exist and resist from within their lands. In this instance, it is important to emphasize on the following points:

- Palestinian principles and rights stated within UN resolutions did not give Palestinian anything but sympathy.
- Palestinian achievements were made through sacrifice, national resistance and popular activism.
- Palestinian people are not holding false hopes that the UN will force Israel to implement the right of return.
- The Palestinian people need to achieve their freedom through establishing a Palestinian state on Palestinian land in a step to obtain right of return and self-determination.
- The current status quo is a slow process of political suicide which will end through establishing, at least, a Palestinian state of a membership at the UN.
- The UN recognition of a Palestinian state doesn't endanger the right of return since it's a collective and individual right which cannot be relinquished by time or an agreement from those who claim to represent the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian step towards UN membership was met with national consensus that included organizations like Fatah and Hamas. In this respect, there has been a letter circulated by Dr. Isam Udwan, Director of Refugees Affairs at Hamas movement which included a number of questions that I will answer:

Will the UN non-state membership of a Palestinian state support and enable the right of return for refugees?

There are fears about obtaining this membership. Israel and US are against such a move purely because it forces them to ease their grip on power over the Palestinians. Israel and US want Palestinians to gain their freedom by begging Israel, as stated by the spokesperson of the American Foreign Secretary, Hilary Clinton, who said that, "Palestinians should seek their rights through Israeli via negotiation and not via the International arena. This means that Palestinians should not develop their strategies based on what is in their best interest but only in consideration of Israel's interest.

In any case, there is no guarantee of protecting the right of return while Palestinians are divided. There has to be a unified Palestinian discourse, and a representative and internationally recognized organization that will protect Palestinian rights. The non-state membership will only enhance the chances of securing a Palestinian state that is not merely an American and Israeli construct but a true reflection of Palestinian goals and aspirations.

The fears associated with moving the Palestinian observer membership to non-state member is theoretical. However, the status quo and practical reality is that Palestinians are heading towards a scenario that only serves the interest of Israel and the US. The PLO has done very badly in terms of negotiations and dealing with the UN over the past decades. It's hard to accept the reason for their persistence in continuing with the status quo given the historical failure and missed opportunities to rebuild the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) after the cancellation of the National Charter.

The steps taken by President Abbas were welcomed by most of the Palestinian parties. These parties looked at the UN move with hope that it will also end the division which has blighted Palestinians for Seven years in addition to confronting Israeli occupation and expansion; including the Gaza siege and the refusal of the election results in 2005.

The non-state membership for a Palestinian state would not be an alternative to the PLO which is an observer member of the UN. PLO would remain the umbrella organization for all Palestinians inside the occupied territories and abroad.

Palestinian can only secure their political and human rights by continuing their struggle at different international arenas. Israel's accession to UN membership was conditional on its agreement to implement UN resolution 194. However, it refused to do so and remained a member of the UN. Protecting the Palestinian refugee issue will be best achieved by a unified Palestinian entity that can unify Palestinian people towards achieving their national goals without capitulation to Israeli demands.





Linda
Ramsden*

Meeting Palestinians Liberated Me: My Journey Away from Christian Zionism

One evening in October 2001, I made a phone call from my home in Surrey to my Palestinian Christian friend, Grace, in Beit Jala, a suburb of Bethlehem. The entire conversation was surreal; while I sat in the peace and quiet of my office, Grace, speaking from her mobile phone, was huddled beside her husband and young baby on the floor in the middle of their ground floor apartment. As we spoke I could hear explosions from rockets launched from Gilo, the Israeli settlement across the valley, and I worried frantically for the life of my friends. I burst out crying.

“Don’t worry,” was Grace’s reply. “God is looking after us. We’re together, and that’s what’s important; there’s nothing more we can do.”

I couldn’t believe what Grace was telling me! The area was under curfew, buildings were being reduced to rubble and civilians were dying. The situation in Bethlehem was dominating my daily thoughts.

I remember sinking back in my chair after the emotional conversation with Grace and reflecting on what had happened that had caused the entire foundation for my life to change so dramatically.

