



PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

SPECIAL BULLETIN

May 2001

INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as a result of two wars - the War of 1948 and the June 1967 War. The War of 1948 (An-Naqba) was triggered by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Res. 181 of 29 Nov. 1947 ('Partition Plan') that allocated 56.47% of Palestine to the Jewish state, at a time when Jews were less than one-third of the population and owned no more than 7% of the land. The war resulted in the creation of the state of Israel in 78% of Palestine, and the uprooting of the indigenous Palestinian population from their homeland by military force, expulsion or fear of massacres and other attacks perpetrated by Jewish underground and militant groups such as Haganah, Irgun, and Stern Gang.

After the war, the newly established UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) estimated that 726,000 Palestinians had fled - to neighboring Arab countries and elsewhere - while some 32,000 had become refugees within the armistice lines (the 'internally displaced') when their lands, homes and villages were seized and often destroyed by the Israeli forces. Of the 800,000 Arabs originally living in the area that became Israel, only some 100,000 remained, becoming an Arab minority in the Jewish state. Some 531 Arab villages and towns were destroyed or resettled by Jews. Today only a tiny number of Palestinian refugees have been allowed to come back under family reunification arrangements and the vast majority is still awaiting justice.

Until this day, and despite the fact that much of the material Israeli "revisionist" or "new" historians have presented on the 1948 War and the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem has revealed that the expulsion of the Palestinians was a clear goal pursued by the founders of the Jewish state, Israel's official position remains one of rejecting any responsibility.

In Dec. 1949, the UN recognized the plight of the refugees and established with Res. 302-IV the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA - to provide humanitarian aid. By 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with UNRWA.

In the course of the June War of 1967 (An-Naqsa), the remaining parts of Arab Palestine (along with the Syrian Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula), came under Israeli occupation, and some 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including around 175,000 UNRWA-registered refugees who were to flee for a second time. To accommodate the new wave of displaced persons ten extra refugee camps were established.

Throughout the occupation, Israeli policies have followed a systematic pattern of land confiscation and other discriminatory measures aimed at forcing even more Palestinians to leave their homeland. The seizure of land and property and their transfer to new Jewish immigrants and Israeli settlers is backed by a series of laws enacted to prevent the return and resettlement of the rightful owners (e.g., Absentee Property Law). More recently, Israel has even taken advantage of the interim character of the Oslo process and made every possible attempt to create more facts on the ground to further preclude a return of refugees.

The overall fate of the refugees remains one of the most complex issues still awaiting a solution. This Special Bulletin aims to present the basic facts and figures relating to the Palestinian refugee question.

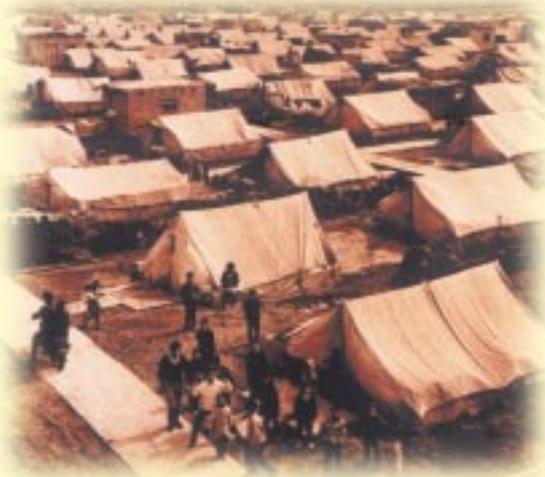




THE REFUGEE QUESTION AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

The refugee question - specifically the right of return - is one of the most controversial issues in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. International law and resolutions, however, leave no doubt that Israel is legally required to permit the repatriation of the Palestinians displaced in 1948 and that Palestinian refugees are entitled to full restitution, including the right of return, the right of return of properties, and the right to compensation for material and moral losses.

The most famous source of reference in this regard is UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948 (see Box), which has been affirmed by the UNGA over 110 times so far. However, Israel continues to dispute the legality of the Palestinian claim based on Res. 194 and refuses to repatriate refugees.



“No settlement can be just and complete if recognition is not accorded to the right of the Arab refugee to return to the home from which he has been dislodged (...) It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes, while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries.”

UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte,
Report (UN Doc A/1 648), 1948

REFUGEES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND UN RESOLUTIONS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 13 (2) (1948): “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country;” and Art. 17 (2): “[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”

UN General Assembly Resolution 194, Para. 11 (11 Dec. 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 the 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.”

Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 49 (12 Aug. 1949): “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.” And Art. 53: “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or cooperative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.”

