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Am I Not a Human?

# The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugee



*Edited by*

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Rana Sa'adah

*Translated by*

Salma al-Houry

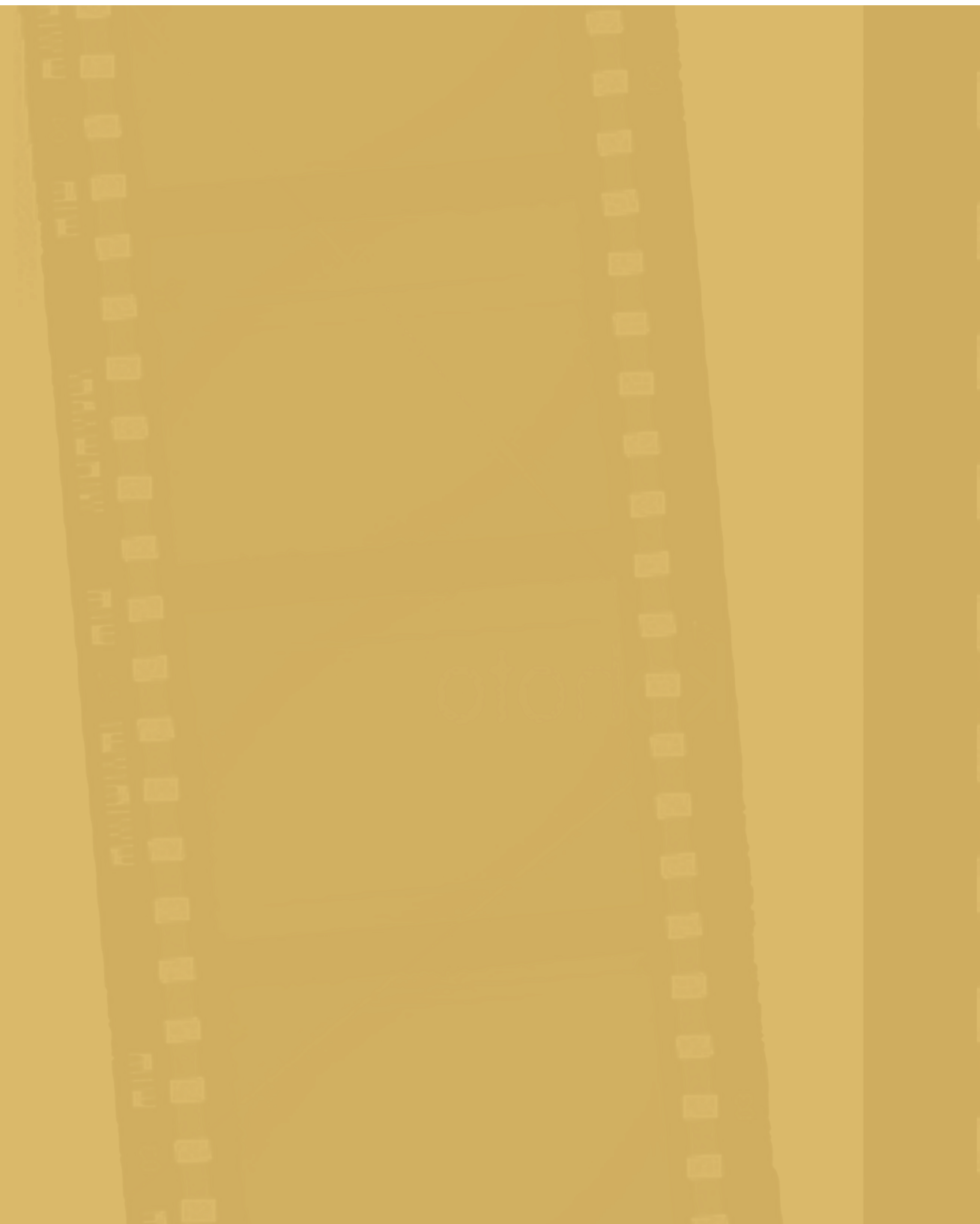
*By*

Mariam Itani

Mo'in Manna'



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations



Am I not a Human?

(6)

Book series discussing  
the sufferance of the  
Palestinian people  
under the Israeli  
occupation

Editors

Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh

Rana Sa'adah

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**Al-Zaytouna Centre  
For Studies & Consultations  
Beirut - Lebanon**

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## Foreword

Statistics of early 2010 estimate that the Palestinian refugee population has reached over 7.5 million refugee, i.e., approximately 70% of the Palestinian population. With the majority of them displaced in 1948 and denied their right to return until today, these refugees constitute the oldest and largest living refugee problem in contemporary history. For more than 60 years, these millions experienced suffering and hardships as daily routine; waiting endlessly for the realization of their right and their dream of returning to their homeland.

Hence, al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations presents to the readers this book, the 6<sup>th</sup> of the humanitarian series *Am I Not a Human?*, entitled “The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugees.”

The book aims at comprehensively covering the various aspects of the refugees’ suffering, since their expulsion in 1948; their distribution and living conditions (legal, social, economic, education, health, and security) in places of refuge and Diaspora; their legal status and rights in international law, namely their right to compensation and return; and the various settlement and naturalization schemes that were deliberately planned but failed against the refugees’ determinacy to resist such schemes, and their clinching to their right of return. It concludes by arguing that the right of return is inalienable, sacred, legitimate, and most importantly feasible when the intentions are sincere and the wills are put into serious action and pressure against the Israeli Occupation.





## *Introduction*

The story of a Palestinian woman refugee, living in Gaza refugee camp near the city of Jerash (in northern Jordan) in a wretched state and abject poverty, epitomizes the plight of millions of refugees. For, in reply to a question by Jordan's monarch who was visiting her home regarding her needs and an offer of a royal gift, she explained that she had but a single demand. When asked what it was, she said, "Return me to my village and my family's home in Palestine."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of their miserable circumstances and their dispersal throughout the world for over sixty years, the Palestinian refugees still cling to their right and wish to return to their homeland from which the Israeli occupation drove them out, and is still doing so through its various repressive measures.

This book is the story of seeking refuge and of the suffering that began with the first exodus; it is the story of perseverance and hope for





a return, in spite of the long wait. For, to the refugee, his homeland is “there,” where the house that his father and grandfather had described to him is, where the door whose key his father had given him is, where everyone speaks the dialect that his mother had taught him, sings the same songs and plays the same games, where the family that today is scattered all over the world is. And he is “there” where no promise of citizenship or any other inducement can divert him from his wish and right to return.



## Memoirs of a Refugee

### *My Father Said, "It is Important that You Do not Forget"*

My father said to me, "... and we went out at night; one of your twin brothers on your mother's shoulder and the other in her lap. Because of her extreme panic and fear, and without being aware of it, one of them fell. She walked more than a hundred meters before realizing that her son is no longer on her shoulder; under fire, she retraced her steps to look for him and find him in the hollow of a stone..."

He said to me, "... in the turmoil of emigrating and leaving, one of the women ran to the bed of her sleeping son, but instead of carrying him and running, she carried the pillow, thinking that it was her sleeping baby. She did not realize her mistake until she had found herself on the other bank of the river, and that was a day. And this is a day."

He said, "... I was about 25 years old when we left Beersheba. Your late grandfather, may God have mercy on him, proceeded with us to a mountaintop located west of Madaba, overlooking the Jordan Rift Valley. From the mountaintop, at sunset, you can still see Jerusalem's lights. Furthermore, directly below us, *al-Karamah* battle took place. Since 1948 and until today, we sometimes go to the mountaintop to stare at Jerusalem's lights..."

He said, "... the Palestinian refugees' keys that they carry with them, among their old belongings and possessions... these keys are not a myth... for if they were so, they should be rusted. Yet, until now, sixty years past the tragedy of expulsion and seeking refuge, they still glitter under every morning's sun."

And he said, "... what is important is that you do not forget."

- From the memoirs of Yusuf Abu Lause, *al-Khaleej* newspaper, Sharja (United Arab Emirates), 23/5/2008.



## *Chapter 1: The Palestinian's Right to His Land*

On 2/11/1917, and in an official letter sent by its foreign secretary, Lord Arthur James Balfour to the Zionist leader Lord Rothschild, the British government made a promise in the form of a declaration and a formal statement of policy stating that “His Majesty’s government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>2</sup> Britain completed its occupation of Palestine in September of 1918, and established Palestine’s current geographical borders, in coordination with the French colonial power, during the period 1920–1923.<sup>3</sup>

Since that date, a heightened activity began in Jewish immigration to Palestine to seize lands and build settlements. And so, after the total





Palestinian land owned by Jews in 1918 was no more than 240 donums (a ratio of 1.56%) of the total area of Palestine, the lands controlled by Jewish settlers, resorting to various methods of deception and bribery, together with British support, became around 1.8 million donums in 1948;<sup>4</sup> and all of that under the supervision and sponsorship of the British colonial rule.

At first, Israeli propaganda began to spread the statement that, before they immigrated to it and settled in it, Palestine was a barren lifeless land (a land without a people). Yet the Palestinian people's roots go deep in that land from time immemorial. For the city of Jericho is considered one of the oldest cities in the world, as it was built around 8000 BC. In 2500 BC, the Canaanites emigrated from the Arabian Peninsula to Palestine, and the land became known by their name. By the year 2000 BC, they had built about 2000 cities and villages, among them the cities of Shechem (Nablus and Balata), Bissan, Ashkelon, Acre, Haifa, Hebron, Ashdod, Aker, Beersheba, Bethlehem... and others. It is worth mentioning that the Prophet Abraham came to Palestine around the year 1900 BC, and the Bible acknowledges that it was then a thriving land called "the Land of Canaan."<sup>5</sup>

Since ancient times, Palestine has been subjected to numerous invasions, and its land has been the battleground of many wars. Yet, in spite of all of that, it has remained Canaanite Arabian until the year one thousand BC.<sup>6</sup> The Israelites ruled part of Palestine (and not all) for around four centuries (1000 BC–586 BC). Their rule ended the same as that of others, such as the Assyrians, the Persians, the Pharaohs, the Greek and the Romans. Throughout, the Palestinian people remained settled in their land, before the Israelites arrived, during their stay,



and after their departure. These same people embraced Islam, adopted Arabic as their language, and remained there throughout the past 4,500 years.

Historians say that, largely, the Palestinians, in particular the villagers among them, are descendants of the Canaanites and other ancient peoples, and whoever joined them from among the peoples of the sea (PLST or the Palestinians), or from the Arabs and Muslims who settled in the land following the Arab–Islamic conquest (15 AH/636 AD).<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the period of Crusader rule that lasted 90 years (1099–1187), Palestine remained, since the date of that conquest, an Arab country under Islamic rule until 1918 AD.<sup>8</sup>

Israeli propaganda also resorted to false claims, spreading the statement that the Palestinians left their country out of their own free will, and that they had sold their lands to Jewish settlers; aiming to mislead public opinion and falsify related facts.

The falsity of the Israeli propaganda and rumors regarding Palestine was exposed later, especially when the plight of Palestinian refugees became well known in international circles. There were repeated United Nations (UN) resolutions calling on the occupation authorities to implement the right of return; meanwhile the refugees' insistence on exercising their right of return to their homeland has become very clear, in spite of the passing of years and the various pressures exerted on them.

On 24/7/1922, Britain obtained a ruling concerning its mandate over Palestine, in Article two of which, it is stated: "The Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish



national home.”<sup>9</sup> This means that the British mandate authorities were concerned with and committed to taking the necessary legal and administrative measures and procedures that would help the Jews immigrate to Palestine and settle in its territories, in preparation for the establishment of their national homeland on it.

In 1800, the Jews in Palestine numbered around five thousands. By 1876, their numbers did not exceed 14 thousands. Then, beginning in 1882, and with the rise of the “Jewish question” in Europe and after the emergence of the “Global Zionist Movement,” Jewish immigration took on a more intensive and organized character. Still, the number of Jews in Palestine in 1918 did not exceed 55 thousands, representing 8% of the population. Nevertheless, with the support of British occupation and coercion, the Jews were able to multiply their numbers to reach 650 thousands in 1948, that is, about 31.7% of the population. This means that they had remained a minority even at the moment when they established their entity. This fact drove the Zionist gangs to carry out massacres, carnages and ethnic cleansing operations to force the Palestinian people off their land, and that led to the emergence of the refugee problem.

Those behind the Zionist plan realized that it is impossible to establish a state without expelling the Palestinians, and so in 1937 the “Jewish Agency for Israel” formed “The Population Transfer Committee,” whose task was “to transfer the Palestinian population in order to preserve the ‘Jewishness’ of the state [Israel].” The Zionist archives abound with documents of plans, resolutions, writings and statements by Zionist leaders and thinkers calling for the expulsion of Palestinians and tying the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to the extent of Zionism’s success in driving out the Palestinians.







These documents were, at the time, classified; but with the passing of decades, they were made available to researchers. Furthermore, many Israeli institutions have published numerous “memoirs” and “diaries” by Zionist leaders in which they reveal their positions that call for the deportation of Palestinians. From the start, Theodor Herzl, the founder of the World Zionist Organization wrote, “... the expropriation and the removal of the poor (Palestinians) must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.” Yosef Weitz, the director of the Jewish National Fund’s Land Settlement Department and the head of the Israeli government’s Official Transfer Committee of 1948 wrote, “Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country... the only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighboring countries.” This was confirmed by Benny Morris, the Jewish researcher, in a document dated 30/6/1948 that makes clear that “Jewish military attacks were the main direct cause of the exodus, followed by Arab fear due to the fall of a nearby town.”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the Palestinians held fast to their land and resisted the occupation, beginning with its first attempts to expel them. For in 1886, Palestinian peasants clashed with the settlers who took control of their lands in al-Khudairah region. There were repeated clashes and protests using all available means. An example of the forms that the

“And before their [the Palestinians’] eyes, we turn into our homestead the land and villages in which they and their forefathers have lived... We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and gun barrel, we shall not be able to plant a tree or build a house...”

- Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, as quoted in: Benjamin Beit Hallahmi, *Original Sins: Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993).





## *Where Did They Go?*

“At the end of 1947, they [my Arab neighbors] disappeared. It was in the winter, in the middle of eighth grade. And the strange thing is that it wasn’t in the least traumatic. It was all done quietly, without any dramatics. They just sort of evaporated. I’m not even sure I saw them packing. I’m not really sure I saw them collecting their things and melting away down the slope behind Schneller Camp. But I remember Deir Yassin well. I remember that we were in our classroom in the Beit Hakarem high school when we saw the smoke rising from Deir Yassin [an Arab village on the western edge of Jerusalem where a massacre was perpetrated in 1948]... Then came obsessive collecting of Mandate period maps to locate the villages that had been erased, the life that ceased to be. And the feeling that without them this is a barren country, a disabled country, a country that caused an entire nation to disappear.”

Haim Hanegbi, an Israeli writer

The truth is, they did not evaporate, they did not carry their luggage. They had no chance to wipe their tears in public. They did not go voluntarily; they were led out to the international open space, and became refugees.

Haim Hanegbi’s testimony hides the departure scene. For the Israeli documents, which were classified for a long time, paint the full picture. Benny Morris, one of the New Historians, dared to expose the first historical lie, and said that the Palestinians did not sell their land, we expelled them by implementing the Plan Dalet . What is in the scene that Haim omitted? “Deir Yassin was attacked. The Irgun and Lehi Zionist paramilitary groups attacked the village (120 fighters). The loudspeaker called on women, children, and old people to leave their homes and take refuge on the mountainside. Afterwards, the Jews carried out a massacre in the village, without making any distinction... they carried part of the captives in cars, and rode with them in Jerusalem’s streets, in a “victory parade”, among the cheers of the Jewish multitude.

They did not secretly leave, as Haim had suggested, because the end scene, as found in the texts, went as follows: they were “taken to town in trucks, paraded in the city streets [of Jerusalem], then taken back to the site and killed with rifle and machine-gun fire.” Thus, Israeli ingenuity managed to kill and slaughter 245 Palestinians.

► Nasri al-Sayegh, *al-Nakbah* in its 61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary, *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 15/5/2009.





Palestinians' objections and their dissatisfaction with the occupational practices of settlers took occurred in May of 1890, when a delegation of Jerusalem's dignitaries voiced their objections to Jerusalem's Administrative Officer (Mutassarif), Rashad Pasha, for his bias to Jewish settlers. Then, on 24/6/1891, Jerusalem's dignitaries presented a petition to the Ottoman Grand Vizier (the Prime Minister) demanding a stop to the immigration of Russian Jews to Palestine.<sup>11</sup>

The Palestinians continued to express their refusal of Jewish settlement in Palestine, sometimes by directly expressing their objections to authorities, and other times through clashes. While the Jewish settlers used to exercise their influence, later using it on The Party of Union and Progress that was in control in the Ottoman Empire.