My childhood and youth on a small farm in Minnesota had been idyllic. Life revolved around our extended family, the tight-knit community, and the Lutheran Church. However I wasn’t prepared for moving away to the big city to attend university. It was at the end of the civil rights movement and during the Vietnam War. My parents, staunch Republicans and fiercely patriotic, warned me against involvement in the peace movement and “liberal ideas”. Even though I was intrigued by aspects of it and hated the way that the United States was becoming so materialistic, I was afraid of defying my parents. I wanted meaning and purpose in life and found it when I was invited to attend Bible study sessions held on campus.

The leader explained the scriptures in a way that brought the Bible to life for me. Soon I had a “born-again” experience and was baptised by full immersion, replicating how Jesus baptised his followers. I adopted a literal interpretation of scripture. A great deal of emphasis of our study was on prophecies about the “end times”. Our fervent leader persuaded me that it was a waste of time and money to complete the final year of my four year degree course because I should be out converting people to Christ so that they could be saved from hell and damnation. He also took a group of us to

* Linda Ramsden is the Director of the UK support group for the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and has facilitated opportunities for people from the West to visit Palestine. At present she is writing her story.



a Bible study centre in Ohio where families and young adults lived in a community that attempted to be self-sufficient as they waited for Christ's return.

I found life at the centre exciting and after I had visited a few times, the leader offered me a job, enabling me to stay. A regular guest speaker was Hal Lindsey, a modern-day "prophet". I literally sat at the feet of this man who went on to become one of the top-selling authors of the last century with his books "The Late Great Planet Earth" and "Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth".

In those days, we prayed for revival to come to America and for more evangelical Christians to be in political positions. Hal Lindsey was a long-time friend of Ronald Reagan and his writing was quoted by President Reagan. Lindsey gave seminars at the Pentagon and is recognized as one of the leaders of the Christian Zionist movement which has influenced American Foreign Policy. Many Americans believe that the number of Bible-believing Christians in Congress today is proof of God's answer to those prayers of forty years ago. Because Christian Zionists believe that we are living in the last days, there is no urgency to save the world from environmental disaster, and their beliefs preclude working for peace with justice in the Middle East. They are generous funders of Israeli settlements and Jewish emigration to Israel.

Fundamentalist Christian Zionism is composed of seven tenets:

1. An ultra-literal reading of the Bible, as opposed to an allegorical interpretation of biblical passages, lending to a unique "revelation" of conditioned events which will come to this divine world. Special emphasis is placed on the verses that predict future events, especially concerning the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ.
2. The Jews remain God's chosen people, thus they continue to enjoy a special relationship with Him. God blesses those who bless the Jews and curses whoever curses the Jews.
3. The land which God promised to His "chosen" people through Abraham and the Patriarchs is "Eretz Israel", from the Nile to the Euphrates in modern-day Iraq. Christian Zionists believe this promise still applies today and therefore the modern day state of Israel is a miracle of God and fulfilment of Bible prophecy. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the occupation of Palestine after victory in 1967 demonstrate that God continues to favour the Jewish people, that He protects them and that they have every right to this land. Jews from around the world must return to live in the land God chose for them. (Genesis 15:18)
4. Jerusalem (or "Zion") is the eternal and exclusive capital of the State of Israel, which must remain under its sovereignty and must never be divided. (Isaiah 52:1).
5. A replica of the Jewish temple built by King Solomon must be rebuilt on Temple Mount. (Exodus 25:8, Ezekiel 43:19) This means that the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque must be destroyed.
6. Christian Zionists believe that Arabs do not have the same status or rights to the land in Eretz Israel as the Jews.
7. Believers will be "raptured" to heaven before the last battle - Armageddon. Therefore Jesus will return twice, first secretly, to rescue true believers out of this world, but his second return will be visible, accompanied by his saints, to judge the world.

It was when I met a Palestinian for the very first time that I began to question these beliefs. It was July



1988 and not only was he a Palestinian, but he was a Christian Anglican vicar from Nablus! Until then I thought that all Palestinians were terrorists and never realized that Palestinian Christians still existed.

