

A people in exile

FACTS ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE PALESTINIAN ARAB PEOPLE

A hotbed of dangerous tension has now existed in the Middle East for over 30 years. One of the main causes is that the Palestine problem remains unresolved and a people stripped of homeland and national rights continue to suffer.

The crux of the problem is the Israeli occupation of lands that the UN resolution of November 29, 1947 had set aside for a Palestinian Arab state¹ and the expulsion of the overwhelming majority of the indigenous population from Palestine.

Before the formation of the State of Israel in May 1948 the Jewish settlers had 1,500 square kilometers of land, or just 5.7 per cent of the territory of Palestine. But in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49, the Israeli troops occupied extensive territories set aside for the Palestinians: when the hostilities ended, the Jewish state had an area of 20,700 kilometers (78 per cent of the former mandated territory of Palestine). The remainder of the territory went to Jordan and Egypt.

Eighteen years later — in June 1967 — Israel seized the rest of the Palestinian lands by occupying the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza Strip. Besides, as a result of the June aggression Israel annexed the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.

All the Arab-Israeli wars were accompanied by massive expulsions of Palestinians beyond the borders of their homeland. But in this sense the 1948-1949 war and the June 1967 aggression were the most painful. As a result of the former, of the Arab population of 1,350,000 in Palestine 120,000² remained on the territory of Israel and 450,000 in the areas that went to Jordan and Egypt. The other 780,000 became refugees. The second war forced roughly 350,000 of the 1,256,000 Palestinians on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip to leave their homes and emigrate.³

The occupation of Palestine and the forcible expulsion of the indigenous Arab population turned the bulk of the Palestinian people into expatriates, as will be seen from the following table.

Geographical distribution of the Arab people of Palestine

Country/region	1971 '000	1978 '000
Israel	370	450
West Bank of Jordan	705	800
Gaza Strip	370	455
Jordan	960	1,115
Lebanon	260	400
Syria	170	250
Kuwait	170	180
Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt	75	110
Persian Gulf Emirates	18	80
Latin America	105	120
USA	45	40
Western Europe	15*	60
	Total: 3,270	4,130**

*The FRG only.

**Including small (totalling about 70,000) Palestinian colonies in other countries.

Consequently, the lesser part of the Palestinians (about 40 per cent) now lives in what used to be Palestine (Israel, West Bank of the River Jordan and the Gaza Strip). More than half of them have taken up residence in various Arab countries, mainly neighboring on Israel. The others have been scattered across the world.

Palestinians in Arab countries (UNRWA camps in Lebanon)

A large proportion of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab countries live in special UNRWA camps.⁴ These are, in effect, people without a homeland, wherever they live — Jordan, Syria or Lebanon — they have to face the same problems: unsatisfactory housing, chronic food shortages, lack of elementary services, recurrent epidemics, a high death rate primarily among children and so on. The psychological factor is also highly important: the people in the UNRWA camps keenly feel their total

dependence on external aid and international charities.

Because of the similarity of the Palestinians' condition in various Arab countries, we can confine ourselves to an examination of the conditions in one country. We'll take Lebanon as our example.

In the early 1970s there were 17 refugee camps in Lebanon. These had between 140,000 and 150,000 persons, or over one-half of the Palestinians in Lebanon in that period.⁵

All camps, without exception, are overcrowded. For instance, the Al-Karama camp near Beirut was planned for no more than 5,000 refugees, but its population now exceeds 15,000. The housing problem is compounded not only by the influx of more refugees and their families, but also by the settlement of poor non-Palestinians from Lebanon itself and other Arab countries: in the period under review UNRWA camps in Lebanon provided shelter for 11,500 Lebanese (including 5,500 refugees from Southern Lebanon) and 3,300 Syrians.⁶

Among the outstanding problems is that of education. The population of the camps is relatively young: over 60 per cent are persons under the age of 19. Refugees registered by UNRWA are provided only with a primary (six-year) education and a so-called preparatory (four-year) education. UNRWA's curricula have substantial defects. Because they are designed to train young Palestinians as 'useful member of Arab society,' they give much less attention to educating young people in a spirit of patriotism, notably, through a study of the national history of the Palestinian Arab people. There is a shortage of Palestinian teachers.