Using bribery, forgery and other devious means, the Jews were able to expropriate large areas of land. Thus, by the end of Ottoman rule in 1918, the Jews had owned about 420 thousand donums of Palestinian lands, which they bought from landowners who were either Lebanese feudal lords or Christian Palestinians, or at public auctions in which the Ottoman state used to sell the lands of peasants who were unable to pay their due taxes.<sup>12</sup>

During their occupation (1918–1948), it became clear that the British intended to establish a Jewish occupation state on Palestinian lands. During this period, the Jews were able to expropriate about a million and 380 thousand donums of land, that is, about 5.1% of the total area of Palestine. Most of this took place in the form of grants by the British government of state-owned lands, or by way of big non-Palestinian feudal lords living abroad who were officially and in practice barred from entering Palestine. As an example of this, Herbert Samuel (a Jewish





Zionist), who represented Britain as the High Commissioner of Palestine (1920–1925), granted the Jews 175 thousand donums of the most fertile lands on the Palestinian coast between Haifa and Qisarya. His huge grants were repeated of other coastal lands in the Negev and on the coast of the Dead Sea. Yet the total area of land, which the Jews were able to obtain from the Palestinians themselves up to 1948, did not exceed 1% of the area of Palestine, in spite of their repeated pressures on and their enticements of Palestinian peasants, the poor among them in particular. For the Palestinians were aware of the Zionist conspiracy contrived against them, and so they joined forces to keep the Jews from usurping their lands, regardless of how aggravated the situation had become.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Palestinian people were subjected to unjust measures and laws and to oppressive administrative practices that contributed to an increase in people's financial hardships; this is in addition to acts of terrorism, mass and individual murders, the destruction of homes and villages, scare tactics and organized psychological war. All of these led to the expulsion of native citizens from their homes, allowing the Jews to establish their own state on their land. Moreover, the Jewish occupation of Palestine did not start in the forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but rather long before that, even if that particular period witnessed the peak in expulsion and displacement operations with the use of varied methods, and the ugliest.



## **Memoirs of a Refugee** *The Day the Village Fell*

I was ten years old when “al-Muftakhara” fell. I was not given the honor of participating in its defense. However, for as long as I live, there will remain printed in my memory the images of the village’s men carrying their few old weapons to defend it against the legions of Zionist gangs, backed by artillery, tanks and heavy machine guns. I remember the faces of those who fell in the battle for its defense. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the village was erased from the map by Israel, I still wish to rebuild all that which was demolished, in all its small details.

- Part of the memories of Ahmad Musa Taha, Abu Musa from al-Muftakhara village in Safad District (al-Husayniyyah camp), *al-Khaleej*, 14/5/2008.



## *Chapter 2: Al-Nakbah and the Expulsion*

On 29/11/1947, and with the support of the United States of America, the UN passed Resolution 181 calling for the partition of Palestine into two states: a Jewish state that occupies 54.7% of the land, inhabited by 498 thousand Jewish settlers and 497 thousand Arab Palestinians, and an Arab state that occupies 44.8% of the land, inhabited by 725 thousand Palestinians and 10 thousand Jewish settlers.<sup>14</sup> But the Zionist gangs plans to displace the Palestinians were already in place, since they did not want their state to become bi-national; they knew that the increase in the Palestinian population is so high that they will become a majority in a few years.





The Jewish settlers used the passing of this resolution as a starting point for “a series of terrorist acts that increased in intensity following the withdrawal of British troops from Palestine; and that paved the way to the eruption of the 1948 war.”<sup>15</sup> The attacks by armed Zionist gangs grew in intensity until they turned into an all-out war in which they committed at least 34 massacres,<sup>16</sup> destroyed 478 villages of the 585 in existence in the territories occupied in 1948, and expelled the inhabitants of 531 villages. This led to the expulsion of more than 804 thousand Palestinians outside what is now called Israel; 30 thousand others were dislodged from their homes to other areas within the occupied territories of 1948.<sup>17</sup>

The Zionist gangs were not satisfied with seizing the lands designated to them by the Partition Plan, they appropriated more lands from the regions designated for the Arab state, and expelled their inhabitants from them. Statistics show that “one third of refugees... came from areas placed by the Partition Plan within the Jewish state, while the remaining two thirds came from areas placed by the same plan within the Arab state.”<sup>18</sup> We say this because a person’s suffering begins on the first day of his being forced to leave his land and his country. Furthermore, the wider the area that was emptied of its people, the more the number of refugees grew and the more the human suffering resulting from this expulsion grew.

These are not the only facts that concern what had happened to the Palestinian people, much more was revealed in the report of Count Bernadotte, the Swedish UN Security Council mediator, which he presented to the General Secretary of the UN on 16/9/1948. This prompted the Zionist Stern Gang to assassinate him on 17/9/1948,<sup>19</sup>





because, in part, he laid bare the magnitude of the massacres and other crimes of annihilation and ethnic cleansing committed by the occupation forces against the peaceful Palestinian people.

Among “the Palestinian holocausts,” we recall that of al-Tirah mentioned in the UN archive no. (DAG–13/3.3.1:10), attested to by more than 15 witnesses, men and women: when, on 25/7/1948, the occupation soldiers arrested around 60 to 80 persons, men, women and children, most of whom were old people and infirm, and some were blind. Whereas the soldiers brought gallons full of petrol and started pouring it over these people, then they ignited it and started to shoot them with bullets. The inhabitants screamed and called for help, while the soldiers watched and laughed. The outcome of this crime was the burning and killing of about 55 persons.<sup>20</sup> There is also the notorious massacre of Deir Yassin that took place during the night of 10/4/1948, when 250 Arab Palestinians were slaughtered, both Muslims and Christians.<sup>21</sup>

The fifth volume of this series (Israeli Massacres of the Palestinian People) discusses in detail the most conspicuous of these massacres. However, the question remains... is it conceivable for a group that says it was subjected to a holocaust to commit the same horror, and in a manner that surpasses description, against innocent blameless people?

And so that no one would view these acts as taking place at a moment of losing control, when the monster hidden inside the Israeli soldiers broke loose, we assert that these were planned actions that came within the context of a scheme devised by this army’s command; for in the course of praising and appreciating what a group of Zionist gangs had done, Menachem Begin, the leader of the Irgun Organization admitted





the following, “Panic overwhelmed the Arabs of Eretz Israel... Not what happened at Deir Yassin, but what was invented about Deir Yassin, helped to carve the way to our decisive victories on the battlefield.”<sup>22</sup> Yes, the Zionist gangs did target peaceful civilians: killing them, destroying their homes and properties, terrorizing the populace, driving them out, and emptying the Palestinian land of its rightful owners, all in order to delude the world into believing their saying “a land without a people for a people without a land.”<sup>23</sup>

The Conciliation Commission experts have attested to the enormous atrocities committed by Zionist gangs against the Palestinians and their land, as they estimate that about 80% of the area of historic Palestine, and more than two-thirds of the cultivated lands are Arab lands abandoned by their Palestinian Arab owners under the weight of terrorist and violent acts.<sup>24</sup>

When we know that the number of Palestinians who remained within the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 did not exceed 156 thousands,<sup>25</sup> we realize the danger that the Zionist aggressive spirit poses to international peace and security.

The following table (Table 1) shows the numbers of Palestinians uprooted from their homes in 1948 and their estimated numbers in 2009, according to the district in which their villages of origin in Palestine are situated.



**Table (1): Places of Origin of Uprooted Palestinians, Their Numbers in 1948, and Their Estimated Numbers in 2009<sup>26</sup>**

District	No. of Emptied Villages	No. of Refugees	
		1948	2009
Acre	30	47,038	399,618
Al-Ramla	64	97,405	827,518
Baysan	31	19,602	166,531
Beersheba	88	90,507	768,915
Gaza	46	79,947	679,201
Haifa	59	121,196	1,029,637
Hebron	16	22,991	195,323
Jaffa	25	123,227	1,046,892
Jerusalem	39	97,950	832,147
Jinin	6	4,005	34,025
Nazareth	5	8,746	74,303
Safad	78	52,248	443,880
Tiberias	26	28,872	245,286
Tulkarm	18	11,333	93,724
<b>Total</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>805,067</b>	<b>6,837,000</b>





## *Where Did They Go? “First: They Fled...”*

The following numbers are taken from the archives of the Israeli Defense Ministry:

At least **55%** of the total of the exodus was caused by our [Haganah/“IDF”] operations.

To this figure, the report’s compilers add the operations of the Irgun and Lehi, which “directly (caused) some **15%**... of the emigration.”

A further **2%** was attributed to explicit expulsion orders issued by Israeli troops, and

**1%** to their psychological warfare.

This leads to a figure of **73%** for departures caused directly by the Israelis. In addition, the report attributes **22%** of the departures to “fears” and “a crisis of confidence” affecting the Palestinian population. As for Arab calls for flight, these were reckoned to be significant in only **5%** of cases...

*“Second: They did not fight at all...  
They relied upon the Arab armies.  
They sold their land for the sake of their safety...”*

Few lines are hardly enough to describe the tragedy of a fierce battle, and of martyrs who, after having sustained an injury, continued to fight. The Arab armies were not prepared for battle: one is enough:

The battle of Ra’s al-‘Ein was led by Hassan Salamah. The commander was hit, he had a mortal wound, the doctors were of the opinion that he was dying. Israeli planes were bombarding, armed Palestinian forces were on the defense. Until a strategic stronghold fell, being situated at the crossroad of the south, the coast and the triangle cities. Furthermore, the railroad line passes by it. Hassan Salamah was dying, “send for Hamzeh Sobh,” he said. Hamzeh came. Salamah asked him to recapture Ras al-‘Ein, “Go and bring the necessary troops. Do not reassure me that you will do it, while betting on my death; and so my death becomes a ticket for everyone to run away.” Hamzeh swore an oath, and kept it. He gathered forces from many locations, and launched an attack on Ras al-‘Ein. It was a decisive forceful attack, carried out by three hundred fighters. The battle lasted three hours. The fighters advanced to al-Lud... advanced more... The Israeli army withdrew, carrying its dead and wounded... Hamzah returned, bearing glad tidings to Salamah at the hospital that he had regained Ras al-‘Ein... Hassan Salamah gave him his pistol as a gift... and passed away. (Al-Lud Book, Esper Mounir).



Following *al-Nakbah* (lit. the Catastrophe) of 1948, the history of Palestinian refugees registered a series of migrations from the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) in search of a decent living. Thus, the 50s and the 60s of the last century witnessed a wave of emigration to Jordan and from there to the Gulf. Then because of the war of June 1967, 330 thousand Palestinians were compelled to emigrate from the WB and GS to Jordan and Egypt. When the war was over, and due to economic and security reasons, there was another emigration wave from WB and GS to Jordan, the Gulf, and other destinations.<sup>27</sup>

In their countries of immigration, the Palestinians endured various forms of suffering. In Jordan, they were affected by the repercussions of the war between the Palestinian resistance and the Jordanian army (1970–1971). While the Palestinians in Lebanon suffered from local strife and civil war (1975–1990), and from Israeli and confessional attacks and massacres, thus, tens of thousands of them were compelled to immigrate to Europe, the Gulf and other destinations. As for the Palestinians in Kuwait, they have suffered from the repercussions of the Iraqi occupation of the country, from the Gulf war and from the policies towards them that followed the restoration of the Kuwaiti rule. So 200 thousands of them had to leave during the Iraqi occupation, while 200 thousand others left following the Iraqi withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, tens of thousands of Palestinians suffered on the Libyan borders following the signing of the Oslo Accords, and tens of thousands others residing in Iraq suffered following the American occupation of that country in 2003.





Yet those who remained in Israel suffered no less than those who were forced out, for they saw with their own eyes how the occupation endeavored to destroy and obliterate all Arabic landmarks, and how it kept many of them from returning to their villages that became closed areas. The Palestinians inside Israel remained under military rule up to 1966. They were treated as if they existed in the state of Israel “by mistake.” Furthermore, Israel confiscated their lands under various pretenses and excuses, most noticeable among them were those that took the form of laws and legislations. For in 1950, the law of “Land Acquisition” was passed, according to which the occupation authorities seized lands under the state of emergency; during that same year, the law of “Development Authority” was passed, which led to taking control of the refugees’ properties on the pretext of building roads, public squares, government institutions, and others. Also in the same year, the “Absentees’ Property” law was passed, according to which the properties of Palestinians, who were not allowed to return, were transferred to the Israeli entity and from it to the settlers. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ratio of confiscated Palestinian lands was estimated at 90%; and the average ownership of the Palestinian individual dropped from 19 donums in 1945 to 0.84 donums in 1981.<sup>29</sup> While the Israeli entity depicts itself as the country of democracy and civilization in the Middle East, it pursues a policy of racial discrimination on all levels: legal, political, public and social, toward the Palestinians who have remained within it, those who are known today as “the Israeli Arabs” or the “1948 Palestinians.” The first book of this *Am I Not a Human?* series, *The Israeli Racism: Palestinians in Israel (A Case Study)* discusses this discrimination in all its forms.<sup>30</sup>



Furthermore, the occupation applied double standards to the Palestinians regarding the matter of citizenship, for whereas its laws allow any Jew in the world, no matter of what nationality he is, to come to Israel, gain its citizenship, and establish residence in it, all of that according to the Israeli Law of Return passed in 1950, it denies any Palestinian who wasn't physically present in Israel from his right of return, although he was forcibly driven out of his country, and under war circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

These legislations have contributed to preventing the return of the Palestinian to his country and home; and in parallel to it, there were the Zionist aims and schemes calling for "pushing" the Palestinians to emigrate from Israel; furthermore, the occupation government commissioned private companies to encourage Palestinian youth to emigrate in search of work.<sup>32</sup>

To date, the Israeli authorities continue to issue racist decrees and laws and pursue public transfer policies against the Palestinians, in particular in East Jerusalem, Negev and Great Rift Valley, where they scheme to steal all these areas from their inhabitants and to do the same to many of the WB villages in order to build the Separation Wall. Thus, since the beginning of the Wall's erection and until June 2008, the number of the displaced has reached 28 thousand individuals.<sup>33</sup>

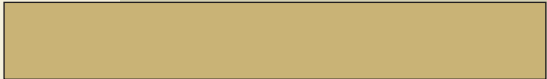


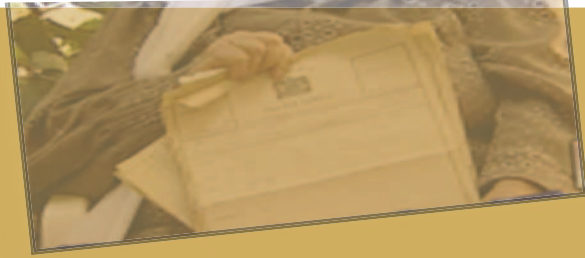


*The First Exodus: 1948*









## *Chapter 3: Refugee Distribution*

In general, the refugees represent seven tenths of the Palestinian population;<sup>34</sup> they are classified into five main sectors:

**The first sector:** comprises the refugees who were expelled from their homes in 1948. This sector is divided into two main divisions, the first: those who receive international aid from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or those who are called “registered”; and the second: those who don’t receive assistance from the Agency, and those are fewer in numbers and are classified as “non-registered.”

**The second sector:** includes those Palestinian refugees who were expelled, for the first time following the 1967 war, from their homes in





the Palestinian territories occupied that year; these are called “displaced persons.”

**The third sector:** comprises the Palestinian refugees other than those of 1948 and 1967; they are those who are living outside the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 and are not able to return to them because their residency permits were revoked, because of the cancellation of family reunion, of expulsion, or of their fear of retribution and persecution in case they returned.

As for the last two sectors, they comprise those displaced inside occupied Palestine, and they are: **the fourth sector:** includes the “internally displaced,” meaning those who have remained in the Palestinian territories on which Israel was established in 1948, and who were, at the same time, forbidden from returning to their villages and cities after the war had ended. **The fifth sector:** includes the displaced inside the territories occupied in 1967.<sup>35</sup> Emphasizing here again that every Palestinian who was uprooted from his home, prevented from returning to it, or denied the right to exercise his national sovereignty over it, is a refugee who suffered and still suffers from the effects of this uprooting and occupation that drove the Palestinians to go to their countries of exile, and from the injustice and tragedies that this wandering entailed, from which the parents had suffered, the children are suffering, and the bitterness of which the grandchildren continue to taste, one generation after the other... until the house’s owner returns to his house, and the wanderer in his country of exile comes back to reclaim the home of his fathers and grandfathers.

As for the distribution of Palestinian refugees, most of them are concentrated in neighboring countries, Jordan in particular, as the



number of Palestinians who were residing there by the end of 2009 was estimated at 3.24 millions, representing approximately 29.8% of Palestinians worldwide; moreover, the majority of them hold Jordanian citizenship. As for Palestinians residing in other Arab countries, their number is estimated at 1.78 millions, representing a ratio of 16.3% of Palestinians worldwide. Most of these are concentrated in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and the Arab Gulf states. As for the Palestinians in foreign countries, their number is estimated at 618 thousand persons, constituting a ratio of 5.7% of Palestinians worldwide; most of them reside in the US, Latin America, Canada, Britain and the other countries of the European Union.<sup>36</sup>

The following table shows the estimates in mid 2008 of the numbers of Palestinians around the world according to their country of residence; noting that the numbers in the table are conservative estimates, they are less than other estimates, whether they were for Palestinians or for the refugees among them.