On that occasion I had the opportunity to “sit at the feet” of Bilal. He told us the story of his family being made refugees when the state of Israel was established. Actually meeting a Palestinian and hearing the story of the grave injustice experienced by his family stimulated me on a quest to learn a different rhetoric, through which I developed friendships with many Palestinians, Muslim and Christian.

I have made a 180 degree change in my understanding of Israel/Palestine. I believe that believers in Christian Zionism need to be challenged. Having them witness the reality on the ground can help them let go of a belief which is embedded in judgementalism and bad theology.

This change in my life has been dramatic and traumatic, however it has also been liberating.

Abbas rejects Israel's refugee 'trick'

Mahmoud Abbas tried to get Israel to let 150,000 Palestinians fleeing war in Syria resettle in the West Bank, but dropped the request after the Jewish state demanded they first give up their right of return, he said.

Syria is home to around 500,000 Palestinian refugees, some of whom have been fleeing the country because of civil war between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and fighters seeking to topple his government.

Israel has said it has no plans to allow them to enter the West Bank, which it has occupied since 1967. "I asked the Secretary General of the United Nations, I told him to ask our neighbours to let us bring them to Palestine. Four days later the surprise answer came to me, (the Israelis) agree," Abbas told Lebanon-based Al-Mayadeen television in an interview broadcast on Friday.

"They agree on one condition...that each one of the refugees renounce their right of return. We said, forget it," Abbas said.

Abbas also told a group of Egyptian journalists in Cairo late Wednesday that Ban contacted Israel on his behalf.

Abbas said Ban was told Israel "agreed to the return of those refugees to Gaza and the West Bank, but on condition that each refugee ... sign a statement that he doesn't have the right of return (to Israel)."

"So we rejected that and said it's better they die in Syria than give up their right of return," Abbas told the group. Some of his comments were published Thursday by the Palestinian news website Sama.

The Israeli condition linked to the resettlement offer made it impossible for Abbas to accept, said Ahmed Hanoun, an official in the refugee department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the umbrella group Abbas heads.

"I think the Israelis were not serious about this offer," said Hanoun. "If they were, they would have endorsed the return of these people who live in misery, and not to blackmail them to relinquish their legal rights."

Around 5 million Palestinian refugees live in U.N.-run camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank and Syria, after they or their ancestors fled or were forced from homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war of Israel's founding.

Palestinians believe U.N. General Assembly resolutions enshrine a right for these refugees to return to their original lands, an idea consistently rejected by Israel.

Their fate has been one of the thorniest sticking points throughout the decades.

Twenty thousand Palestinian refugees have fled from Syria into neighbouring Lebanon, joining 400,000 Palestinians living in hard-scrabble ghettos in that small nation.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denied it would let Palestinians from Syria into the West Bank. Israeli government representatives told Reuters they had no information on such talks.(1)

Stateless and hapless as ever

Syria's Palestinian refugees are being both thumped and cold-shouldered

HELD in a hostel for migrant workers, Palestinians who have fled Syria's civil war pass their days exchanging pictures on their mobile phones of the corpses of relations who failed to get out. "They are here till the war ends," says a sympathetic Jordanian policeman, who mans a checkpoint near the hostel to bar their way out.

Close relations in Amman need permits to visit their camp in the midst of a barren free-trade zone rather hopefully named Cyber City, near Jordan's border with Syria. Families cram into small rooms, with grey UN blankets for doors. Each inmate lives on coupons worth \$30 a month that they can spend at a lone camp stall. Unlike the Syrians who stream into Jordan each night in their hundreds, no one formally recognises the Palestinians as asylum seekers. The UN shunts responsibility from one agency to the next. Yet the Palestinians who are let into Jordan are relatively lucky. The UN says three-quarters of the 500,000 Palestinian refugees who have been living in Syria have been harmed in the uprising. More than 600 of them are thought to have been killed.

