

More information

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, is a Palestinian community-based organization that aims to provide a resource pool of alternative, critical and progressive information and analysis on the question of Palestinian refugees in the quest to achieve a just and lasting solution for exiled Palestinians based on the right of return. www.badil.org

Frontiers of Fears and Dreams (Film), accompanies two young girls on an extraordinary journey to the borders of exile, which separate them from each other and from their homeland. Mona (from Beirut's Shatila refugee camp) and Manar (from Bethlehem's Dheisheh camp) begin to communicate via email and build a friendship, despite the barriers separating them. Their remarkable relationship culminates in their dramatic meeting at the Israeli/Lebanese border. www.arabfilm.com

Palestinian Return Centre, London, is an independent academic/media consultancy founded and registered in the United Kingdom in 1996. It specializes in the research, analysis, and monitor of issues pertaining to the dispersed Palestinians and their right to return. It also serves as an information repository on other related aspects of the Palestine Question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. www.palestinerefugees.com

UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), was established by United Nations General Assembly after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestinian refugees. The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950. Today, it is the main provider of basic services - education, health, relief and social services - to over 4 million registered Palestine refugees in the Middle East. <http://www.un.org/unrwa>

US Committee for Refugees, was founded in 1958 to coordinate US participation in the United Nations' International Refugee Year. Since then, the organization has conducted a variety of research studies on worldwide refugee demographics including their place of origin, their current locations and conditions, and their rights under international law. www.refugees.org



Five things you can do to help

1. Write a letter to the editor or op ed for your local paper.
2. Call your local newspapers and media stations to complain when they run erroneous reports on Israel's occupation - and to thank them when they get it right.
3. Working with local peace and justice groups, contact your elected city, state, and national representatives to demand that U.S. policy support a just peace based on human rights and international law, and stop aid to Israel until it ends the occupation.
4. Organize local educational forums regarding events in Israel and Palestine.
5. Get your local group to join the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation (www.endtheoccupation.org) to join their efforts with others around the nation.

OCCUPATION REALITIES

AFSC Israel-Palestine Resource Series

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Palestinian Refugees

Who are the Palestinian Refugees?

For complex historical, legal and political reasons, there is no internationally-understood definition of Palestinian refugees. This fact has important implications for the ability of Palestinian refugees to obtain international protection in most of the world. Palestinians are indigenous Arab inhabitants of historic Palestine. Today this geographical area is divided into the State of Israel, established in May 1948, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), which Israel occupied following the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. For the purposes of this fact sheet, a refugee is any Palestinian who fled, was expelled or forced into exile from his/her home in historic Palestine and/or was refused reentry. Depending on their circumstances, different groups of Palestinian refugees are classified in specific ways. Because the majority of Palestinians are refugees, a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must successfully address the situation of Palestinian refugees and their rights under international law.

The Majority of Refugees are Palestinian

- Palestinians are the largest single group of refugees in the world. One in three refugees worldwide is a Palestinian refugee. (World Refugee Survey 2003, US Committee for Refugees, www.refugees.org)

The Majority of Palestinians are Refugees

- There are an estimated 7 million Palestinian refugees worldwide. This figure represents more than two-thirds of the worldwide Palestinian population. (Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, www.badil.org)

How Did They Become Refugees?

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinians have experienced two periods of major displacement. The first of these periods was related to the events preceding and during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. While Israeli historians such as Benny Morris maintain that Israeli armed forces drove Palestinians off their land, the Israeli government claims that Arab governments encouraged Palestinians to leave their land at the onset of the 1948 war, and thus refuses to take responsibility for the creation of the refugee crisis. The second period of major displacement was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The displacement

and/or expulsion of Palestinian refugees during these two periods occurred through a combination of tactics by Israeli forces including military attacks on civilians, looting, destruction of property (including entire villages), land confiscations, house demolitions, revocation of residency rights, deportation, forced expulsion, and/or denied reentry. In addition to these two periods of major displacement, many Palestinians continue to be displaced as a result of Israeli occupation policies which include many of the above mentioned tactics.

- 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes and lands in the events leading to and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. (Benny Morris in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge University Press 2004).

- During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, many Palestinian refugees of 1948 were displaced for the second time. In addition, 200,000 Palestinians were displaced for the first time. (Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, www.badil.org)

Current Location and Conditions of Palestinian Refugees

Palestinian refugees experience different kinds of treatment by many states, depending on where they are and how the particular state defines their legal status and rights. Major concentrations of Palestinian refugees are found in the OPT, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Some of these Palestinian refugees are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) while others are not. Some of the Palestinian refugees live in refugee camps while others live in villages and city neighborhoods. Though Palestinian refugees have been marginalized and abused in all host areas, the socio-economic conditions and human rights violations that they endure vary greatly from country to country.

AFSC principles and positions

The American Friends Services Committee roots its positions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the belief that there is that of God in each person, an adherence to international law and human rights, and a commitment to nonviolent action for social change. Within this framework we strive toward a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians that provides justice and security for all peoples living in the region.



**American Friends
Service Committee**

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Khan Younis Refugee Camp, Late 1940s. (AFSC Archives)

• UN General Assembly Resolution (UNGA) 194 (1948), Article 11: “Resolved 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.” Since 1949, the General Assembly has issued annual resolutions affirming the right of return and reaffirming UNGA 194.