**Table (2): The Numbers of Palestinians around the World in Mid 2008 according to Their Country of Residence<sup>37</sup>**

Place of Residence	Total no. of Palestinians (mid 2008)	% of Total Population	No. of Residents	Total no. of Refugees	Unregistered Refugees
The Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)	1,265,147	12.3	924,959	340,188	340,188
GS	1,407,218	13.7	316,286	1,090,932	
WB	2,110,066	20.5	1,252,146	857,920	86,777
<b>Historical Palestine</b>	<b>4,782,431</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>2,493,391</b>	<b>2,289,040</b>	<b>426,965</b>
Jordan	3,102,836	30.2	778,213	2,324,623	357,209
Lebanon	471,296	4.6	29,422	441,875	19,882
Syria	577,137	5.6	27,520	549,617	82,200
Egypt	64,728	0.6	11,033	53,695	53,695
<b>Neighboring Countries</b>	<b>4,215,996</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>846,187</b>	<b>3,369,809</b>	<b>512,985</b>
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	364,568	3.5	-	364,568	364,568
Kuwait	50,017	0.5	4,413	45,604	45,604
Arab Gulf States	140,086	1.4	-	140,086	140,086
Iraq and Libya	98,564	1	-	98,564	98,564
Arab Countries	7,356	0.1	-	7,356	7,356
US	270,131	2.6	40,519	229,611	229,611
Other Countries	343,983	3.3	51,597	292,386	292,386
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,273,132</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,436,108</b>	<b>6,837,024</b>	<b>2,118,125</b>
	<b>100%</b>		<b>33.4%</b>	<b>66.6%</b>	<b>20.6%</b>



Registered Refugees (UNRWA)	Registered Refugees living inside camps	Registered Refugees living outside camps	% of Refugees to the Total no. of Palestinian Refugees	% of Refugees to the Total no. of Palestinian Population
			5	3.3
1,090,932	499,231	591,701	16	10.6
771,143	195,770	575,373	12.5	8.4
<b>1,862,075</b>	<b>695,001</b>	<b>1,167,074</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>22.3</b>
1,967,414	339,668	1,627,746	34	22.6
421,993	224,194	197,799	6.5	4.3
467,417	126,453	340,964	8	5.4
			0.8	0.5
<b>2,856,824</b>	<b>690,315</b>	<b>2,166,509</b>	<b>49.3</b>	<b>32.8</b>
			5.3	3.5
			0.7	0.4
			2	1.4
			1.4	1
			0.1	0.1
			3.4	2.2
			4.3	2.8
<b>4,718,899</b>	<b>1,385,316</b>	<b>3,333,583</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66.6</b>
<b>45.9%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	<b>32.4%</b>		





In general, the registration systems of the Palestinian refugees and displaced lack precision, methodicalness and periodicity. While the registration system of UNRWA is considered one of the most methodical and comprehensive in its field, it still suffers from numerous gaps, since it is restricted to the Palestinian refugees residing in the regions covered by the Agency (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, WB and GS). It also excludes many of the refugees present within its sphere of action, of those who have earned the nationality of their countries of refuge, those who were expelled after 1948, or those who had chosen not to register with the Agency (as registration is optional). For example, while official estimates indicate the presence of about 3.24 million Palestinians in Jordan, those of UNRWA show that there are 1.98 million refugees among them; this maybe due to the fact that most Palestinians in Jordan carry Jordanian citizenship, still most of them are unable to return to Palestine because the occupation doesn't allow it, therefore, they are entitled to their right of return and compensation. Similarly, UNRWA's estimates indicate that, until 31/12/2009, the number of registered Palestinian refugees was about 4.77 millions, whereas the estimates of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for the year 2009 point to the presence of 5.63 million Palestinians outside Palestine (registered and non-registered refugees, and in the neighboring states and other states,... meaning the total number), and 1.8 million refugees from the territories occupied in 1948 who reside in the WB and GS, in addition to 150 thousand displaced Palestinians living in the land occupied in 1948 itself. This means that the overall number of Palestinian refugees is close to 7.58 millions, representing 69.7% of the total count of the Palestinian population which was nearly 10.9 millions at the end of 2009.<sup>38</sup> This number exceeds slightly the one mentioned in the table





above (6.8 million refugees in the middle of 2008), for it was based on conservative estimates, and the first number contains some repetition, with the presence of a number of Palestinians who are living abroad, of those who had left the WB and GS for various reasons and have the necessary IDs that allow them to return; still, it is likely that this group are few in numbers.

### *Al-Nakbah's First and Fourth Generations*



This picture was taken at Rafah refugee camp north of GS.

The reason for the presence of informational gaps in many of the sectors pertaining to Palestinian refugees is due to the absence of an effective registration system, able to compute their numbers, as UNRWA's registers cover only about 63.5% of them. A series of recurring Palestinian migrations contributed to these gaps, in addition to the failure of international agencies to reach them, the circumstances surrounding some of their gatherings, the lack of a clear definition of who is a Palestinian refugee, their dispersal across the globe, and their living under various regimes that deal with them in dissimilar ways, statistically, politically, socially and economically.

In the following, we will take a comprehensive look at a number of the main locations where Palestinian refugees are present; these are, the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel), WB, GS, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt.





## 1. The Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

This group of refugees suffers from being rarely mentioned, as to legal, media and political aspects. For following the 1948 war, some Palestinians left their destroyed villages and took refuge in neighboring villages and cities, in anticipation of returning home when the situation calms down; they did not leave Palestine. However, after the war was over, and the occupation forces declared their entity, these Palestinians were prevented from returning to their villages of origin, and these villages were declared, “closed military areas” where no one may enter.

The occupation authorities and UNRWA agreed to stop the latter’s assistance to these “displaced,” and to strike them off the Palestinian refugees’ records. The occupation authorities tried to merge them in other Arab societies and in the Israeli entity, and to make them forget their right of return. This measure has contributed to the absence of any precise estimates of the number of these refugees (the displaced) today, which can vary between 150 and 350 thousands (end of 2009 estimates).<sup>39</sup> The Jewish researcher Hillel Cohen described them as the “Present Absentees,” referring to the actions of the occupation state against them of confiscating their lands and villages under the cover of “The Absentee’s Property Law,” which it passed in 1950, in addition to other laws such as “The Absentee’s Property (Amendment) Law, 5711–1951,” “Land Acquisition Law” (1953), and “Israel Lands Law” (1960)... and similar laws according to which it confiscated the Palestinian Refugees’ lands. The area of lands that the occupation has confiscated by the force of these laws is estimated at 93% of its “state’s” territories. Nevertheless, to this day, the Palestinian refugees of the 1948



Arabs still cling to their right to return to their villages of origin; and every year, they commemorate *al-Nakbah* by organizing marches to these villages.<sup>40</sup>

While the Israeli Law of Return stipulates that any Jew anywhere in the world may come to Israel, gain the Israeli nationality, and own property, the occupation authorities keep Palestinian refugees from returning to their lands, even as they are only few miles away. The occupation's legal authorities improvise ways so not to apply the "family reunion law" to the Palestinians among their "citizens"; eventually, they arrived in July 2003, at a racist amendment that stipulates clearly that no citizenship would be granted by way of "the family reunion law" to the 1948 Palestinians, which means that these are not allowed to bring their wives or husbands to live with them.

As for the hardships in their lives, this category of refugees suffers from Israeli racist practices on all levels, legal, social and economic. This racism is also apparent in statements made by



The occupation authorities laid their hands upon most of the villages from which, in 1948, they expelled the inhabitants. They forbade even those who took refuge in nearby cities and villages from returning to them after the situation had calmed down. The occupation authorities declared these villages "military zones" that no one is permitted to enter. Furthermore, by passing a series of unjust laws, and little by little, the lands of these villages were confiscated. The area of lands that the occupation "possessed," owing to these laws and confiscations, is estimated at 93% of the area of "its state."





Israeli leaders and Israeli clergy, and in their transfer, discrimination and oppression policies. The first book of this series, *Am I not a Human? (1): The Israeli Racism: Palestinians in Israel (A Case Study)* discusses this suffering in details.

## **2. The West Bank**

By the end of 2009, the number of Palestinian refugees in WB was estimated at around 749 thousands of the total population of WB of 2.48 millions.<sup>41</sup> About a quarter of them live in official camps, while the majority has moved to the cities and villages of WB.

There are 19 camps in WB: Balata, Tulkarm, Jenin, ‘Askar, Dheisheh, Shu‘fat, Jalazone, Kalandia, ‘Arroub, Nur Shams, Fawwar, Far‘a, Camp No.1, ‘Akbat Jabr, ‘Aida, Deir ‘Ammar, Ein al-Sultan, Beit Jibrin, and Am‘ary.<sup>42</sup>

The number of resident refugees (registered and non-registered) is estimated to be 749 thousand refugees which is approximately 30.2% of the total population of WB, 2.48 million Palestinians. Not all of the WB camps fall under the control of the Palestinian self-rule, for two of them are under the total authority of the occupation (Shu‘fat and Kalandia), and four are under the shared supervision of the occupation and the self-rule authority (Deir ‘Ammar, Jalazone, Fawwar and ‘Arroub).<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, these camps, the same as all the regions of the WB, are in effect under occupation that carries out incursions deep into them whenever it wishes and commits numerous violations and crimes.

## **3. The Gaza Strip**

In 1948, two hundred thousand refugees arrived in the GS, which was then inhabited by only 80 thousand persons; their arrival put a heavy burden on this narrow strip of land that has a total area of 363 km<sup>2</sup>.



By the end of 2009, the number of Palestinian refugees in the GS was estimated at 1.11 million refugees according to UNRWA's records, while the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimate them to be 1.05 million refugees, i.e., approximately 69.5% of the total population of the GS of 1.51 million persons,<sup>44</sup> where more than half of the refugees live in the Strip's eight camps: Jabalia, Khan Younis, Rafah, Bureij, Beach, Maghazi, Nuseirat, and Deir al-Balah.

The GS is considered one of the most densely populated regions of the world, if not the most dense. This density rises in particular in the refugee camps. For example, more than 82 thousand refugees live in Beach camp, the area of which is less than one square kilometer;<sup>45</sup> this overcrowdedness results in added misery to all facets of the refugees' hard life.

#### **4. Jordan**

Outside WB and GS, the largest numbers of Palestinians reside in Jordan, less than one hundred kms from their native villages and cities inside the occupied Palestinian territories. By the end of 2009, the number of Palestinians residing in Jordan was estimated at around 3.24 millions, according to The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. According to UNRWA's statistics in the same date, the number of Palestinian refugees registered with it in Jordan was almost 1.98 million refugees, i.e., about 17.2% of them live in camps.<sup>46</sup> There are a large number of Palestinians who, for various reasons, are not registered as refugees; in fact, many self-supporting Palestinians did not register themselves and 13% of camps' residents are not registered with UNRWA, while about 95% of Palestinians residing in Jordan carry Jordanian citizenship.<sup>47</sup> That is why, of all refugees, the Palestinian refugees in Jordan relatively



live under the best conditions, in terms of enjoying economic, social, civil and political rights, even if they also suffer in some areas that we will discuss later in Chapter Four.

In Jordan, there are ten official camps run by UNRWA. These are: Baqa'a, 'Amman New Camp (al-Wihdat), Marka, Jabal al-Hussein, Irbid, Husn, Zarqa', Souf, Jerash and Talbieh. There are also three neighborhoods in Amman, al-Zarqa' and Ma'daba that the Jordanian government considers camps, while UNRWA considers them "unofficial" camps.<sup>48</sup> The total number of Palestinian residents of these districts and camps and the areas adjoining the camps represent 65% of the refugees in Jordan.

## 5. Syria

Most of the Palestinian refugees who had reached Syria following *al-Nakbah* of 1948 came from the Palestinian north, mainly from Safad and the two cities of Haifa and Jafa.<sup>49</sup> As of 31/12/2009, the number of Palestinians registered with UNRWA as refugees and residing in Syria came to 472,109 persons, about 27.1% of them live in camps. UNRWA recognizes ten official camps in Syria: al-Neirab, Khan Dunoun, Sbeineh, Hama, Khan Eshieh, Dera'a, Homs, Qabr Essit, and Jaramana; whereas there are three other camps that it does not recognize; these are Yarmouk, Latakia, and Ein al-Tal.<sup>50</sup> Damascus accommodates around 67% of the total number of Palestinian refugees in Syria, most of whom live in Yarmouk refugee camp (more than 144 thousand refugees), in spite of the fact that UNRWA does not recognize it as a camp.



The above-mentioned estimates do not include the Palestinians who were expelled to Syria in 1967 (when Israel occupied the Golan) and in 1970 (following the events of September 1970 in Jordan), because most of these are not registered with the Agency.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, thousands of Palestinians fled from Lebanon to Syria in the 80s of the last century when Israel invaded Lebanon, and when the Lebanese civil war erupted and the inhabitants of the camps became its chief victims.<sup>52</sup>

## 6. Lebanon

The number of Palestinian refugees who immigrated to Lebanon following the Palestine *al-Nakbah* ranges from 100-130 thousands.<sup>53</sup> They were accommodated in more than 45 camps and residential gatherings. Of these, 12 official camps remain today run by UNRWA, these are (Ein al-Hillweh, Mieh Mieh, Shatila, Burj Barajnah, Nahr al-Bared, Beddawi, al-Buss, Rashidieh, Burj Shemali, Wavel, Dbayeh, and Mar Elias), and there are 13 unofficial gatherings that UNRWA does not recognize and to which it doesn't provide any services worth mentioning. Three other camps were destroyed during the years 1975 and 1977 of the Lebanese civil war and were not rebuilt or substituted, and these are, the Nabatiyeh camp in the Lebanese south, and al-Dekwaneh and Jisr al-Basha camps in Beirut. In addition, the Lebanese militias have destroyed the Tel al-Za'tar camp and committed a massacre there that left thousands of victims among Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the Gouraud camp in Baalbek was vacated years ago, and its inhabitants were moved to Rashidieh camp in Tyre.<sup>54</sup> In 2007, Nahr al-Bared camp was destroyed during armed clashes between "Fath al-Islam" group and the Lebanese army.





By 31/12/2009, the number of Palestinians residing in Lebanon and registered with UNRWA as refugees came to 425,640 persons; about 53% of them live in camps.<sup>55</sup> Of all refugees, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon suffer the most, on all levels, legal, living, health, social and economic.

## **7. Iraq**

Following *al-Nakbah*, about four thousand Palestinians took refuge in Iraq. These were transported in Iraqi army trucks. At first, their allocations were part of those apportioned to the Iraqi army, including food and nutrition. The Palestinian refugees in Iraq came from the villages of the Carmel triangle. Upon the establishment of UNRWA, it was allowed to function in Iraq; but few months later, in compliance with a demand from the Iraqi government, it stopped its work there. Subsequently, the names and numbers of refugees in Iraq were dropped from the Agency's records. Meanwhile, Iraq had established the Refugee Affairs Department. However, the refugees' status kept on fluctuating, so that at times, they would enjoy privileges, generous budgets, and laws that facilitate their lives' affairs and they would be treated on an equal footing with Iraqis. At other times, these laws would be changed, amended or eliminated altogether.<sup>56</sup>

Following the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the Palestinians were subjected to threats, killing, kidnapping and forced expulsion by some militias. This forced many families to flee their homes and head to various destinations, inside and outside Iraq, or to temporary camps on the borders between Iraq and neighboring countries. Today no information or statistical records are available from official on non-official sources that can be considered dependable. At the





same time, there is a difference between the number of Palestinians and the number of the refugees among them; hence, it is hard to speak of acceptable indicators of their numbers, geographical distribution, and their social and demographic characteristics. Furthermore, the situation of these refugees is unlike that of Palestinians in any other country with regard to the suffering they endured since the American occupation of Iraq.<sup>57</sup>

According to the statistics of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees in Iraq in 2003, shortly after the occupation, came to 35–40 thousands. In addition, according to information by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Department of Refugee Affairs in March of 2008, the number of refugees who remained in Iraq was estimated at 15 thousands.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, hundreds of them live on the Iraqi–Syrian and the Iraqi–Jordanian borders, in camps that lack minimum basic living requirements; most prominent of these camps is al-Walid camp in which 1,700 refugees live, and al-Tanf camp in which 880 refugees live.<sup>59</sup>

## 8. Egypt

The Palestinian refugees arrived in Egypt in three stages: the first was caused by *al-Nakbah* of 1948, the second occurred following the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, while the third happened following the setback (*Naksa*) of 1967; thus the total number of refugees in Egypt reached 90 thousands.<sup>60</sup> The Egyptian government set up for them temporary camps; later these camps were dismantled after the state of emergency was lifted. This prompted affluent Palestinians to move to cities or to the countryside, while the overwhelming majority of the refugees moved to the GS inside Palestine, close to the Egyptian borders.<sup>61</sup>

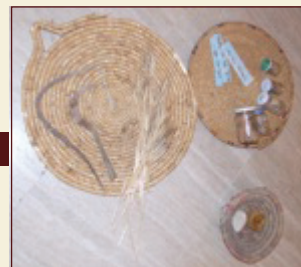
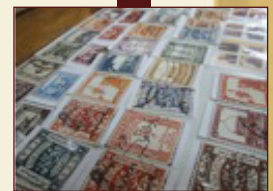
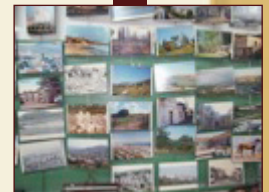




The Egyptian government did not allow UNRWA to operate in its territories and settled for granting the refugees temporary travel documents that required renewal. This measure contributed to making them live unstable lives, in addition to their generally harsh living circumstances. These reasons, as well as the nature of the regime in Egypt, contributed to a deficiency in the available information regarding the number of Palestinian refugees in Egypt, where they are, and their living conditions. In 2008, their number was estimated at 65 thousands.<sup>62</sup>

Pictures of some Palestinian refugees' belongings documented and displayed in an exhibition. The refugees are keen on documenting and making public such belongings, as manifestation of their holding on to their identity.