Rebels and regime forces are recruiting and arming Palestinians, dragging their camps into the fray. Some rebels have sought refuge and medical treatment in the camps, hopeful that the UN agency responsible for Palestinian welfare might offer international protection. Some later sought to use the camps as a haven to shoot at loyalist forces, who shot back. Shelling since the summer has emptied Deraa, a dismal Palestinian camp of some 23,000 near Syria's border with Jordan.

The regime has turned to Palestinian militias it has sponsored for decades. Some have eagerly responded but others, most notably the Islamist movement, Hamas, have changed sides. So the camps have become battlefields. Seeking safety in numbers, many Palestinians in Deraa fled to Damascus, only to find themselves caught in the crossfire again. Dozens have been killed in fighting in Yarmouk, a camp-cum-suburb on the edge of Damascus that is home to 80% of Syria's Palestinians. On November 12th Palestine Street, a main road to the camp, erupted in flames.

Some 10,000 have fled to Lebanon, but only 1,600 have got into Jordan. That figure is surprisingly low, since Jordan houses half of the 400,000 Syrians who have fled the carnage, and Deraa is only five minutes' drive from the border. Unlike Syrians, Palestinians need visas to enter Jordan, which for over a year, say exiles, have not been dished out. Some forge Syrian papers to slip in and hide with relatives. Palestinians caught crossing are usually sent back. "Wein Baba (Where's Daddy)?" cries a toddler, banging his fists. His father handed himself in to Jordan's authorities but within three hours was back in Syria; soon after he was killed. "Neighbours aren't very welcoming to Palestinians," sighs a senior UN refugee-agency man, Filippo Grandi.

For decades, Jordan's monarchs did more than any state to provide a haven for Palestinians. But the influx has reduced the kingdom's indigenous Bedouin to a minority. Though they dominate the armed services, they fear that letting any more in will turn their realm into a Palestinian state. At the Cyber City checkpoint, the police have stitched "Jordan First" emblems onto the lapels of their uniforms, as if to imply that Palestinians come second.

Jordan has other reasons for fearing a spillover. Some 3,800 rebels have slipped in alongside the refugees. Jordan fears they may not only provoke Mr Assad's regime to strike back, perhaps with car-bombs, but may also raise the flag of jihad to recruit Jordanians to their cause. Last month Jordan said it had uncovered three Salafist plots, two of them orchestrated by Syrians, to bomb civilian and Western targets in the kingdom. America has sent 150-plus military advisers to Jordan, perhaps to prepare for the creation of a Syrian buffer zone across the border from Jordan.

With Jordanians this week taking to the streets across the kingdom to protest against rises in the cost of fuel, the government and the king are unusually edgy. Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, with its ties to Hamas, is limbering up for a showdown. All of this has tempered the king's initial eagerness for a new regime in Syria.(2)

New European Union assistance for the Palestinian people

The European Union has decided to bring forward the first part of its 2013 assistance package for the Palestinian people to the beginning of the year in order to ensure that the support to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA), who provide vital services to the Palestinian people, is not interrupted.

The Decision has two components. For the first, €60 million will be allocated to the PEGASE mechanism, which supports the Palestinian National Development Plan by helping the PA to finance its budget deficit and implement its reform agenda, meet its obligations towards civil employees, pensioners and most vulnerable citizens, and maintain the functioning of the administration and the provision of essential public services to the population. This amount will contribute to the Palestinian Authority's payments of salaries and pensions for the first three months of 2013.

The Second component allocates an initial amount of €40 million to UNWRA's 2013 regular budget (General Fund) in order to support the education, health, relief and social services programmes which UNWRA is responsible for providing for Palestine refugees in West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

High Representative/Vice/President Catherine Ashton said: "The European Union is again doing its utmost to underpin the ability of the PA and UNRWA to deliver essential services to the Palestinian people without interruption. We are committed to continuing our support while urging other donors to follow suit. This year we are also earmarking a specific allocation for the Jerash refugee camp in Jordan, which is home to some of the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees in the Middle East."