It is extremely hard to find jobs for refugees. In the period under review, only about 40 per cent of the UNRWA camp population in Lebanon had constant, seasonal or day work. Unemployment is especially high among young people: 73 per cent in the 15-19 age group and 56 per cent of the 25-29 age group are unemployed. Palestinians are offered mainly dirty and low paid jobs.

Occupied territories

In 1974 a special UN Committee pinpointed the following main lines of Israeli policy toward the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: annexation of Palestinian lands and the establishment of Jewish settlements, demolition of houses, mass arrests, imprisonment, administrative deportation and economic exploitation.⁷

Since 1967 the Israeli government has been doing its utmost to 'assimilate' the occupied lands. As many as 50 Jewish settlements were established in the area in only the period of 1967-1973. By the end of 1976 the number had risen to 70. There are now 92 such settlements with about 10,000 inhabitants in the occupied areas; according to the official plan of the Likud government, in which extremists⁸ have the final say, the number of settlements is to increase by another 196 by 1992.⁹

Israeli policy has generated growing resistance among the Arab population in the occupied ter-

ritories. The discontent is being stamped out by brutal police measures, terrorism and intensified repression. It has been estimated that from 1967 to 1977 roughly 60,000 Palestinians went through Israeli jails; in 1978 they held about 5,000 persons.¹⁰ World opinion has irrefutable proof of the inhuman treatment of prisoners in the torture chambers on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Administrative deportation is used by the occupation authorities mainly as a method to put down patriotic Palestinian intellectuals: artists, writers, journalists, poets, prominent political personalities and trade unionists; by now, over 1,500 persons have been forcibly expelled from the occupied territories.

In the recent period Israeli capital has extended its exploitation of cheap manpower in the occupied territories, for the advantages are obvious: wages are lower than those paid to workers of Jewish origin (in 1976 — by an average of 51.6 per cent), and the Palestinians have no trade union and social rights. Workers in the occupied territories live in extremely hard conditions: according to the newspaper *Al-Ittihad*, Arab families with small children are herded in pens on Jewish farms.¹¹

Palestinian manpower is exploited by Israeli capital very 'efficiently': in 1976 the net profits of Israeli businessmen from the exploitation of Palestinian working people amounted to £1,113 million, as compared to £816 million in 1975.¹²

Arab minority in Israel

In the 30-odd years of Israel's existence as a state, the condition of the Palestinian population has undergone radical changes. The system of discrimination ranges over every aspect of the Arabs' life in Israel. Many Palestinians and even their children born after 1948 have no Israeli citizenship. The law designates them as 'hereditary expatriates,' that is, people without citizenship. This inequality frequently assumes downright insulting form. For example, only those who have done army service have the right to social security grants for the birth of a child. But it is well known that as a rule Arabs are not drafted into Israel's armed forces.¹³

The education system is shot through with discrimination. In 1974 Arab children over 14 had an average of 5.9 years of schooling, as compared with 8.5 years for Jewish children. This gap widened with the rise in education standards: today only 3 per cent of the students are Arabs, who account for 12-13 per cent of Israel's population. There are many times more illiterates among the Arabs than among the Jews (36.5 per cent and 9 per cent respectively in 1972). Everywhere Arab schools are extremely short of premises, teachers, study aids and equipment.¹⁴

Arab municipalities receive smaller appropriations from the state budget than Jewish municipalities. This will be seen very well from the following data published in March 1978 by the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality group in the Israeli Knesset.

	Population '000	Budget total (£ mln.)	appropriations per head (£ '000)
Jewish villages			
Beit Dagan	2.5	10.5	4.2
Binyamina	3.0	6.6	2.2
Zichron Yakov	5.0	12.0	2.4
Arab villages			
Iksal	5.0	1.4	0.3
Beit Djan	4.5	1.0	0.2
Ja Dieda	4.0	0.9	0.2

Source: *New Perspectives*, No. 5, 1978, p. 40.