In the first picture, embroidered Palestinian dresses are shown, with the names of their owners' villages, as embroideries vary from one village to another. The second picture is a collection of photos from Palestine. The third displays keys of refugees' homes in Palestine that they had carried with them. The fourth is a collection of postage stamps belonging to the mandate period in Palestine. The fifth is a picture of a prayer rug from al-Damoun village. The sixth is a picture of an embroidered peasant hat from Gaza. While in the seventh picture, some peasant tools are displayed, in addition to vessels that their owners carried with them from their villages of origin, containing: "sand from al-Damoun," "sage leaves from Galilee" and "sand from Acre."





## *Chapter 4: The Suffering of Palestinian Refugees in Their Places of Refuge and Diasporas*

The state of Palestinian refugees varies from one country to another, with regard to their living conditions and legal status. As we had mentioned earlier, the refugees are concentrated mainly in four principle congregations, which are WB, GS, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria; then Iraq and Egypt; and the rest of Arab and foreign countries.

Those interested in the Palestinian issue and in refugee affairs face many obstacles in finding up-to-date information about the refugees' conditions in general, the places they are at, and their circumstances. This is so because of the state of dispersal in which they live, the



nonexistence of a unifying authority, and the state of weakness and corruption prevalent in the PLO, which is supposed to be that authority.

However, the available information is sufficient for pointing out, albeit in brief, the extent of the suffering that the Palestinian people continue to endure since they were driven out of Palestine by the Israeli occupation. This chapter will examine various aspects of this suffering according to available information and cases.

### **1. The Legal Aspect**

The legal aspect is regarded as an introduction to clarifying many facets of the Palestinian refugees' suffering, and explaining how this suffering varies in accordance with where they are. For the Palestinian refugees are dealt with in keeping with different laws, each according to his country of refuge. This factor plays a greater role in those countries whose governments did not allow UNRWA to function in their territories (Iraq, Egypt and Libya), the fact that created in the refugees, as laws changed, a feeling of instability.

In this regard, we should mention the refugees of the WB and GS, and the “displaced” within Israel of those who are not allowed to return to their villages and houses of origin. We have already discussed in detail the racial discrimination that the Palestinians inside Israel endure on the legal level; and that is found in the first volume of this series.<sup>63</sup> As for the occupied Palestinian territories, one cannot speak of a legal aspect as long as the occupation continues to subjugate these territories to its absolute authority by virtue of its power, and to commit various violations without ever being held responsible.

Going back to the refugees outside historical Palestine, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt suffer the most with regard to the legal aspect, while the suffering of the refugees in Syria and Jordan with



regard to this same aspect is confined to a limited groups of refugees who arrived later or arrived in exceptional circumstances.

And so we find that in Jordan, most Palestinian refugees enjoy the benefit of carrying Jordanian nationality, with the exception of about one hundred thousand refugees who are originally from GS; these latter carry temporary Jordanian passports that do not qualify them for full Jordanian citizenship and the rights thereof, most prominent of which is the right to hold a governmental job. Almost a quarter of this group (about 25 thousand refugees) resides in Jarash (Gaza camp).<sup>64</sup> While the rest of refugees, as we had mentioned earlier, carry the Jordanian nationality. In 1950, the Jordanian king Abdullah I issued a ruling that granted all Palestinians residing in Jordan Jordanian passports, based on the law annexing the WB to Jordan. Therefore, with the exception of some discrimination that some Palestinians feel when they compare themselves to their brothers of Transjordanian origin, the refugees there enjoy all the rights of citizenship (ownership, employment, travel and political participation) that distinguish them from the rest of the Palestinian refugees in the other countries of refuge.<sup>65</sup>

In Syria, and from a legal perspective, the refugees are classified according to the dates of their arrival; subsequently, they are divided into four categories:

- a. **The 1948 refugees:** these constitute the largest segment of refugees; and there is a government department created specifically to watch over them and organize their affairs. The law 260 of the year 1956 treats the refugees of this category on the same footing as Syrian citizens in all areas: employment, vocations and education, but excludes them from election and nomination to membership in People's Council (the parliament); and they





retain their Palestinian nationality. These are always referred to as “those who are in effect Syrians.”

- b. The 1956 refugees:** what apply to the first category apply to them as well, except in what concerns entering the job market, for they cannot enter it except through temporary contracts, subsequently they are not eligible to advance in government jobs and they don't submit to compulsory military service. It should be mentioned that the refugees of these two categories are registered with UNRWA.
- c. The 1967 refugees:** and these are divided into two groups, the first consists of those who were able to register with UNRWA, and therefore are treated the same as the 1956 refugees, and the second consists of those who are not registered with UNRWA, and are treated the same as foreigners if they carry Egyptian travel documents, or like Arabs if they carry temporary Jordanian passports. The Palestinians of this group are required to renew their passports; furthermore, they face some complications regarding their living affairs, in particular in what concerns employment.
- d. The 1970 refugees:** these suffer the most and their legal status is the most complicated; for most of them have no documents after their Jordanian passports had expired, or their Egyptian travel documents had not been renewed (these must be renewed annually). These refugees cannot enter the job market in a regular fashion and cannot travel as well, in view of the absence of clear laws regarding the way to deal with them.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike Syria and Jordan, in Lebanon, there are no proper legal mechanisms for managing the affairs of Palestinian refugees. These





In this “rusty tin shack,” if you wish to call it that, the Palestinian, ‘Ali al-Hindawi (84 years) has been living for over thirty years, in a gathering of Palestinian refugees in the town of Kafr Bada in the Lebanese south. UNRWA does not recognize these “unofficial” gatherings, which, consequently, do not receive any services or aid from any party. Of all refugees, the inhabitants of these gatherings are the ones who suffer the most.

► Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 21/5/2009.



refugees suffer from marginalization and discrimination, as Lebanese law forbids them from working in 72 different professions, including the primary professions of medicine, law, engineering, pharmacy and others (these restrictions were partially lifted in the memorandum issued by former labor minister Trad Hmadeh on 7/6/2005. A subsequent memorandum was issued in February 2010, granting exceptions to the Palestinian refugees born in Lebanon, in anticipation of positive initiatives in their application).<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, they are not allowed to own property, in spite of the demands made by many human rights associations for securing these basic rights to Palestinian refugees. In justifying such a treatment, the Lebanese authorities claim to be “keeping away the ghost of naturalizing,” in spite of the fact that the Palestinians in Lebanon had asserted that they have no wish to settle in the country and they reject this notion because their hope and objective are and will remain their return to Palestine. The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are excluded from the laws governing the treatment of Arabs



or even of foreigners, because they do not carry a “nationality” in the legal sense of the word. They identify themselves with cards issued by the General Directorate of the Administration of Palestinian Refugee Affairs (renamed the Directorate of Affairs of Palestinian Refugees in 2000—DAPR). They are divided legally into three categories:

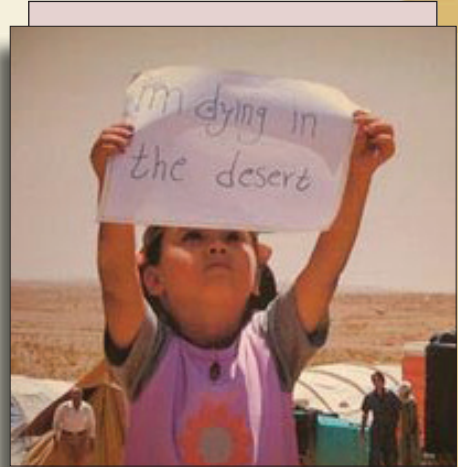
- a. The first comprises those counted immediately after *al-Nakbah* and whose registries are recorded with the Interior Ministry; consequently, these have “legal residency” in Lebanon and are exempt from “the duty” of proving their presence in Lebanon; and in case they wished to travel, they are issued travel documents.
- b. This category comprises those who were not covered in the first category’s census; their stay and status in Lebanon were settled in accordance with decree 309 of the year 1962; these can obtain a *laissez-passer* to be able to travel.
- c. This category includes those who were forced to reside in Lebanon following the 1967 war or the events of September 1970, those who came with the Palestinian commandoes (*Feda’yeen*) or those who were liberated from Israeli prisons. These are the refugees that suffer the most, for they don’t enjoy the freedom to move, travel or migrate out of Lebanon, they face security measures when moving within the country because they lack identity papers and documents, and what that entails of their children not having them either, and therefore are unable to work, register in schools or be hospitalized, etc. Furthermore, they try quite often to obtain false identity papers in order to gain access to UNRWA’s services, or they resort to registering their children under the names of relatives.<sup>68</sup>



The number of non-ID Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is estimated at five thousands.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in spite of the fact that the Lebanese government started lately to work on issuing temporary identity papers for this group of refugees, they will still be deprived of several basic rights, the same as all the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; at the forefront of these rights are the right to work and to own property.

In Iraq, and in the context of defining who is a Palestinian refugee, the Iraqi government stipulated that he should be living in the Iraqi territory and have been residing there since before 1958.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in spite of the declaration, which the Iraqi government used to make, that it treats the Palestinians on a par with the Iraqis, it used to issue exceptions, amendments, and clarifications

to its laws that used to impede the Palestinian and rob him of the ability to live a stable life and to contemplate a future for himself. What is worse is the passing of a law in 1993 that prohibited the Palestinian from buying a private car or a home phone line or even from renewing his permit to practice a certain profession. Things kept going back and forth; at times, laws would be passed that granted some rights and allowed property ownership (one house to reside in), at other times, other laws would be passed that restricted all of that. In 2001, the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council issued an explicit decree, according to which the



A Palestinian child stuck in one of the camps on the Iraqi borders, carrying a sign on which it is written:

**“I am dying in the desert”**





Palestinian is to be treated on the same footing as the Iraqi as regards rights and duties, with the exception of nationality, military service, and political rights related to participation in elections or running for an office. Another decree was issued to the effect that any government employee who does not implement the first decree carrying the number 202 of the year 2001 would be punished,<sup>71</sup> at the time, Iraq was under international blockade. Two years later, the American occupation of Iraq took place, and with it, all facets of the social, political and legal life collapsed, including those related to Palestinian refugees. Today, these refugees—or those of them who remained following the waves of violence that targeted them—suffer instability and ambiguity in what concerns the laws that regulate their affairs.

It should be mentioned in this regard that, as matters in Iraq moved toward relative stability, the new Iraqi government issued on 4/11/2008 a decree applying the law of political asylum of 1971 to Palestinian refugees. This decree has placed the refugees under the watchful eye of the Directorate of General Security and the Directorate of Military Intelligence, and delegated to the Minister of the Interior the task of designating to the refugee his place of residence, of issuing an order to expel or prosecute him if he breached the state's security or its political interests, and of granting approval of his leaving the country. However, according to this law, if his absence is to exceed one month, he needs the consent of the president of the republic.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the government issued a decree on 26/11/2008, in which it granted Iraqi citizenship to the children of Palestinians married to Iraqi women;<sup>73</sup> and it announced in April of 2009 that it is working on a strategy to return those who were compelled to leave, and to put in order, and in a proper manner, their living and legal status.<sup>74</sup>



Under different circumstances and causes, and with similarity in their situation, due to lack of information and absence of UNRWA because of the Egyptian government's rejection, the Palestinian refugees in Egypt live in a state of instability regarding their legal status, which reflects negatively on their social and economic conditions.

The Egyptian government settles for granting its Palestinian refugees travel documents that do not give them the right of residency in Egypt,<sup>75</sup> the thing that—intentionally or unintentionally—contributed to the small number of refugees in Egypt. These refugees are divided into categories, all of whom carry documents that vary as to their need for renewal. Thus, there are categories (A) and (B) made up of those refugees of 1948 who are obligated to renew their permits/ residencies every five years; the same ruling applies to those belonging to category (C), who came during the war of 1956. While those who came during the war of 1967 are classified under categories (D) and (E), and those must renew their permits every year to three years. It should be taken into account that the procedure for renewing permits is costly and worrisome, for each time, it is conditional upon the approval of the concerned security authorities. Moreover, any Palestinian who remains absent from the country for a period of more than six months would be denied entrance into Egyptian territories, unless he presents proof of working or studying abroad. Furthermore, Egyptian women married to Palestinians are excluded from the law that allows an Egyptian woman married to a foreigner to give the Egyptian nationality to her children.<sup>76</sup>

As for other laws, the Palestinians in Egypt have gone through many stages, with their treatment changing with the change in the political system and circumstances. For soon after their arrival in Egypt, they suffered from restrictions and harsh living conditions. Then these





conditions improved during the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, to deteriorate again during Sadat's rule, as they were once again classified as foreigners, with regard to their rights to education, employment and ownership, etc. These laws are still in force today; however, it should be mentioned that this discrimination is almost nonexistent on the public level; for the Egyptian people demonstrate their sympathy to Palestinians and cooperate with them. Still this discrimination is present in the laws and constitutes a negative push factor for the Palestinian refugees in Egypt, in particular concerning the cost of education, specifically at the university level. It also causes the Palestinian worker to be legally subject to exploitation and oppression, in particular as regard wages, in a country where even its citizens suffer hard economic circumstances and a relatively high rate of poverty and unemployment.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, moving to the legal status of refugees in other Arab and foreign countries, we find that most Palestinian refugees in foreign countries carry the nationality of those countries, and consequently enjoy all the rights thereof. As for Arab countries, no information is available about the refugees in Libya and North Africa (the Arab Maghreb, specifically Tunisia and Algeria) where thousands of Palestinians live. In the Arab Gulf states, where hundreds of thousands of them go to earn a living, the Palestinians are treated as foreigners, as these countries have reservations regarding the Arab League's resolutions, specifically the Casablanca Protocol of (1964) calling for treating the Palestinian refugee on par with its citizens. Moreover, until recently, the Palestinians were denied, unlike foreigners, the right to own real estate, establish a business or found a company in their names in the Gulf States. However, with the economic developments of the last few years, the Palestinians took advantage of new laws that allowed ownership in some Gulf States such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.



## 2. The Security and Judicial Aspect

This aspect of the Palestinian refugee's suffering is particularly noticeable in Lebanon, Iraq, and inside the occupied Palestinian territories, including those occupied in 1948 or Israel, as was the case in the past with Libya and Kuwait. This proves how much the Palestinian refugees are subject to varying political circumstances, fluctuations and whims. They continue to pay, because of a crime that they did not commit, which is the Israeli occupation of their land, a very high price indeed, being quite often their blood.

If the talk about the feeling of insecurity that Palestinian refugees in the WB and GS experience is self-evident, being always subjected to the occupation's incursions, invasions and attacks, and what accompany that of killing, targeting civilians and arbitrary and mass arrests, it is regrettable to speak about similar suffering—albeit to a lesser degree—of the refugees in neighboring Arab countries that are supposed to constitute an embracing environment for the refugees and not add to their sufferings.

Regarding Lebanon, ever since they arrived, the Palestinian refugees have been suffering from feelings of loss of security and protection, as they were in the beginning under the authority of the Bureau of the Lebanese Army Intelligence (the Second Bureau) that managed their affairs directly and placed them under strict supervision that extended to the simplest living matters.<sup>78</sup> Then, in spite of the improvement in their circumstances with the arrival of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon at the beginning of the seventies of the last century, and as the PLO spread its influence in a number of Lebanese regions, their presence on the ground generated a negative response on the part of some Lebanese factions, especially the warring



Lebanese militias during that period of the civil war. Thus, the refugees in the camps became victims to political and security wranglings that took place during that war. Thousands of Palestinians were killed in attacks carried out by Lebanese militias on the refugee camps, in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), and in what became known later as the War of the Camps and their siege (1985). Thus, the camps of Tel al-Za‘tar, Shatila, al-Da‘ouq, al-Shawakir, and Ras al-‘Ein were destroyed, and some of them were totally demolished. Many other camps were partially destroyed, among them Rashidieh, Burj Shemali, Burj Barajneh and Mieh Mieh. To this day, some of the marks of this destruction remain, because the Lebanese government forbids the introduction of building materials into the camps, which prevents their restoration, also because of the extreme poverty prevalent in the camps that compel many refugees to live in damaged houses, and sometimes in extremely damaged houses. During that same period, the Palestinians were the victims of several massacres, most prominent among them are those of Sabra and Shatila, and Tel al-Za‘tar. In both atrocities, the number of those killed was not precisely determined because so many were killed; however, in each, the number was estimated at three thousands, which brings the total to six thousands killed, added to them the thousands more killed, after being kidnapped at roadblocks during the civil war, or during the camps’ siege that caused the spread of diseases and hunger, and forced the refugees to eat grass and cats’ flesh to survive.<sup>79</sup>

With the end of the civil war in Lebanon and the deportation of Palestinian fighters from it, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon continue to suffer from feelings of insecurity, and so they insist on keeping their weapons inside the camps, as they feel that they are still targets and that the government there is unable to protect them. It is worth mentioning





here that, until now, the Palestinian refugees continue to refuse the presence of the Lebanese army inside the camps, because they don't feel that they can trust the Lebanese government, and because they fear a repetition of the massacres that they had suffered in the past, especially in view of their harsh circumstances, being denied most of their economic and social rights.