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle, announcing the adoption of the package, said: "The Palestinian Authority has particular problems in obtaining donor funds early in the year. The EU is aware of this and, as a reliable donor, has taken steps to alleviate the problem. These funds for both the PA and UNWRA for early 2013 are vital for ensuring that there is no interruption in the provision of the basic health and education services which the Palestinian people need".

In addition to the two components financed from the 2013 budget, a further amount of €2 million is allocated from 2012 funds to rebuild shelters for around 100 of the poorest Palestinian refugee families in Jordan's Jerash Refugee Camp. (3)

Arab League Calls on Syrian Regime to Protect Palestinian Refugees

CAIRO -- Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil al-Araby made a call on the Syrian regime to protect the Palestinian refugees living in Syria.

In a written statement released on Monday, al-Araby called on the Syrian regime to protect the Palestinian refugees and reminded that killing the Palestinian refugees and related violent incidents were all violations of international laws and human rights."

I am highly concerned about the deaths of innocent Palestinian refugees in Syria. I was very concerned after hearing that Syrian war jets bombed the Yermuk camp in which Palestinian refugees lived," al-Araby stressed.

It is the Syrian administration who is responsible for the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, al-Araby stated.

The administration of countries in which Palestinian refugees live is responsible for the protection of the Palestinian refugees, al-Araby also said.

Since March 2011, 382 Palestinian refugees have been killed by Assad forces in Syria according to the database of the Syrian Revolutionary Martyrs.(4)

Gaza ceasefire offers chance to address 'root causes' of Israel-Palestine conflict – UN official

26 November 2012 – The head of the United Nations agency tasked with helping Palestinian refugees said today that the ceasefire halting the recent violence between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza offered a chance to "address the real problems underlying the crisis."

"It is of crucial... importance that we seize the opportunity provided by this tragic escalation," the Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA), Filippo Grandi, said in remarks at a meeting of the body's Advisory Commission, taking place by the Dead Sea in Jordan.

“Difficult political work would have to be carried out, including promoting and supporting lasting Palestinian unity,” he noted in reference to divisions among the wider Palestinian leadership, according to an UNRWA news release.

“But failing to act now will have dire consequences,” he added.

The ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, which controls Gaza, was announced on 21 November, just over a week after the start of the latest wave of deadly violence, which included rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza, and Israeli airstrikes on targets in the Strip.

In his remarks, Mr. Grandi also noted that an Israeli blockade on Gaza, imposed since 2007, was illegal, and the “greatest danger is to return to the status quo ante, and restore the prison-like conditions of Gaza.” He said it would be “only a matter of time (until) violence resumes” if there was such a return.

Mr. Grandi called for the blockade, which Israel has reportedly said it maintains for security reasons, to be “lifted in all its aspects.” He mentioned crossings, fishing zones, imports and exports as aspects of the blockade in need of address, and said there should be “proper guarantees given to – and by – all parties in respect of the security of all civilians.”

Created by the UN General Assembly in 1949, UNWRA is the main provider of education, health, social and other basic services to the five million registered Palestinian refugees in Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The refugees trace their roots to those displaced amid the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948. The Assembly created the Advisory Commission, which comprises 25 UN Member States and three Observer entities, to “advise and assist” UNWRA.

On Saturday, UNWRA re-opened all but two of its 245 schools in Gaza, according to the agency. It added that all 21 of its health centres resumed operations on Sunday, while it also named three crossings into the Strip that were open.

“The fragile calm in Gaza seems to hold,” UNRWA said in a situation report, while also highlighting that a Palestinian youth was killed and 19 other people injured on Friday by fire from the Israel Defense Forces. “The people of Gaza used the official holiday on Friday to mourn their beloved ones, to rest, and to somehow find a way back into daily life,” the report noted. “The first heavy winter storms, accompanied by strong winds, rain, and cold temperatures, brought further hardship to all those living in damaged homes.”

Mr. Grandi also briefed the Commission on UNRWA’s work amid the crisis in Syria, where many of UNRWA’s beneficiaries are located and where violence – since an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began over 20 months ago – has killed at least 20,000 people, mostly civilians, and spawned more than 440,000 refugees.