Khan Younis Refugee Camp, 2003. (Http://www.caritas.org.nz)

International Law and Palestinian Refugees

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 13(2): “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”
- Fourth Geneva Convention (1950), Article 49(1): “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportation of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of another country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motives. [...] Persons thus evacuated shall be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased.”
- Articles of Nationality of Natural Persons in Relations to the Succession of States (1999): “Any habitual resident is entitled to nationality in the new state” and that “[by Rule of Readmission] persons cannot be denationalized as a means to exclude them from the state.”

Major Concentrations of Palestinian Refugees†

• 88% of the Palestinian refugees live within a 100-mile radius of their original homes: 46% in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 42% in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The remaining 12% are equally divided between Arab and other countries. (“The Implementation of the Right of Return” by Salman Abu-Sitta in *The New Intifada*, Verso 2001).

- Approximately 1.3 million Palestinian refugees live in 59 official Palestinian refugee camps located throughout the OPT, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. (UNRWA, www.unrwa.org)
- 43% of the current Palestinian population of the OPT are refugees. (World Refugee Survey 2003, US Committee for Refugees, www.refugees.org)

Host Area	Number of Refugees	% of Area's Population	Legal Status in Host Area
West Bank & Gaza Strip	1,510,000	47%	Living under Israeli occupation.
Jordan	2,700,000	50%	Granted citizenship; Except those from the Gaza Strip (150,000); Equal access to public services.
Syria	475,000	2%	Granted Residency IDs; No travel restrictions; Equal access to public services.
Lebanon	400,000	9%	Severe travel restriction; Work permits required and difficult to obtain; Banned from over 70 professions; Denied access to public services.

*Information in this table was derived from UNRWA and the US Committee for Refugees.

† Within the internationally recognized borders of Israel there are approximately 260,000 internally displaced Palestinians. These Palestinian were displaced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war like many other Palestinians. However, their location within the state of Israel places them in a different category. Nevertheless their rights are similar to those of refugees and are consistently violated, but due to the scope of this fact sheet they were not included. For information on internally displaced Palestinians see “Internally Displaced Palestinians, International Protection and Durable Solution” at www.badil.org.

Voices from the Region

“In the months of April-May 1948, units of the Haganah [the pre-state defense force that was the precursor of the Israeli Defense Force] were given operational orders that stated explicitly that they were to uproot the villagers, expel them and destroy the villages themselves. That can't be chance. It's a pattern [of massacres]. Apparently, various officers who took part in the operation understood that the expulsion order they received permitted them to do these deeds in order to encourage the population to take to the roads.”

- Israeli historian Benny Morris in an interview with Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz (1/16/04). (www.counterpunch.org/shavit01162004.html)

“I wish I were a bird so I could fly back to my homeland, Palestine ...” Somewhere else in the film she says, “Why should we study. We have no future. We are refugees with no rights. Our dreams are dying ...” ...The children are being brutalized and traumatized by the violence around them. This manifests itself in the way they play and in the nightmares they have at night. They see their parents humiliated, their fathers powerless to provide for them or to protect them. What amazes me is the fact that despite their miserable conditions, the teenagers in Shatila and Dheisha camps still manage to laugh, love and dream like any other teenagers around the world. Their greatest strength is the fact that they haven't lost their humanity or their spirit.”

-Filmmaker Mai Masri in an interview at the 2002 New York Human Rights Watch International Film Festival on the Palestinian refugees featured in her documentary *Frontiers of Fears and Dreams*. (<http://www.brn.org/ijf/2002/traveling/frontiers-interview.html>)

“Do I not have a heart and mind like all other human beings? Do you not see me standing in front of you, existing as you do? Why is it that the United States government upheld the right of return for Kosovo refugees but not Palestinian refugees? We are human beings just like them. We were pushed off our land just like them. We just want our human right, our right to return.”

-Kyan, Palestinian refugee speaking while on tour (March 2002) with the Ibdaa Cultural Center Dance Troupe of Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem.

“We seek no bloodshed or revenge. We want an oasis of peace and security for all peoples. But we seek the right of return and the implementation of all UN resolutions. We don't want violence, but only the enforcement of international laws and resolutions.”

-Sheik Atta al-Wabidi, Vice-Chair of the Camp Committee in Baqa'a refugee camp in Jordan.

“We don't want charity, we want justice! We want you to advocate for this. We Palestinians had a program of offering to live in peace with Israel—but we also want our rights. We have suffered a long time. It is enough. There will be no solution if the two-thirds of Palestinians who live ‘outside’ [of Israel and the OPT] have no rights.”

-Member of General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon.

“I think that the ethnic cleansing in 1948 will never allow Israel to reconcile with the Palestinians and the rest of the Middle East, nor to live in peace with its own Palestinian minority unless Israel boldly faces the past.”

- Israeli historian Ilan Pappé in an interview with the online journal Logos (<http://www.logosjournal.com/pappe.htm>).

“I believe that Israel must concede to the Palestinian right of return in principle. Israel must, first of all, assume its responsibility for what happened in 1948, as far as we are to blame—and we are to blame for a great part of it, if not for all—and we must recognize in principle the right of refugees to return.”

- Gush Shalom (Israeli Peace Bloc) founder Uri Avnery in an interview in the magazine *The Progressive* (<http://www.progressive.org/april04/intv0404.html>).

The 59 Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East, showing the number of Palestinian refugees living in each camp, and the number of registered refugees living outside of the camps in each country in 2003.

(From: *When the Rain Returns - Toward Justice and Reconciliation in Palestine and Israel*, AFSC 2004)