On the individual level, the Palestinians complain of security and judicial discrimination in light of the absence of any representation that can protect them. This became clear during the events of Nahr al-Bared camp in the summer of 2007, in which the camp and its residents were the victims; 80% of the camp was severely damaged, and most of the inhabitants were made homeless in humiliating circumstances. During those events, hundreds of Palestinian youth were arrested and detained by the Lebanese judicial authorities, and are still awaiting trial; knowing that most of them were arrested and detained arbitrarily, solely because they are Palestinians from the camp. Usually, these detained Palestinians suffer postponement of their trials, which may sometimes take years; as was the case with Yusuf Sha'ban who spent 16 years in jail, accused of a crime whose real perpetrators were arrested, tried and convicted in Jordan years before he was finally released.<sup>80</sup>

The Palestinians face measures of exaggerated security cautiousness, and notice signs of suspicion, accusation and doubt directed at them; this was intensified following the events of Nahr al-Bared. Moreover, some Palestinian camps are surrounded by security rings of the Lebanese army that control the movement in and out of the camps. This suffering is aggravated for the non-ID Palestinians who become prisoners inside the camp, fearing they would be arrested upon leaving it, or would be unable to return to it once they leave.





In Iraq, and since the American occupation of it in 2003, the Palestinians have been living in a state of insecurity, for they were subjected to numerous acts of killing, plundering and looting that were prevalent in the country at the time. They were also victims of the waves of sectarian violence that spread in the country, where they were targeted by Shi'a militias. Those who survived these massacres returned to living in tents or sought asylum in another country in search of peace and security. Today, thousands of Palestinian refugees who were in Iraq live in border camps, under very hard conditions,<sup>81</sup> with no authority responsible for them, and are targeted because of their being classified as "Sunni Muslims" or as "followers of the previous regime."<sup>82</sup> Almost all Iraqi Palestinians, whom Human Rights Watch interviewed in May of 2006, complained that the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) discriminated against them at the expense of their fundamental human rights. Mistreatment at the hands of the MoI ranged from abusive language during residency registration to being singled out for torture. Moreover, some of them told the organization that many of their compatriots "disappeared" after the Iraqi security forces arrested them.<sup>83</sup>

Part of the suffering endured by Palestinian refugees in the past was that of the refugees in Libya during September of 1995, when the Libyan President Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi announced his intention to expel all of them, on the pretext of proving to the world that the Gaza-Jericho Accord signed by the Palestinians and the Israelis is a sham; for it did not achieve peace, a state for Palestinians, or a return of refugees! The number of Palestinian refugees in Libya at the time was estimated at 30 thousands. These were actually gathered in camps and left stranded on the Libyan-Egyptian borders; then they were transported in trucks and deported by sea. Of those deported, few hundreds did not find a





country that would admit them, not even those countries in which they sought refuge in 1948 at the time of *al-Nakbah*. Thus, they established a camp on the Egyptian–Libyan borders which they called the “Camp of Return” in which they lived in deplorable conditions. A fact-finding committee sent by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights wrote that conditions in the camp portend of a human disaster... and that these innocents are paying the price of disputes of which they are not a party, and of decisions about which they were not consulted. On 14/6/1997, the Libyan General Secretariat of the General People’s Congress called on those refugees still stuck on the borders to return to Libya.<sup>84</sup>

In Kuwait, following Iraq’s occupation of the country on 2/8/1990, and after an announcement by the head of the PLO, Yasir ‘Arafat, expressing his support for Iraq, the Palestinian refugees in Kuwait suffered politically, economically and security-wise, in spite of the fact that the Palestinians residing in Kuwait overwhelmingly opposed the Iraqi occupation, and in spite of the pivotal role they played in Kuwait’s advancement and growth. At the time, the number of Palestinian refugees residing there was about 430 thousands; the majority of them were educated, skilled workers, or businessmen. Their numbers dropped to 37 thousands, as most of them had to leave to new countries of exile or return to their initial country of refuge.<sup>85</sup>

In general, and due to the multiplicity of their countries of refuge, the Palestinian refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in the areas of security and administration of justice, in the absence of an official representative to protect them (an embassy) and their deliberate exclusion from the protecting umbrella of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and because of the mere service nature on the basis of which UNRWA was established.



## *Al-Nakbah Has No One Unique Date*



1

1. Tel al-Za'tar 1976
3. Iraq 2003 (still exists)



3





2. Khan Yunus 2001

4. Nahr al-Bared 2007

5. Gaza Strip 2009



2



4



5





### **3. The Political Aspect**

The suffering aspect is almost the only one that all Palestinians share, no matter where they are, including those who were able to gain the nationality of other countries. For the Palestinian refugees miss having an effective political authority, in light of the absence or the forced absence of the PLO in this context, seeing that it was established as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, inside and outside Palestine. The absence of a political authority leads to a gap in raising refugee issues, concerns and rights, at the forefront of which are the rights of return and compensation.

This absence reflects on the refugees' concentrations in their places of residence, as there is not any party or political authority to defend or demand granting them their rights.

Regarding representation, the Palestinian people lack a real representation mechanism, especially regarding elections; for the Palestinians of the Diaspora have no recourse to participation in Palestinian decision-making. This fact causes the Palestinian political representation to be confined to Palestinians inside Israel, noting that these latter live under occupation. This fact also removes any real full legitimacy of representation from those who negotiate in the name of Palestinian people or of their rights, including their right of return.

### **4. The Social and Living Aspect**

If we wish to describe in detail the social reality of Palestinian refugees, we find that it depicts their suffering in many areas, first and foremost among them is perhaps the lack of decent housing and what that entails of social and health problems. Next comes the economic suffering and what that too entails, then the health



and educational realities and the difficulties that surround them.

Today, sixty years past the date when they first sought refuge, most Palestinian concentrations lack adequate housing; whether with regard to infrastructure (electricity, sanitary sewage systems and water), ventilation or necessary spaces (the problem of overcrowded housing) or basic facilities such as streets and playgrounds (narrow streets and no playgrounds for children). Even in Jordan where the refugees enjoy all their civil rights, a study conducted by the Norwegian Fafo Institute

for Applied International Studies showed that the rates of poverty and unemployment in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan are higher than the same rates in other areas. And because of the concentration of such problems in the refugee camps, bigger social problems arise, such as crowdedness, despair, depression and crime, particularly in light of the deteriorating housing and infrastructure conditions in the camps.<sup>86</sup>

In Syria and in most camps, the main problem is the sanitary drainage system networks; as in some neighborhoods, such networks are nonexistent. Furthermore, most houses in the camps are primitive, in need of repair or improvement, and lack necessary ventilation, which affects negatively refugees' health.<sup>87</sup> Probably the housing conditions in Neirab camp are the worst when compared with those in any other

*"A Smile" in the Dheisheh Camp  
for Palestinian Refugees in WB*



The picture was taken in October of 2005.





Syrian camp, as some of its houses are considered to have the lowest health and security standards in all of Syria. This camp, which was established in abandoned military barracks, with no improvements made to its rundown facilities, suffers from burning heat in the summer and freezing cold in the winter, in addition to water seepage and infestation with rodents. It also suffers from the absence of playgrounds for children and the visible narrowness of alleys; for most of them are no wider than the extended arms of a child.<sup>88</sup> In al-Raml (Latakia) camp, most houses need rehabilitation because of the high degree of humidity and corrosion caused by the camp's proximity to the sea.<sup>89</sup> Speaking of the suffering of refugees in Syria, we should mention what the inhabitants of the Jaramana camp went through in the eighties of the last century, when more than 700 families were forced to move out of the camp because of "building new roads" that go through the camp!<sup>90</sup>

In Burj Barajneh camp in Lebanon, misery and poverty prevail in the muddy streets; it is so overcrowded that a family of 13 sleeps in a single room of 4x4 meters. In the camp's area of 500m length and 400m width, tens of thousands of camp's residents live, forbidden from expanding outside it, being forced to live within it since they first arrived.

In northern Lebanon, Beddawi camp that can accommodate about 16 thousand refugees has become overcrowded with double that number, in the wake of the events in the neighboring Nahr al-Bared camp. The displaced have settled in schools, streets and stores; meanwhile the camp's infrastructure and facilities came under unprecedented pressure, especially that the whole camp, as an example, has only one health care center. Furthermore, many of the camp's houses have remained the same, "temporary houses" built to accommodate the refugees upon





their arrival; their roofs are made of corrugated zinc, water seeps into them summer and winter, humidity rises sharply inside, they even have bricks falling on their dwellers.<sup>91</sup>

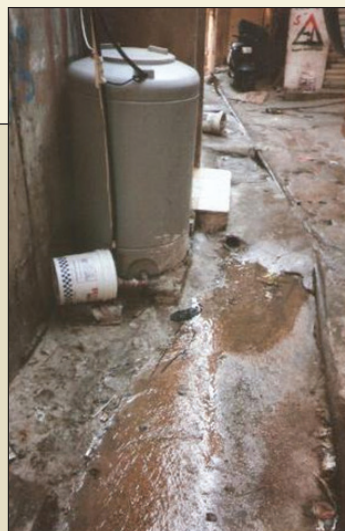
The housing status of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is considered the worst because of two factors, the first, denying the Palestinians the right to own a house, and second, decrees by the Lebanese government concerning building inside the camps; as horizontal expansion of the camp outside its initial boundaries granted to it in 1948 is forbidden (in spite of the fourfold increase in the refugee population). Furthermore, building materials are not allowed into the camp, the fact that prevents the restoration of many of the camp's houses that were destroyed during the Lebanese civil war. Thus, in Rashidieh camp where more than 600 houses were destroyed, these continue to be homes to thousands of refugees, UNRWA was not able to restore them, because of the ban imposed by the Lebanese government on the introduction of building materials;<sup>92</sup> the same took place in Burj Barajneh, Burj Shemali, Shatila and Mieh Mieh camps.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, in Lebanon, camps' residents live under extremely bad health and environmental conditions. For example, in the Shatila camp, humidity pervades the air and residents complain of overcrowded housing and the absence of the necessary infrastructure for water, electricity and sanitary drainage systems; they also drink water from unreliable sources.<sup>94</sup> In al-Buss camp, the refugees continue to live in concrete houses, some of which they had erected themselves. These homes cannot be rehabilitated because of the ban on the introduction of building materials; furthermore, only 60% of the camp's houses, where more than ten thousand refugees live, are connected to the uncompleted sanitary drainage network.<sup>95</sup> In Wavel (al-Jaleel) camp, most houses



lack sunlight and ventilation.<sup>96</sup> Power lines hang down in front of and above the doors of houses, in a very dangerous fashion; quite often they catch fire or drop to the streets, in particular in pouring rain. Without exception, all camps in Lebanon suffer from this phenomenon.

Regarding WB and GS, since the eruption of *al-Aqsa* uprising (*Intifadah*) in September of 2000, the Israeli occupation has escalated its incursions into and aggressions against the WB; the camps were the



Most Palestinian camps suffer from problems in their sanitary drainage systems, aggravated by bad infrastructure, the alley's narrowness, haphazard building, absence of cleanliness; all of which lead to numerous environmental and health problems.

The accompanying pictures were taken in Burj al-Barajneh camp in Lebanon.

► Palestinian Human Rights Foundation (Monitor), 19/2/2010.



main targets because of the prominent role they play in the struggle against Israel, particularly, the camps nearest to Israeli settlements and military encampments. These camps are permanent targets to incursions and bombardment operations, among them, the camps of Rafah, Khan Yunis in GS, and Camp No.1, 'Aida, Beit Jibrin, Tulkarm, and Jenin in WB; and so, the refugees are always subjected to injuries, death and destruction of property.

In Rafah camp for example, UNRWA counted 1,728 houses destroyed in military operations, between September 2001 and March 2005. According to UNRWA, these houses shelter 3,337 families, that is, about 17 thousand individuals, who in fact have become homeless.<sup>97</sup> In Beach camp, also in GS, the Israeli authorities demolished more than two thousand houses in 1971 “to widen roads for security reasons”!<sup>98</sup> In Khan Younis camp, UNRWA counted 750 houses destroyed during the same period (September 2001–March 2005). Many families that used to live in these houses remained without a shelter because UNRWA lacked the necessary funds to rebuild them.

In April of 2002, and in the WB, the occupation forces committed a massacre against the inhabitants of the Jenin camp; it took place during the same period in which they committed many massacres, and carried out murder and destruction operations in other camps in WB and GS. These acts were depicted in detail in a previous book of this series (The Israeli Massacres of the Palestinian People).<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, the houses of the WB and GS camps have many problems relative to structure, specifications and the availability of infrastructure. Here again, overcrowdedness, the inefficiency of the sanitary drainage networks and water systems emerge as two principle





problems. Moreover, 31% of the camp's houses in WB and 19% of those in GS are unconnected to the sanitary drainage networks.<sup>100</sup>

As we have previously stated, the GS, and more specifically the camps in it, are some of the most crowded regions of the world. In Nuseirat camp, where more than 63 thousand refugees live (according to the 2009 census), sewage and drinking water flow in the streets in open ditches, alleys and streets, and in arable lands; and that constitutes a very serious health hazard to the camp's population. The same applies to Bureij camp (32 thousand refugees) and Maghazi camp (24 thousand refugees), where there are no sanitary drainage networks and water flows in open canals; again, this constitutes a fertile environment for the growth of germs.<sup>101</sup>

The absence of sanitary sewage networks entails serious health and environmental problems, the most important of which are water pollution and the spread of diseases. Moreover, the consequences of overcrowdedness and lack of ventilation are not confined to the health aspect; they entail many social problems as well, such as lack of privacy and depression.

Matters are no different in WB camps, where 'Arroub camp has absolutely no sanitary sewage system (the camp was established in 1950, and according to the census of 2008, 11 thousand people live there).<sup>102</sup>

The 'Aida camp suffers from extreme crowdedness;<sup>103</sup> the same applies to Camp No.1, where during funeral processions, the residents are forced to pass the caskets through the windows because the alleys are so narrow!<sup>104</sup> In 1964 and in 'Askar camp, where crowdedness is also a problem, the camp's residents were compelled to widen it



“A house unfit for living,” thus and in short, the “Witness” Human Rights Association describes the status of many houses in Lebanon’s refugee camps. The accompanying picture of this inhabited house is but “one example.”

- The Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness), 29/6/2008.

In light of Israeli repeated attacks, and the inability of most families to rehabilitate or restore their bombed out homes, due to their hard financial circumstances, you find many of the partially destroyed houses occupied by their refugee residents in GS and WB camps.

The picture is that of a “residential” building in the Rafah refugee camp, south of GS.





themselves, because UNRWA lacked the authority to do so. This caused this new enlargement, known as “New ‘Askar,” not to be recognized by UNRWA and consequently to be deprived of the services and basic facilities that UNRWA usually provides to camps.<sup>105</sup>

In Shu‘fat camp, north of Jerusalem, many refugees who had left the camp in the past are returning to it, in an attempt to conserve their Jerusalemite identity, due to Israeli construction of the Separation Wall and due to the continuous escalation in the Judaization of Jerusalem, and the attempts to deprive its inhabitants of their Jerusalem identities. Whereas UNRWA’s estimates indicate that the number of camp’s residents ranges between 10 and 11 thousand refugees, UNRWA itself admits that these estimates are far from accurate, as the last few years have witnessed the return of more than four thousand refugees who wished to avoid losing their rights as residents of Jerusalem. This overcrowdedness led to the disregard of many building rules; thus, three and four stories were built on foundations meant to carry one or two stories, as the occupation prohibits the camp’s expansion horizontally.<sup>106</sup> In addition, camp’s residents became victims of the Separation Wall that the occupation authorities are building in WB; these authorities have demolished tens of houses “to the benefit of the Wall’s path.”<sup>107</sup> The occupation endeavors to gradually isolate the camp from Jerusalem and deprive its population from their Jerusalem identities. In addition, because most of the camp’s residents carry the blue Israeli ID cards, they hardly benefit from any of UNRWA’s services. Moreover, the camp depends on Jerusalem for services provided by hospitals, schools and universities; thus, with the Separation Wall isolating them from their city, the refugees’ lives have become unbearable.<sup>108</sup>



Everything that we have mentioned above constitutes part of the refugees' current and not past suffering, which they endure with the hope that it is temporary. For, at the beginning of their ordeal, they were scattered in tents, in abandoned buildings and barracks, and sometimes even in cattle's yards.<sup>109</sup> Tens of refugees used to live in a single shelter or room, use light curtains as partitions, and share the few available toilets, in an environment that lacked the minimum privacy requirements of families, as well as those of individuals.