“Concerns about the welfare of the half-million Palestine refugees there have grown as they are increasingly affected by the conflict,” the Commissioner-General said. “UNRWA’s strategy in Syria, as in Gaza, is to be there, to maintain services, and to address the growing emergency needs as much as possible.”⁽⁵⁾

UNRWA responds to Israel TV’s Gaza war claims

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees issued a response this week to an Israeli TV channel’s claim that Palestinian militants had used UNRWA facilities to fire rockets at Israel during its war on Gaza.

During a recent interview, a reporter from Israel’s Channel Two News claimed that during Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9, Hamas militants had been operating from inside UNRWA installations and attempting to fire rockets at Israel.

The popular Israeli news channel did not provide any evidence to substantiate the claims made by its reporter.

“We heard this misinformation during the war when there was shelling on and around the Agency’s schools and our main warehouse in Gaza,” UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness said in a response that was published by Israel’s Channel Two News.

“There has never been any evidence produced to show that during the Gaza war militants were firing rockets into Israel from UNRWA installations,” he added.

Channel Two News said its publication of UNRWA's response to did not amount to a retraction, saying UNRWA's statement to that effect was "misleading".

'Battle of narratives'

But Guinness notes that the report's amendment is the third of its kind by major news organizations in the last several months.

"I want all journalists to know that these falsehoods will be confronted and that shoddy journalism will be exposed," he told Ma'an.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC, was forced last week to issue an apology, correction, and clarification to a report about UNRWA after a complaint from the Australian Labor Member of Parliament for Fremantle, Melissa Parke, UNRWA said.

The ABC broadcast contained factual errors and unsubstantiated claims about UNRWA's neutrality, which were made by a far-right ideologue, UNRWA said.

The agency said ABC admitted that the report "did not meet the requirements" of its Code of Practice and expressed its "regrets for this lapse in standards."

"This was an outrageous attack on UNRWA, a neutral UN agency that does essential human development and humanitarian work with some of the most disadvantaged, in one of the world's most unstable regions," Parke said.

Chris Guinness called the retractions a "decisive victory in the battle of narratives" concerning misinformation about the Gaza war.

Israel's military offensive on the Gaza Strip destroyed 18 schools and damaged over 280, a report by human rights agencies said a year after the war.

Three teachers and 86 children registered with UNRWA were killed in Operation Cast Lead, a three week offensive on the Gaza Strip which left nearly 1,400 Palestinians dead, including 300 children.

At the height of the war, nearly 60,000 people took refuge in UN facilities, including UNRWA schools. Despite having been given the GPS coordinates for all UN installations in Gaza, Israeli forces launched airstrikes on UN facilities, including the use of white phosphorous.

According to UN figures, Israel's military destroyed over 3,500 residential homes and made 20,000 people homeless during the 22-day assault.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed "outrage" in 2009 after Israeli shelling in and around UNRWA schools.

Ehud Barak, Israeli Defense Minister during the conflict, said the shelling of an UNRWA warehouse was a "grave mistake." (6)

Israeli TV admits: No rockets were ever fired from UNRWA schools in Gaza during "Cast Lead"

Another staple of Israeli propaganda has been busted, as Israeli television has – years late – admitted that claims rockets were fired from UNRWA schools in Gaza were false.

UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, issued a statement yesterday, in eastern occupied Jerusalem, that says in part:

Israel's highest-rating news programme, Channel Two News, has published a statement correcting false claims that rockets were fired from schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) during the Gaza war in 2008-2009. The statement makes clear that Israeli officials themselves acknowledged that such claims were false and that there was no evidence to support them.

"We heard this misinformation during the war when there was shelling on and around the Agency's schools and our main warehouse in Gaza", said UNRWA Spokesperson Chris Guinness, "but Israeli officials made it clear to the UN during the war itself that they knew claims about militants in UNRWA installations were completely false. Constant, unchecked repetition of this misinformation has been very damaging to the Agency and has produced some very poor and biased journalism, which I will continue

to confront. This is the third time in just a few months that a major news organisation has issued a public retraction because of false information about UNRWA.”