The development of Arab villages is being blocked by the almost total absence of state aid: in 60 of 107 Arab-inhabited localities in Israel there are no permanent medical centers, and in 40 there is still no electricity.¹⁵

Arab migration to the cities has markedly increased in the past decade. This is the result of the Israeli authorities' persistent and purposeful policy of discrimination.¹⁶ Arab peasants, who work about 20 per cent of the farmland in Israel and make up 32 per cent of the economically active rural population, receive only 2 per cent of the water for irrigation, while their technical facilities come to no more than 7 per cent of those available to Jewish farms.¹⁷

The flight to the cities is to some extent also due to discrimination in farm prices. For the same grade of tobacco for instance, a Jewish farmer is paid an average (with a special increment) 64 per cent more than an Arab farmer, and for olives and olive oil, 41.1 per cent more.¹⁸

The condition of Arabs in the cities is little better. Only 14 per cent are engaged in mental work (government officials and members of the liberal professions). Most are employed in non-skilled jobs. The average wages of an Arab worker in Israel, per capita, are only half of those paid to Jewish workers. They are denied many political and trade union rights.

Such are some of the facts about one aspect of the Palestine problem: a 'stateless' people created by the Israeli rulers' policy of expansion and racism. Continuation of this state of affairs can only lead to chronic tensions in the Middle East, with all the ensuing consequences.

Alexander Notin

1. This resolution abolished the British mandate in Palestine and established two independent states — Arab and Jewish — with 12,200 and 14,100 square kilometers respectively. The city of Jerusalem was to be turned into an independent administrative unit with a special international status.

2. Another 40,000 were evicted from their villages by the Zionist authorities after the establishment of the State of Israel. They stayed in Israeli territory, but in the eyes of the law they were regarded as 'absentees.'

3. Of these 900,000 lived in the West Bank and 356,000 in the Gaza Strip.

4. UNRWA — United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East, set up under a resolution adopted by the 4th UN General Assembly Session on December 8, 1949.

5. The facts about the conditions in the UNRWA camps were presented by the journal *Ash-Shuun al Palastynia*, No. 36, 1974, pp. 47-73.

6. In the camps 90 per cent of the houses have one or at most two rooms, each occupied by an average of 4 persons; 60 per cent of the houses have no running water, 19.5 per cent no toilet, and only 58 per cent have primitive heating installations.

7. *Israeli Violation of Human Rights*. Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories. UN publications, 1974, pp. 30-44.

8. Menahem Begin and several cabinet members were involved in many of the notorious anti-Arab acts by the Zionist commandos. Begin headed the Irgun Tsvai Leumi (Nationalist Military Organization) which massacred more than 250 inhabitants in the village of Deir Yasin in April 1948.

9. *Al-Ittihad*, November 24, 1978. According to the Israeli press, government appropriations for the 'development of settlements' in 1979 totalled £850 million as compared with £540 million in 1978. Besides, it was decided to add another £135 million to the budget to fund 1,400 Israeli families, which are to move into the West Bank within the next two years.

10. *Zo Haderech*, March 8, 1978.

11. *Al-Ittihad*, February 24, 1978.

12. *Al-Kitab al-Ihsaiy as-Sanawiy*, No. 28, 730.

13. Members of the Druse Arab minority and Bedouin tribesmen are sometimes admitted to the Israeli army.

14. In Israel, there is only one center for training Arab teachers, and 38 for training Jewish teachers.

15. Government authorities obstruct the building of new houses in Arab villages and do not allow villagers to enlarge their homes. Houses built in violation of this ban are demolished.

16. The main content and expression of this policy ever since Israel was established 30 years ago has been the unlawful and forcible expropriation of Arab lands. Even according to official statistics, by the late 1950s the Israeli authorities had deprived the Arab population of 80 per cent of its land (not counting the vast areas expropriated from refugees).

17. *New Perspectives*, No. 5, 1978, p. 40.

18. Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, New York-London, 1976, pp. 215, 307.

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