These harsh living conditions, together with the painful events that the Palestinians lived through (such as the war in Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, Iraq, in addition to *al-Nakbah* at the start of the occupation) led to the spread of the emigration phenomenon among Palestinians. Moreover, as we had mentioned in Chapter Three, today, the Palestinians are scattered across most countries of the world; in the process, their social fabric has been weakened; as many families are dispersed in the four corners of the globe. At the beginning of *al-Nakbah*, thousands suffered from broken connections with members of their families, the mother separated from her children, the children from their parents or siblings; and up to this day, some people still are not able to reconnect some of these ties. Thus, the story of the Palestinian woman, Rihab Ken'an, stirred the emotions of the whole world. It was circulated on the Internet because of the human dimension that it depicts. For, in the eyes of the people of the Sabra and Shatila camps, Rihab was another victim of the massacre that took place there, the same as the 54 other members of her family who were all murdered. Her neighbors took upon themselves the task of raising her daughter Maymana, who was eight years old at the time; while in Rihab's mind, her daughter was one





of those murdered in the massacre. More than twenty years later, one of the neighbors happened to see Rihab on television reciting a poem. He informed her daughter who was thrilled tremendously. A telephone call was arranged between mother and daughter to be broadcast on the Abu Dhabi satellite channel, without the mother knowing anything about the matter. The moments of this call were so charged with emotions, that they could have brought tears to a stone. By then, Maymana was all grown-up and married.<sup>110</sup>

In a similar story, but so far without a happy ending; on 3/8/2005, the *al-Quds al-'Arabi* newspaper published the story and appeal of the Palestinian Emile Sarsour (59 years old) who resides in Norway, and who, up to this day, continues to look for his uncle missing in Safad in 1948. Emile's family had believed that the uncle had died and held a gathering of mourners for him. However, in the year 2000, one of the village's people told them that he had met him two decades ago; this piece of news revived their hopes. Emile headed to the Palestinian territories specifically to meet him, in fulfillment of a promise that he had made to his father, who had asked his children, before his death in 2005, to keep looking for their missing uncle and his descendants. However, alas, to this day, he has not been able to find him.<sup>111</sup>

Even the families who are able to keep in touch suffer from geographic dispersal, as the parents are in one country, with their children, each in a separate country. This causes an important human dimension to be missing in persons known for the depth of their social bonds and the importance that they attach to these bonds.

Some governments take advantage of the emigration of registered refugees to strike them out of their records; thus, they refuse to renew





After the liberation of southern Lebanon in 2000, many palestinian refugees in Lebanon were able to see their family and relatives for the first time, following a separation of ten years. During these “border visits,” the refugees exchange words with their relatives “by shouting—as much as they could—” as seen in the first picture; until the lucky ones among them manage to reach a closer point that allows them direct contact—as in the second picture.

The pictures are those of refugees from Rashidieh refugee camp on a border visit.

- The Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness).

their travel documents, in an attempt to remove from them their refugee status; in spite of the fact that they continue to have kinship ties with camp’s residents in their primary places of refuge.

During the American occupation of Iraq, the dispersal problem surfaced again, when tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees became homeless and their suffering carried them to their countries of exile and Diasporas. Therefore, they scattered across more than 15 Arab and foreign countries, known among them, in addition to Jordan and Syria, Cyprus (1,600 refugees), Sweden (800 refugees), Brazil (140 refugees), Chile (130 refugees), Iceland (50 refugees), Australia (150 refugees), Switzerland (25 refugees), India (80 refugees), Malaysia (30 refugees), France (one family). Furthermore, an unknown number of them took



refugee in each of Norway, Denmark, Canada and Holland,<sup>112</sup> while tens of thousands of them are still stuck in tents on the Iraqi–Syrian and Iraqi–Jordanian borders, awaiting acceptance somewhere, and a new journey of displacement.

In addition to the human dimension in the suffering of the Palestinian refugees in Iraq, the issue of deporting them in limited numbers to various countries raises the fears of the observers of this dossier, lest scattering them across western countries and settling them there becomes an example to be emulated on a larger scale, with the aim of solving the refugees' issue.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, the doors of Arab countries that have common borders with Palestine are shut in their faces, whereas official and international parties decline to demand the refugees' rights of return and compensation.

### **5. The Health Aspect**

The refugees' suffering extends to the health aspect, as diseases are widespread among them. Most of these diseases are caused by the harsh conditions under which they live and inadequate infrastructure, in addition to insufficient and inadequate healthcare facilities. Sometimes these factors lead to mass health emergencies, such as the one that occurred in Camp No.1 in WB in the summer of 1998, when hundreds of refugees were treated for chronic diarrhea caused by polluted water sources. Their treatment required a state of emergency on the part of UNRWA and other health bodies in the WB, over a period of continuous days and nights.<sup>114</sup>

In Lebanon, and in general, the refugees suffer from deteriorating health conditions, the insufficiency in the facilities provided by UNRWA, and from being excluded from the public health services



provided by the state, unlike Syria and Jordan for example. And while the World Health Organization (WHO) considers providing one bed per thousand patients as the minimum requirement, the average of what UNRWA provides for the refugees in Lebanon is one bed per four thousand persons.<sup>115</sup> Some healthcare centers in the camps receive, on average, between 200 and 300 patients a day.<sup>116</sup> A field study conducted by the Witness Association for Human Rights showed that the average time that an examination of a patient in an UNRWA clinic takes is only two to three minutes! More than 42% of those surveyed in this same study stated that they underwent a surgery because of negligence in diagnosing their disease by UNRWA's staff. In addition, due to bad living conditions inside the camps, diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart diseases and mental illnesses are rampant.<sup>117</sup> In Burj Barajneh camp, infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, mange, lice and diarrhea, are prevalent among children.<sup>118</sup> In Mar Elias camp, chronic diseases are widespread in a noticeably high rate, in particular hypertension, cancer and diabetes.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, in spite of the hard economic circumstances of refugees, UNRWA contributes little to the treatment of many diseases, the cost of medicines, and the treatment of chronic diseases. For example, it does not cover the cost of kidney dialysis or blood transfusions for Thalassemia sufferers, and covers a small percentage of the cost of open-heart surgery (\$250 for middle class patients and \$500 for the poor, while the surgery's cost is no less than five thousand dollars).<sup>120</sup>

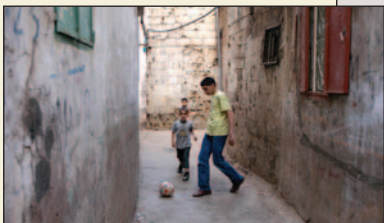
The laboratory tests provided by UNRWA are confined to routine and basic ones. Even these limited tests are not available in all the



camps, and often sick refugees are compelled to go to another camp to do them. For example, in Beddawi clinic, radiography is not available, so the patient is forced to go to Nahr al-Bared camp (before its destruction) to have it done, knowing that radiography in al-Bared camp was limited to x-ray. As for echography, MRI, CT Scan, etc. these are not available at UNRWA's clinic, the same for cardiography and encephalography, as for the analyses that need culture, hormonal and glandular analyses, etc. these are totally nonexistent, while their costs are exorbitant.<sup>121</sup>

Added to all of the above, there are a considerable number of people with disabilities, sustained especially during the Lebanese civil war. Whereas there are no precise numbers for all the camps and refugees in Lebanon, the ratio of the disabled in Beddawi camp is around 2% of the total population; these constitute a much-marginalized group to whom no services, care or special facilities are available.<sup>122</sup>

As for Syrian camps, in spite of the fact that the Syrian government provides health and educational services to the refugees, numerous camps suffer in the area of health, either because they are situated far from services or cities, or because of the spread of diseases resulting from lack of necessary infrastructure, absence of a sanitary drainage network, and the deficiency in required housing qualifications, such as ventilation and sunlight. In addition, the Palestinian refugees in Syria suffer from several hereditary genetic diseases, aggravated by the prevalence of marriage between relatives, because for many young people, it is hard to marry outside the extended family, in view of their bad financial situation.<sup>123</sup>



## *The Work Places... the Play Places*

Camps' children grow up fast. They go to school "sometimes." To them, work places are very similar to play places. For in both, necessary safety measures are nonexistent. The child adapts to the surrounding environment with all its hazards, and the possibility of it causing him harm. In both places, the child looks for some hope.

Due to poverty, and because their parents face difficulties in finding a job, many children resort to work. In Lebanon's camps, the rates of dropping out of school and of child labor are high, with encouragement from "the older generation," those who had completed their education, but failed to find a job compatible with their qualifications; this is because Lebanese laws deny Palestinians the right to work in more than 72 professions, most notable among them are medicine, law and engineering. The Palestinians hope for improvement in their situation in the coming years with the passing of a new amendment to these laws (February 2010) that grants exceptions to Palestinians born in Lebanon.





## 6. The Economic Aspect

Thousands of refugee families live in abject poverty. UNRWA's records indicate that, by the end of 2009, there were about 51 thousand refugees in Jordan, registered as special hardship cases (SHCs), 51 thousands in Lebanon, 34 thousands in Syria, 35 thousands in WB and 94 thousands in GS.<sup>124</sup> If we calculate the percentage of these cases of the total of those registered with UNRWA in these regions, we find that it is 2.6% in Jordan, 12% in Lebanon, 7.2% in Syria, 4.5% in WB and 8.5% in GS. This again indicates that Lebanon's refugees are singled out as to the extent of their suffering, so that the rate of SHCs among them is higher than even that of GS (always with reservation regarding UNRWA's figures, they are still significant as general indicators).

It should be mentioned here that the refugees registered as SHCs represent a concept independent from that of refugees that receive food rations or depend totally on them, as is the case with numerous refugee families, in particular in GS and Lebanon. Statistics show that, in general, the refugees constitute the poorest group in their surroundings.

In Jordan, we find that the ratio of extreme poverty cases in camps reaches 7%,<sup>125</sup> while the Fafu study indicated that 31% of the total number of camps' families live below the poverty line. The Fafu study cited several indicators that reflect the harsh reality of the Palestinian refugees' camps in Jordan; at the forefront is the large size of the family, the rise in the number of dependants needing support, and the rise in the number of families where the woman is the head of the household, as these families are more subjected to social and economic difficulties in conservative societies such as that of Jordan, subsequently, the rise in the rates of poverty (31% of families live below the poverty line, and 23% of those economically active also live below the poverty line),



unemployment (13% of the economically active residents) that rises in particular among males (15–24years) to reach 16%. The study added that 95% of the families have no savings in the bank, 55% cannot afford new clothes, and 77% are unable to eat meat three times a week.<sup>126</sup>

In Lebanon, most refugee families depend totally on UNRWA, due to its capacity as the only provider for education, health, relief and social services,<sup>127</sup> and noting the deterioration in its services and its failure to secure the refugees' basic needs. The refugees' economic crisis is aggravated by denying them the right to work in many occupations, and that leads to a very high unemployment rate among them. In addition, in case they had managed to find a certain job illegally, they become subject to abuse from their employers. Lebanese authorities allow Palestinians to work in a very limited range of professions; they oblige their employers to pay for them fees just like those paid for foreign workers, to obtain for them work permits, and to register them with Social Security (Social Security forces employers to pay fees on behalf of their Palestinian workers without giving these workers the right to benefit from any of its services). Still the Lebanese authorities are strict in granting these permits. For the number of permits given to Palestinians between the years 1992 and 2000 came to 500 of the 50 thousand permits granted to foreigners during that same period.<sup>128</sup> The UNRWA statistics show that 60% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live under the poverty threshold, and that 36% of them have no means of subsistence.<sup>129</sup>

There are no available statistics about the other countries of refuge, except WB and GS, where a study indicated that the refugees constitute 47.5% of the total of the poor (by comparison, they represent 40.6% of the Palestinians in the WB and GS);<sup>130</sup> unemployment rates rise



The picture depicts refugee children from the Gaza refugee camp (Jerash) in northern Jordan trying to warm themselves over a simple fireplace that they had made of wood. Most families in the camp live on a monthly income of no more than \$40. The refugees suffer from deteriorating infrastructure in the camp, and from the surrounding harsh desert climate. Furthermore, most refugees in this camp lack identity papers, and subsequently are denied several basic rights such as those of employment, ownership and movement.

In spite of the enormous damage and loss of life and property caused by the Israeli aggression against GS, the children there did not interrupt their education. In the picture, a group of children is shown studying near their school that was destroyed during the Israeli aggression against GS.

Statistics show a rise in the rate of education and decline in the rate of illiteracy among refugees, when compared to the rest of the Palestinian population in WB and GS.







among them to reach 30.6% in refugee circles compared to 22% for non-refugees.<sup>131</sup>

## **7. The Educational Aspect**

Education is considered one of the few bright spots in the lives of refugees, albeit not free of suffering. This aspect of refugees' lives brings to light their attachment to learning, and adherence to it, in spite of their hard circumstances.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, we find that in WB and GS, educational levels are higher among refugees than among the rest of the Palestinian population,<sup>133</sup> in spite of their high poverty and unemployment rates, and the continuing practices of the occupation of targeting the educational sector. The ninth book of this series will be consecrated to speaking about the suffering of the educational sector and of the Palestinian students under Israeli occupation.

The rate of illiteracy among refugees residing in the Palestinian territories who are 15 years and older came to 5.9% in 2008, compared to 6.4% among non-refugees.<sup>134</sup>

In the rest of the countries of refuge, and in 2006, the average illiteracy rate among Palestinian refugees in Jordan's camps was estimated at 17.6%, in Syria 16.5%, and in Lebanon 25.5%.<sup>135</sup>

In most countries of refuge, UNRWA schools suffer from shortage of essential educational facilities, especially modern equipment such as computers and laboratories, and shortage of extracurricular activities. Moreover, most of these schools suffer from crowdedness, where the number of students in a single class may vary between 30 and 40 students, to reach sometimes 45 or more. Moreover, in spite of the





absence of accurate statistics, most studies indicate the existence of the dropping out phenomenon among the children of refugees, in particular in poor camps in Syria and Lebanon, because of bad social and economic conditions. In addition, a state of frustration dominates the refugee students in Lebanon, because they know that after graduation and specializing in a certain field, they would not be able to work because of the aforementioned law and circumstances.

Yet, the greatest challenge facing the refugees in this respect is UNRWA's curricula that do not include the subjects of Palestine's history and geography, which is an intentional omission. In addition, there is total absence of cultural and enlightening programs related to Palestine.<sup>136</sup>

Now for the bright side in this sector; there are many Palestinians who occupy important positions in Syria and Jordan, including high-level academic posts such as university administrators. The Palestinians have also played (and are still playing) a distinguished role in the economies of their countries of refuge. This role is most prominent in Lebanon. Among these, there were notable businessmen (Yussuf Baydas, Rif'at al-Nimr, Tawfic Gargour, and Raymond 'Audi), skilled engineers (Kamal al-Sha'er, Zuheir al-'Alami, Haseeb al-Sabbagh and Sa'id Khoury) and intellectuals and eminent academics (the families of: Sayigh, al-Khalidi, and al-Maqdisi).



In refugee camps, there are many common denominators, most prominent of which are the narrow alleys, screaming in all possible forms and colors: Palestine is our homeland, and the return to it is our right.

The mural drawings reflect the refugees' aspirations and memories, the most widespread of which are: the map of Palestine, the Palestinian flag with its green, red, white and black colors; places and towns that inhabit the Palestinian memory, such as Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Nazareth and others; in addition to the domes of mosques, city walls and lighthouses, there are also orange groves, keys, kouffiah, Hanthala (the famous caricature figure of Naji al-'Ali), a veiled commando fighter and a weapon.





## *Chapter 5: The Palestinian Refugees and International Law*

Specialists in international law, in particular the part of it related to refugees, and those interested in it, including international and human rights organizations, agree that the international law has failed the Palestinian refugees and purposely excluded them from the introductory clauses of international agreements and conventions related to refugees in general. At the forefront of these are the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967) that stipulates the following: “This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance.” This applies





only to Palestinian refugees and UNRWA. It is necessary to mention here that UNRWA is a relief agency; subsequently, the Palestinian refugees are denied protection, a matter that reflected itself clearly on the heightened suffering of Palestinian refugees in their Diasporas and in occupied Palestine, as was discussed in past chapters.

The status of Palestinian refugees in the eyes of international law can be specified in two main sections: the first, the definition of a refugee, and the second, the right of return and compensation. We will discuss them consecutively in this chapter.

### **1. Definition of Refugees**

The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it...

The matter of defining the Palestinian refugee has specifically added complexity due to their issue's four main characteristics:

- a. At its inception, this issue concerned the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees; today, it concerns that of millions of them, scattered around the globe.
- b. As a rule, the refugee asks for permanent residence in his host country because of personal fear; and rarely does he wish to



return to his country of origin; while the Palestinian refugees are the individuals most adherents to their right of return and to the demand that it be implemented. They left their country only because of the flagrant Israeli practices against them, of massacres, blowing up of houses, and razing entire villages.