The UNRWA statement also notes that during its offensive, Israel destroyed other UN facilities, including warehouses containing millions of dollars worth of desperately needed relief supplies. (7)

Systematic targeting of Gaza's schools?

In part, the constant propaganda refrain must have been an attempt to justify what can only have been systematic targeting of Palestinian schools by Israel.

As a 2009 report (PDF) by Oxfam, Amnesty International and 14 other European human rights and aid agencies – one year after “Operation Cast Lead” - stated:

During the military offensive, 18 schools were destroyed, (including eight government schools, two private schools and eight kindergartens) and at least 280 were damaged. Six of the destroyed government schools were in North Gaza alone, affecting almost 9,000 students who had to relocate to other schools.

The report, *Failing Gaza: No building, No recovery, No more excuses*, added:

- There are 640 schools in Gaza - 221 UNRWA schools, 383 government schools and 36 private schools - serving more than 440,000 students.
- 88% of UNRWA schools and 82% of government schools operate on a double shift. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools are currently operating three shifts per day.
- 164 students and 12 teachers from government schools were killed during the military offensive. A further 454 students and five teachers were injured. 86 children and three teachers from UNRWA schools were killed and a further 402 students and 14 teachers were injured.

What this means is that with 18 schools destroyed and 280 damaged - 46 percent - almost half - of all schools in Gaza were hit by the Israeli army.

References:

- 1) <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=102347> (Viewed 30/1/2013)
- 2) <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21566708-syrias-palestinian-refugees-are-being-both-thumped-and-cold-shouldered-stateless> (Viewed 30/1/2013)
- 3) http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-18_en.htm?locale=en (Viewed 30/1/2013)
- 4) <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/145808/arab-league-calls-on-syrian-regime-to-protect-palestinian-refugees.html> (Viewed 30/1/2013)
- 5) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43601&Cr=&Cr1=#.UQIDeh26fYQ> (Viewed 30/1/2013)
- 6) <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=532419>
- 7) <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-tv-admits-no-rockets-were-ever-fired-unrwa-schools-gaza-during-cast-lead>

Trading Away Peace: How Europe helps sustain illegal Israeli settlements*

This ground breaking report shows how Europe, although deeming Israeli settlements as illegal, is supporting the very infrastructure of settlement building and destroying the chance of peace.

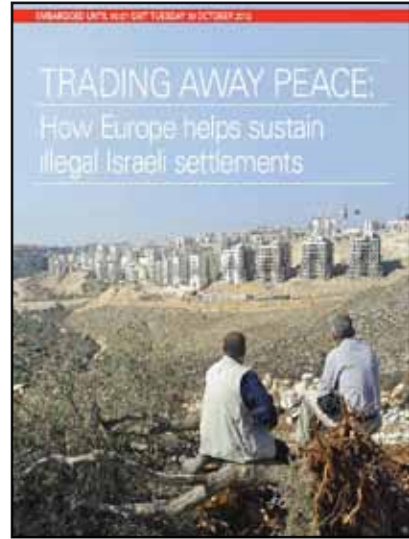
The European union's position is absolutely clear: Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are "illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-state solution impossible". yet this report shows how European policy helps sustain the settlements. It reveals that the EU imports approximately fifteen times more from the illegal settlements than from the Palestinians themselves.

Through the establishment of settlements, successive Israeli governments have created a discriminatory two-tier system in the West Bank with settlers enjoying all the rights and benefits of Israeli citizenship, and Palestinians subject to Israeli military laws that deprive them of their fundamental rights.

Movement of Palestinians within the West Bank and access to essential services, including hospitals, remains hampered by some 542 obstacles to movement.

Settlement farmers and manufacturers benefit from wide-ranging Israeli government subsidies and enjoy easy access to international markets via government-built roads that bypass Palestinian populated areas. In stark contrast, the Palestinian economy is severely constrained by Israeli restrictions on access to markets and natural resources, the annual cost of which has been estimated at eur 5.2 billion or 85% of the total Palestinian GDP.