- c. The issue of the Palestinian refugees is not confined, in the technical sense of the word, to the refugees, it encompasses large numbers of persons displaced and expelled from their lands and homes after 1948. For, until today, the Israeli occupation authorities go to extremes in their policies aimed at expelling Palestinians from their lands, even those who carry the Israeli nationality and live inside the green line.
- d. It is an issue that, in addition to its humanitarian dimension, carries an important political dimension that is almost predominant, as the refugee dossier constitutes the most difficult settlement dossier, in case there will be a settlement, and in view of the occupation's categorical refusal of the refugees' return, fearing the demographic threat; in spite of what the researcher Dr. Salman Abu Sitta has proven, with tangible evidence, that their return is practicably feasible, today, and to their places of origin.

These four main problems are brought up whenever there is a discussion of any current definition of Palestinian refugees. For example, UNRWA's definition is a mere procedural one that excludes a great many of them, as it defines them as "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." Elsewhere, it adds in



describing them “those who took refuge in one of the countries where UNRWA’s services are offered. This definition and eligibility to receive aid is applicable to their direct descendants.”

Whereas the Palestinian National Charter, adopted by the National Department for Refugee Affairs in the PLO defines the refugees as follows “The Palestinians are those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in Palestine regardless of whether they were evicted from it or have stayed there. Anyone born, after that date, of a Palestinian father—whether inside Palestine or outside it—is also a Palestinian.” By stating that, this definition tries to get around the issue of Palestinian refugees, those who had left Palestine or were driven out of it after 1948, and up to this day. Those that the Israeli occupation, by circumventing the terminology of international law, tries to exclude from the definition of a refugee by describing them as “the displaced,” and so deny them two main rights, that of return and that of compensation, or tries to divide the Palestinian refugees’ files.

The importance of the question of defining refugees comes to the fore in settlement negotiations, and in international circles, where any negligence or exclusion denotes depriving a group of Palestinians from one of their intrinsic rights. As an example, this has happened during the Ottawa conference of 1992 when the head of the Palestinian side of the joint Palestinian–Jordanian delegation presented a definition that coincided with the Israeli definition of the “absentee” category, which was:

the Palestinian refugees are all those Palestinians and their descendants who were expelled or forced to leave their homes during the period extending from November 1947 (Partition Resolution) and January 1949 (the Rhodes Armistice Agreement) from the area under Israeli control (i.e., inside the green line).





Dr. Salman Abou Sitta's definition of a Palestinian refugee may be considered the most precise in this context, as he defines a refugee as:

Every (non-Jew) Palestinian expelled from his normal place of residence in Palestine in 1948 and afterwards, or had left it for whatever reason, and Israel did not allow him to return to his former homeland. The refugee continues to hold this attribution until he or his descendants return to their country of origin.



### *Definition of a Refugee*

Name: refugee  
Date of birth: 1948  
Residence: 'Aida  
Grandfather: Palestinian

- ▶ A mural in the 'Aida refugee camp in WB.

There is reservation to specifying 1947, as the hostile acts of Jews and Zionists started long before that.<sup>137</sup>

At the end of this account, it could be useful to quote what the researcher Najwa Hissawi had mentioned regarding this matter, as it is precise in its comprehensiveness. She points out the necessity to:

consider every Palestinian, who had left Palestine or wasn't there for any reason when the occupation occurred, and every Palestinian born outside Palestine and cannot go back to his homeland because of the Israeli ban, is concerned with the right





of return, regardless of his legal classification, whether under the category of refugee or that of displaced, as long as this classification's aim is to implement the right of return, consecrated by human rights conventions related to every individual.<sup>138</sup>

## **2. The Right of Return and Compensation**

Since *al-Nakbah*, the concept of Palestinian refugee was linked to the right of return. This is proof of what this right symbolizes for the Palestinian. As for compensation, even if less prominent, this is also a fundamental right of the Palestinian. Moreover, contrary to what some may think or endeavor to consecrate, this right is not subject to prescription if the right of return was implemented; and, in turn, once it is implemented, it does not eliminate, the right of return; for each is a self-standing independent right.

The reason why the right of return is more prominent pertains to its political dimension, for Israel rejects its implementation because of what it represents of the fear of a demographic threat to the population makeup of Palestine, especially inside the green line, which would endanger what Israel is striving for, “the Jewishness” of its occupying entity.

Article 11 of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 194 issued on 11/12/1948:

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



Furthermore, in order to remove any ambiguity, the same resolution contained a call to form the “Conciliation Commission.” This Commission has convened a conference in Lausanne, Switzerland on 26/4/1949 that resulted in the “Lausanne Protocol,” in which it asserted its anxiousness to achieve as quickly as possible the objectives of the General Assembly’s Resolution of 11/12/1948, which stated that:

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

Israel signed this protocol because signing it was a condition from the UN for accepting its membership in the international organization. Once this was achieved, and its membership in the UN was approved, it reneged on its commitment to the Lausanne Protocol, renounced the committee’s decisions, and refused to implement its terms.<sup>139</sup>

The debate over compensation involves the following three issues:<sup>140</sup>

- a. The right of refugees who choose not to return to be compensated for their properties’ value.
- b. The right of individuals to compensation for loss of assets, for those who wish to reclaim them, for gain they had missed due to laying hands on those assets, for damages incurred due to their being away from the land and losing their independence. As for those who choose not to reclaim their properties, they must be compensated for the value of these properties, and for the gains they had missed. In both cases, it should be taken into account,



as a basis for computing the missing gains and benefits, that the Jews made use of them, as if their own, after laying hands on them.

- c. The right to compensation for mental anguish and psychological harm, having sustained enormous damage due to the suffering of more than half a century of homelessness, to living the life of the displaced, to not being allowed to return to their own country, and to being deprived of many of their basic rights.

The definition of the right of return is also connected to three main items:

- a. The nature of this right: for it is a right of a civil nature, but at the same time, of a political nature (properties and land + citizenship).
- b. The place to which to return: which is Palestine, specifically, the place from which they were expelled, for return to GS is not “the

### **Memoirs of a Refugee**

#### *‘Awdeh Awaiting the Return*

While carrying the deeds of his land and his old house, Hajj ‘Awdeh recounts: I will never forget that day, when all the villagers gathered on a single road in the well’s yard, heading west toward the coast. The time was before sunset, and winter has just started. We walked, looking back at our village, waving our hands, our hearts weeping and our voices raised in a farewell. We said goodbye to our dear village, with all there is in it, its stones, dates and trees; to the sand goodbye, to the houses that carry the scent of my mother whose words are still etched in my memory “the get-together is the day we get together, O our homeland!.”

- Hajj ‘Awdeh ‘Adwan (93 years), a refugee from Barbara village, *al-Khaleej*, 9/5/2008.





return” for those who were driven out of Haifa, for example, etc. Therefore, all the solutions that propose a return of Palestinian refugees or of some of them, to WB and GS, and not to their villages of origin inside the green line, do not put into effect the right of return.

- c. The holder of this right: basically, the right of return is an individual one. However, it assumed a collective dimension because it pertains to the problem of an entire population. Subsequently, the right to relinquish it is also an individual one, belonging to every refugee, and it is not the privilege of politicians.

International conventions consider the right of return as “an individual and basic right of every person,” because denying someone this right constitutes one of the harshest punishments that can be imposed on a human being. On 21/6/1946, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended the establishment of an international organization, the task of which is to secure the return of refugees to their countries of origin. While Article 13 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” This right is consolidated by the illegitimacy of forcible transfer, as no country is allowed to “expel a population under its control”; especially that the Fourth Geneva Convention in its Article 49 provides for, “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.”<sup>141</sup>





Not merely that, there are a number of binding agreements, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which called for securing a person's rights and freedoms, among which is his right of return. Article 12 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates, "Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence." More significantly, there is emphasis on the inadmissibility of "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country."<sup>142</sup> It should also be stressed that the right of return and the obligation to compensate do not constitute a political decision or an agreement, but a right and a duty that are not subject to prescription and are not altered because of any contingent political event. The UNGA has repeated its emphasis on implementing Resolution 194 (right of return and obligation to compensate) more than 135 times during the last fifty years, starting from the date of its issuance on 11/12/1948. In 1974, the UN issued Resolution 3236 in which it reiterated that the return is an inalienable right, and urged states to offer support to the Palestinian people, including arms, for the sake of gaining their rights.<sup>143</sup>



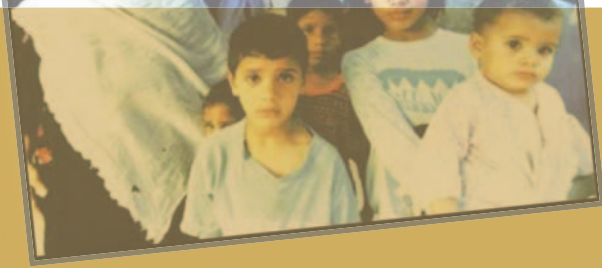


## *One Generation after the Other: They Inherit the Culture and the Struggle*

The Palestinian folk songs were among the first things that the refugees were eager to bequeath to their children and grandchildren, as part of the homeland and the identity. Pictures show (in the past and recently) Palestinian young men performing *dabkeh*, which is the Palestinian folk dance.

The *dabkeh* is considered one of the most important facets of Palestinian heritage. When performing it, hands are interlocked as mark of unity and solidarity; feet stomp the ground as a symbol of vigor and manliness. The *dabkeh* is accompanied by songs that express the depth of belonging to the Palestinian land that they love. It is performed on all occasions, welcoming someone returning from a trip, weddings, joyous events, anniversaries, all with a show of pride and zeal. The *dabkeh* differs from one occasion to another and from one village to another; however, after the occupation, it took on a form of struggle. In spite of the invasion of the Palestinian culture by various other cultures and Arabic and international arts, including attempts by the Israeli occupation to obliterate the Palestinian identity in all its manifestations, the *dabkeh* maintained its continuity and presence on all occasions; it is present in almost every Palestinian wedding, even in countries of immigration. Today, the Palestinians perform the *dabkeh* to the sound of patriotic and struggle songs that express their suffering and love of Palestine and their desire to return to it.







## *Chapter 6: Between the Dream of Return and the Naturalization Plans*

In spite of the fact that, since 1948, the number of Jews has multiplied, and so the number of Palestinians, and this led to crowdedness, especially in major mixed cities, it is still easy to find out the population distribution, and know the lands' original owners, and so arrange for their repossession, especially following the experience of Bosnia–Herzegovina, and after the UN had adopted the Pinheiro Principles, of which Principle two declares “all refugees and displaced persons have the right to have restored to them any housing, land or property of which they were arbitrarily or unlawfully deprived...”<sup>144</sup>





However, since *al-Nakbah* and to the present day, the occupation authorities refuse to recognize the refugees' right to return to their homes or allow them to exercise that right. For that end, they fabricate excuses and justifications. Thus, in 1948, the Israeli foreign minister refused the request of Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator in Palestine, to return the Palestinian refugees and demanded that they be settled outside Israel's borders. In 1956, and during a visit by the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett to the US, he stipulated that the Palestinian refugees be settled in their countries of refuge.<sup>145</sup> More than a few Israeli leaders have proposed plans for the settlement of refugees, among them: Levi Eshkol, Menachem Begin, Yigal Allon, Moshe Sharett, Yitzhak Shamir, Shlomo Gazit, Abba Eban and Moshe Dayan. In July 2000, shortly before he went to participate in the Camp David talks, the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced, "Israel will never accept the right of return or Resolution 194."<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, in September 2006, the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni urged the world to persuade the Palestinians to agree that the solution of the Palestinian refugees' problem is not found "within Israeli borders," adding that "such a solution required that each state should be the solution for its own refugees, Israel as a homeland for Jewish refugees from around the world, and the future state of Palestine the answer for Palestinian refugees." As for the Palestinians, the land's owners, she asked them to stop looking for their rights in the "country of others, [meaning Israel!]."<sup>147</sup> All these stances emphasize that Israeli leaders endeavor to consecrate the Jewishness of their state, in an effort to get rid of the Palestinian Arabs who stayed in their homes inside the green line (today's State of Israel).



The same matter is asserted in the election programs of major Israeli parties, Labor, Likud and Kadima, as these programs are alike vis-à-vis the refugee issue, to the point of coinciding. They also correspond to the stance taken by the Israeli “cultural elite” of writers and journalists. The basis of this stance is “the Jewish nature of the state of Israel” and the propagation of the idea that it is impossible to allow the refugees to return, thus, disregarding any historical revision that would affirm Zionist responsibility for their plight, considering the war of 1967 as the starting point of the struggle and where the right of return stops.<sup>148</sup>

Since 1948, the estimate of the number of proposed or put forth settlement plans, total or partial, ranges from 40 to 50 plans.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps the oldest of these plans on a global level is that of George C. McGhee, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1949), that of the UN, headed by Gordon R. Clapp (1949), that of Blandford (1951), that of Johnston, offering resettlement of Palestinians in the East Bank of the Jordan river (1953–1955), that of Humphrey (1957), that of Hammarskjöld (1959), a research by Donna E. Arzt (1997), and the plan of Ros-Lehtinen (2006); most of these are American proposals. There was also a 1955 proposal by the British Foreign Ministry to assimilate gradually one million refugees in Iraq; and another by the Canadian diplomat Mark Perron, in 1993 that he called “new Middle East without refugees.”<sup>150</sup>

In the framework of Palestinian–Israeli negotiations, the occupation authorities intentionally avoid to mention or raise the refugee issue. In the negotiations, they draw upon UN resolutions 242 and 338 and not 181; the first doesn’t have a text that guarantees the refugees their right of return, or give them free choice in deciding



whether they wish to return or not! Furthermore, many negotiators neglect the right of return and compensation; under pressure, they agree to postpone raising it. Regrettably, some of them, in secret documents, agreed to abandon it and accept naturalization. We find that in the Geneva Initiative dated on 12/10/2003, signed by many personalities close to Yasir ‘Arafat, that Article Seven states that “The Parties recognize that UNGAR 194, UNSC Resolution 242, and the Arab Peace Initiative (Article 2.ii.) concerning the rights of the Palestinian refugees” and that the “Palestinian refugee status shall be terminated upon the realization of an individual refugee’s permanent place of residence (PPR) as determined by the International Commission.” There is also the secret letter sent by the president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmud ‘Abbas to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in which he said that “he is absolutely convinced that the Palestinian refugees’ right of return to their homes, from which they were expelled in the fateful catastrophe, *al-Nakbah* of 1948, is not realistic and inapplicable,” adding that “he is well aware that a small number of refugees would be able to return to their homes in the Hebrew State.”<sup>151</sup> Here we stress again that the rights of return and compensation are two individual inalienable rights that don’t prescribe because of political concessions.

As for the refugees, after 60 years had passed since *al-Nakbah*, they have not lost hope of returning, nor the determination to work for achieving this right of theirs. This is made clear in the upbringing of their children; thus, we find that second and third generations of refugees identify themselves as coming from such and such village and such and such district in Palestine. They are keen on expressing their Palestinian identity and on clinging to what is still handed down



to them of the Palestinian heritage. The date of 15/5/1948, the anniversary of the issuing of the Partition Resolution, is considered an anniversary of *al-Nakbah*, which Palestinians around the world commemorate annually by presenting activities that stress this right.

In this context, civil society initiatives and Palestinian gatherings abroad are prominent, such as the “Palestinians in Europe Conference” that the Palestinian Return Centre in London organizes regularly since 2003, and which is attended by thousands of Palestinians of those who carry European nationalities and IDs, but who, however, insist on their Palestinian identity and their right of return: “No homeland other than Palestine.”

Such initiatives are not new to Palestinian resolve. For since the first expulsion, several ideas were considered, calling on the refugees to conduct mass trips of return to the villages and towns from which they were expelled. The first idea called for launching “the immigration of return” by land across the borders, as the overwhelming majority of refugees were living in Israel’s neighboring countries. Actually, shortly

In spite of repeated Israeli denials, the feasibility of the Palestinians’ return to their homes and villages of origin has been asserted repeatedly by a number of researchers, with illustrations using current maps of Palestine. No Israeli researcher or academic dared challenge or was able to refute this scientific proposition.

- *Al-Majdal* Magazine, The Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, no. 27, Autumn 2005.



after *al-Nakbah*, large numbers of Palestinian men and youth tried to return, in order to pave the way for the return of their families and offspring. However, the Israeli military forces adopted “a ‘shoot to kill’ policy along the armistice lines to prevent the return of Palestinian refugees, until the number of refugees killed by Israeli forces between 1948 and 1956 while trying to return to their homes and properties was estimated at five thousands.”<sup>152</sup>

The refugees have signed family honor documents, and convened regional conferences in various areas of Palestine and in their countries of refuge and Diasporas. In these documents, they declare their adherence to their right of return, their rejection of all resettlement plans, and their refusal to have their issue looked at from only a humanitarian angle, while it is a political issue par excellence. They declare their rejection of political deals, and consider the issue of refugees inside and outside the camps as one and the same. They demand that Israel apologizes for the refugees’ suffering, recognizes their right of return to their homes, and allows them to do so. They also demand that the global community maintains UNRWA in its capacity as an international witness to their plight.<sup>153</sup>

What was also done with the aim of return is the idea to use a fleet of small ships and move by sea; and so they chartered the Greek ship “Silver Paloma.” However, the ship’s owner broke the contract because Israeli intelligence had threatened him. The then Israeli Prime Minister Yitshak Shamir considered that “such steps are tantamount to a declaration of war.”<sup>154</sup>

Even the refugees, those who had stayed inside the green line, and in spite of the severe restrictions placed on them by the occupation, and its



blatant discrimination against them, are in the habit of organizing trips, where they gather, young and old, to renew their memory of their rights, properties and homes..., the homes of their fathers and grandfathers; they point to houses, real estate boundaries and hills, to where there are rivulets, springs and wells, in the expanse of which they used to revel,<sup>155</sup> during those days of long ago filled with joy, before the Zionist occupier spoiled all of that for them.

On every occasion, the refugees declare their adherence to their right to return to the homes from which they were expelled. In 2000, one opinion poll showed the refugees' answer to the question: if you were given the choice of return (to Palestine) or settling in your place of residency; the refugees chose the return. The poll's results came as follows: "WB: 94.9%, GS: 87.2%, Syria: 72.7%, and Lebanon: 89.6%."<sup>156</sup> Two polls conducted by al-Jazeera Satellite Television Station revealed overwhelming preference to return. For the results of the first poll indicated that 88.3% of participants were not in favor of relinquishing the right of return in exchange for establishing a Palestinian state on the territories of 1967, while the second poll showed that 85.6% do not accept the notion of naturalization and financial compensation in exchange for relinquishing the right of return.<sup>157</sup>

Furthermore, a methodical scientific survey, conducted by al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in May of 2006, in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, indicated that 79.2% of them believed in the inevitability of return to Palestine, even a generation/generations from now, while 2.3% of them believed that the return will take place, but to WB and GS and not to all of Palestine, and 13.4% did not believe that



it will happen, while 5.1% answered “I don’t know.” When asked about their attitude vis-à-vis the proposed solutions for the refugees’ problem, 79.6% of those polled clung to their right of return to their native villages and their lands. Only 5.4% of them agreed to return to WB or GS, 6.3% agreed to compensation and naturalization, but outside of Lebanon, 1.7% accepted compensation and naturalization in Lebanon, 4.9% would accept compensation and settlement in Lebanon if they were granted their civil rights there, while 2.1% of them answered, “I don’t know.”<sup>158</sup>

The Palestinian researcher, Dr. Salman Abu Sitta, presented a plan in which he considered that the right of return is feasible. He mentioned that during its mandate (1920–1948), Britain prepared detailed maps of all of Palestine, containing 100 thousand names, corroborated by total aerial photography. Israel used this information and improved on it, keeping a record of each piece of real estate, its original owners, and current tenants, because the Israeli government rents out Palestinian lands to settlers. Furthermore, the UN keeps records of Palestinians’ lands in files kept by the International Conciliation Commission.<sup>159</sup> Abu Sitta points out that the demographic distribution of Jewish settlers up to 1994 remained the same as it was in 1948. When we coincide the locations of the regions from which the refugees were expelled with where the Jews are gathered, we find that the refugees’ return to their homes is still possible, without any structural obstacles; in particular the return of the upper Galilee inhabitants, with the possibility of moving some of the Jews living in the countryside to the center areas where the major gatherings of Jews are, if they wish to do so.<sup>160</sup> Statistics show that 78% of Jews





live on 15% of Palestinian land, 22% of them exploit 85% of the land, while 2.7% of settlers control 17.325 million donums,<sup>161</sup> which are the houses and properties of the Palestinian refugees who were driven out of their country.

In view of all of that, where is the world's conscience?

This is what remains of a demolished camp: a drawing of Jerusalem and the hope of return.

- This picture was taken at Nahr al-Bared camp in the north of Lebanon after its destruction in 2007.





## *Epilogue*

The dream of return is not that of the impossible, but of the feasible. It is the dream of a people whose majority has lived an unsettled life, moving between countries of refuge and countries of exile. Yet these people persevered, clinging to their identity and their right to their land, and to their right to return to it. It is the dream of millions, of the country in which they lived, even if it is physically far from them. The country that, from the narrations of their parents and grandparents, they know by heart, its roads, houses and air; and they cling to whatever remains of it in their possession.

As they had left them in camps, lacking decent human living, in corners unreachable by the sun, they made the dream of return their wish and objective. Instead of the sun, they drew Jerusalem, Gaza, Yafa and Haifa. They called their alleys and neighborhoods by the names of





## *Sixty Years... and the Return is Nearer*



This is the motto of the sixth conference of the Palestinians in Europe conference, held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 3/5/2008, with the participation of about seven thousand Palestinians, most of whom carry European nationalities. The speeches delivered during the conference stressed adherence to the right of return and the necessity to let Palestinian refugees participate in Palestinian decision-making.

► <http://www.prc.org.uk/newsite/ar/centre-activities/conferences/125-sixth-palestinians-in-europe-conference-denmark>

their villages and cities, and expressed, with all the meanings and all the words, that they are “Palestinians” and that they are “returning.”

The dream of returning home to Palestine has become a legacy handed down from one generation to the next, taught by the old to the young, as a pledge and a promise. In the first year of the 1987 uprising (*Intifadah*), and during interrogation, a Zionist officer asked a young man, a refugee from Deir Yassine: does your father still dream of returning to Deir Yassine?... the young man replied: seeing that you did not forget Deir Yassine, how do you expect us to forget it?<sup>162</sup>

The same longing for “the smell of the country” (the smell of Palestine known to the refugees as “the country”) is what prompted Qatf Jamil Qaddoura, “Umm Ass‘ad,” to keep in her possession a bar of soap made from Palestine’s olive oil. She carried it with her when she was driven out along with her family, wishing to be washed with it upon her death. Toward the end of July of 2005, Qatf died, aged 85, and realized her wish when her family washed her with her soap from Palestine.<sup>163</sup>

As for Ahmad Muhammad al-Taha, born in 1914, when, on 1/10/2006, was asked about his Palestinian memories and about the return, he sighed in sorrow and heartache; he tilted his head as if wishing to say that this question worries me and occupies my thinking wherever I go. He then



took a piece of paper on which a poem, in Palestinian colloquial language, was written. Its opening verses went as follows:<sup>164</sup>

O God! From You I recall my pledges... so that I would return to my country and my land

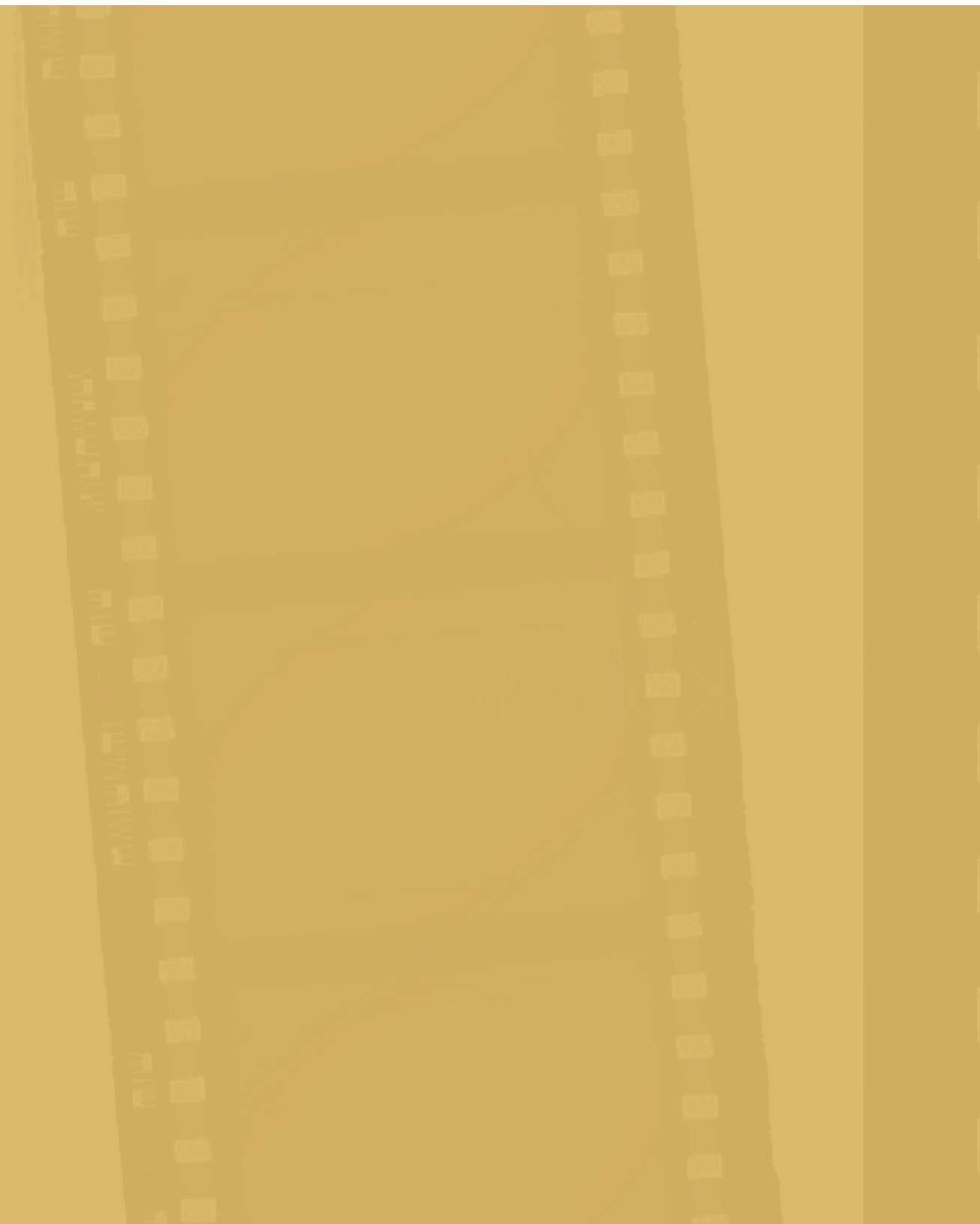
I planted my roses along all the roads... and I was unjustly rejected, but I regained my existence

I refused to remain without an identity... for glory is my map and the drawing of my borders

Even the son of the author of this book, Mahmud, who was not three years old yet, came to his father one day chanting a Palestinian traditional song... By God, we haven't forgotten... Palestine is our country... and the light of our eyes... *Ouf yaba* (O my father)... *Ouf yaba*.

I know that he may not be exactly aware of what he is saying, but I know that these songs will be inculcated in his memory, until they become a belief that will govern all his conduct and the path of his life. Thus, he will remain loyal to the home of his fathers and grandfathers, seeking to realize the dream of about seven million Palestinian refugees.

Mahmud's songs stirred our emotions... because they are true to the pledge... and because it brought back to the author's memory the stories of his own father, his mother's folk songs, his paternal aunt's tears and sighs when recalling her memories in Nablus with her paternal uncles... and his grandfather who refused to live with the refugees,... neither in the countryside nor in the camps... except for a passing visit, and soon he would return to his solitude, there, in the high barren mountains of al-Qassimiyyah in the Lebanese south... faithful to the capital of al-Sham countries... Palestine... Jerusalem... and Acre, where he was born and from which he was expelled. His dearest wishes was to be buried in its soil, but the usurping Zionist gangs denied him the realization of his wish of dying and be buried in the soil of his homeland and dear country... Palestine...



## Endnotes

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- <sup>70</sup> Tarek Hammoud, *op. cit.*
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- <sup>164</sup> Ahmad Muhamad al-Taha, from Safforia in Palestine. He handed me the poem which is written in his own handwriting. He's 92 years old and he studied in Palestine till the fourth elementary class. His wife died when he was 60 years old, so he went back to his reading and writing .





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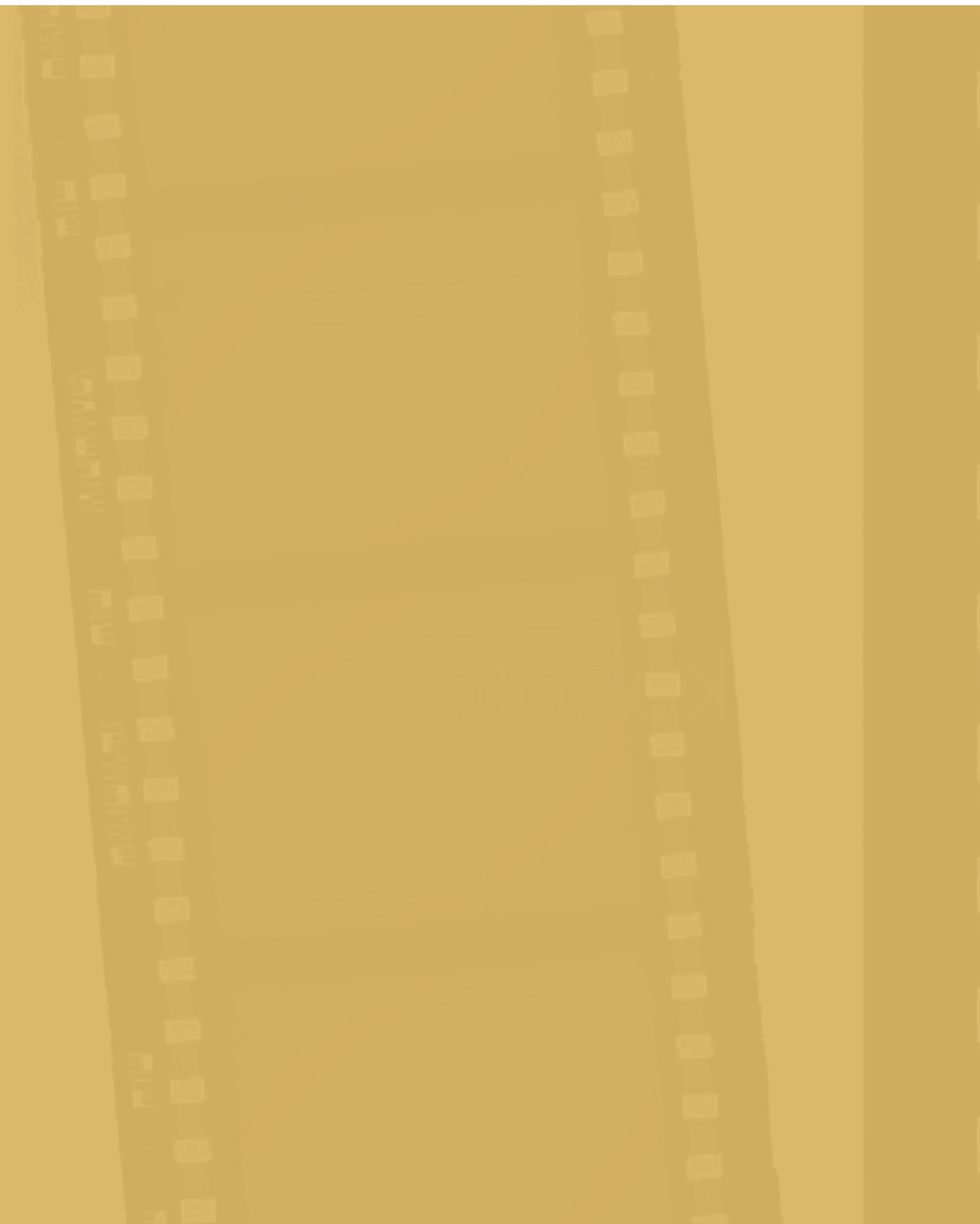
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6. Mohsen M. Saleh and Ziad al-Hasan, *The Political Views of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon as Reflected in May 2006*, 2009.
7. Ishtiaq Hossain and Mohsen M. Saleh, *American Foreign Policy & The Muslim World*, 2009.







## *The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugee*

معاناة اللاجئين الفلسطينيين

6

Am I Not a Human?

### *This Book*

The issue of the Palestinian refugees is the oldest and the biggest of its kind contemporary history, where they are estimated to be 7.5 million refugees, at the beginning of 2010. No talk about the Palestinian suffering is complete without the talk about the Palestinian refugee suffering; this is the hardship that lived daily by the millions. For more than sixty years and despite their continuous suffering, the occupation denies the Palestinians their right of return, while the world tries to avoid taking responsibility and admitting its historic crime.

This book, the sixth of Am I Not a Human? series, is dedicated to shedding light on the different aspects of the Palestinian refugees suffering. Thus, it sheds light on the suffering that started with *al-Nakbah* in 1948 and then on the Palestinian right to his own land. It talks about the suffering of the refugees in the Diaspora and inside historical Palestine, as well as about their distribution. Next it discusses the legal aspects of the issue and ends with the naturalization attempts and the precedence of the right of return; for the refugees have proved, throughout the years, and despite the harsh circumstances, their permanent grasp of this right and insistence on it.



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