The most recent estimate of the value of EU imports from settlements provided by the Israeli government to the World Bank is \$300m (€230m) a year; this is approximately fifteen times the annual value of EU imports from Palestinians.



"We consider it necessary that the EU bring an end to the import of settlement products which are, in contradiction with EU labeling regulations, marketed as originating in Israel."

Javier Solana, Richard von Weizsäcker, Helmut Schmidt, Romano Prodi, Felipe Gonzales, Lionel Jospin and 20 other former European leaders (1)

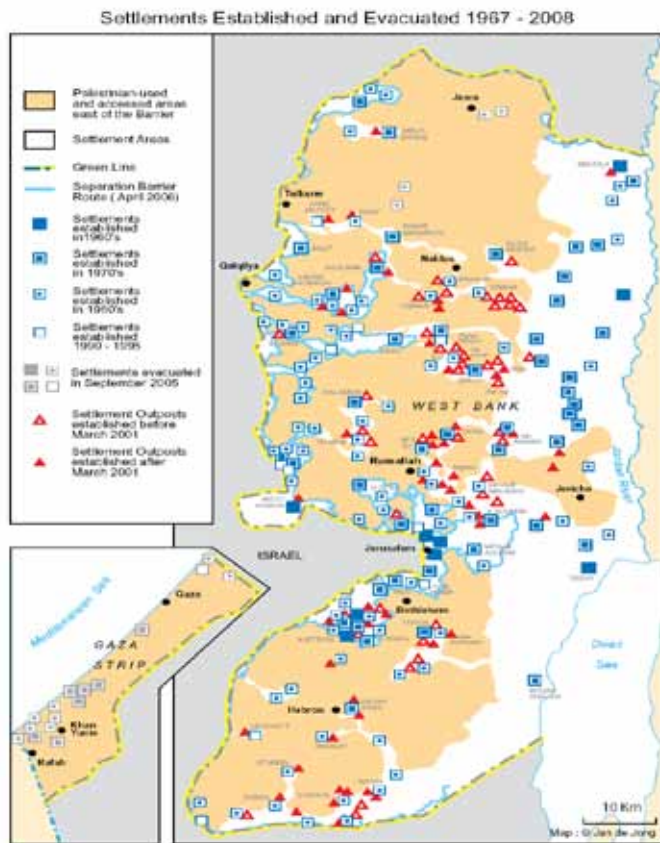


Beyond the trade in settlement goods, some European-owned companies have invested in settlements and related infrastructure or are providing services to them. Adding to the contradictions at the heart of EU policy towards Israel's illegal settlements, the EU has failed to fully exclude settlements from the benefits of its cooperation programmes and bilateral agreements with Israel.

"Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal and cannot be regarded as a part of the territory of Israel. Therefore, goods produced in these settlements by Israeli companies cannot be regarded as goods originating in Israel."

European Commission

This groundbreaking report suggests how the EU should change its trading with Israel. It identifies concrete measures that the EU and its 27 member states should adopt to restore credibility to the EU's positions and contain the settlement policy. At the highest level, they deserve serious consideration.



▲ Settlements Established & Evacuated 1967-2008
 Foundation for Middle East Peace and Jan de Jong, Feb 2009

* http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/trading_away_peace_-_embargoed_copy_of_designed_report.pdf

(1) Open letter to the President of the European Council, 'EU must sanction Israel over its refusal to obey international law and must recognize the State of Palestine' (2 December 2010): <http://www.romanoprodu.it/documenti/eu-must-sanctionisrael-over-its-refusal-to-obey-international-law-and-must-recognize-the-state-of-palestine_2401.html>.

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 2011 when over 50 European parliamentarians visited Gaza.



WWW.PRC.ORG.UK



100h Crown House, North Circular Road, London NW10 7PN, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8453 0919 Fax: +44 (0) 20 8453 0994
www.prc.org.uk e: info@prc.org.uk