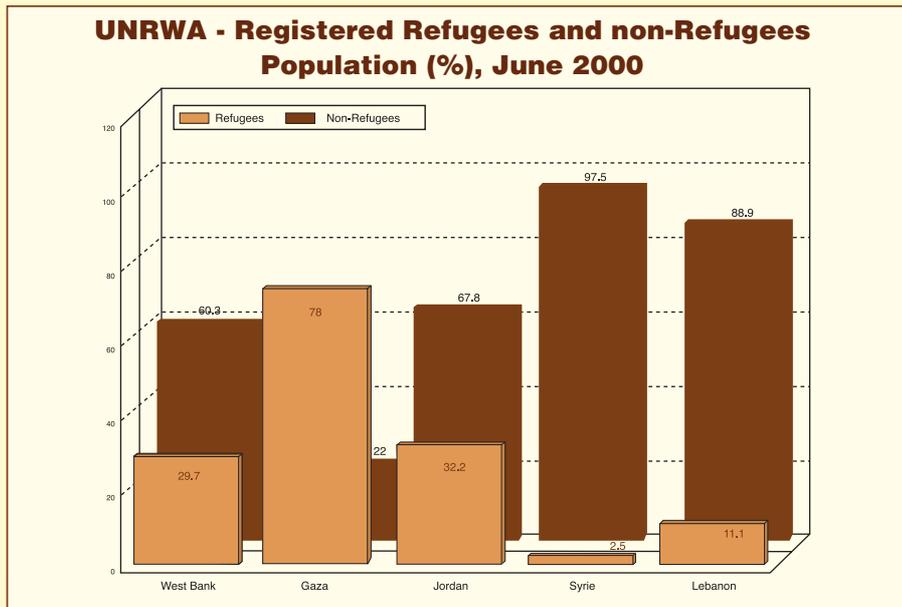
The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Art. 12 (1966): “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.”

REFUGEES TODAY

The Palestinian refugee problem is the oldest refugee problem in the world. Today, there are over 5 million Palestinian refugees, constituting two-thirds of the total Palestinian population and making Palestinians the largest single group of refugees in the world (with a 3%-increase annually).

Three different groups of 'refugees' are differentiated: **refugees** of the 1947-1949 period; **displaced persons** as a result of the 1967 War; and **expired permit-holders** (or "latecomers"), i.e., residents of the West Bank and Gaza who overstayed their permits while abroad and were denied re-entry.

Some 3.7 million of the total 5 million refugees are registered with UNRWA, and about a third of these live inside one of the 59 UNRWA camps (see map p. 6), most of which were established between 1948-1953. For over 50 years now UNRWA has been responsible for providing health, rehabilitation, schooling, training, and other services to the camp population; in 2000, its budget amounted to US\$300.9 million.



UNRWA REGISTERED REFUGEES (JUNE 2000)

	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Total
Registered Refugees (RR)	583,009	824,622	1,570,192	383,199	376,472	3,737,494
Increase over 1999	2.3%	3.3%	3.8%	2.3%	1.7%	3.1%
% of total population	29.7	78	32.2	2.5	11.1	30.7
% of total RRs	16	22	42	10	10	100
No. of refugee camps	19	8	10**	10	12	59
RR living in camps (as % of RR)	157,676 (27)	451,186 (54.7)	280,191 (17.8)	111,712 (29.2)	210,715 (56)	1,211,480 (32.4)
RR outside camps	425,333	373,436	1,290,001	271,487	165,757	2,526,014

** Three additional neighborhoods in Amman, Zarqa and Madaba are considered 'unofficial' camps by UNRWA.
 (Source: UNRWA in Figures, UNRWA Headquarters, June 2000. For annual updates see www.un.org/unrwa)



Because of UNRWA's narrow refugee definition (only persons - and their descendants - whose normal place of residence was Palestine between 1 June 1946 and 15 May 1948, who lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the War of 1948, and who took refuge in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Jordanian-ruled West Bank or the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip) some 48% of Palestinian refugees in the Diaspora are not registered. The definition does not cover refugees who fled elsewhere, those displaced in 1967 (at least 325,000) unless they were already registered with UNRWA, or those who were outside the West Bank or Gaza in 1967. Also not included are the 'latecomers', numbering at least 50,000 cases.





DISTRIBUTION OF UNRWA REGISTERED REFUGEES, WEST BANK AND GAZA

WEST BANK			GAZA STRIP		
District	Camp (year of est.)	Population	District	Camp (year of est.)	Population
Nablus	Askar (1950)	12,712	Gaza North	Jabalia (1948/49)	99,039
	Balata (1950)	19,196			
	Camp No. 1 (1950)	5,847	Gaza City	Shati (Beach) (1949)	74,464
Jenin	Far'a (1949)	6,312	Gaza South	Khan Younis (1949)	58,891
	Jenin (1953)	13,361		Rafah (1949)	
Tulkarm	Nur Shams (1952)	7,577	Gaza Central	Deir Balah (1949)	19,903
	Tulkarm (1950)	14,862		Nuseirat (1948/49)	59,969
Ramallah	Ama'ri (1949)	7,396		Bureij (1949)	28,946
	Deir Ammar (1949)	2,043		Al-Maghazi (1949)	21,559
	Jalazon (1949)	8,372			
	Qalandia (1949)	8,189			
Jerusalem	Shu'fat (1965/66)	8,955**	** the de facto numbers of the camp population are much higher as an estimated 4,000 refugees have moved into the camp in the past years to avoid losing their residency rights in Jerusalem.		
Jericho	Aqabat Jaber (1948)	4,775			
	Ein Sultan (1948)	2,178	(Source: UNRWA, Fact Sheet, 2000.)		
Bethlehem	Dheisheh (1949)	9,812			
	Aida (1950)	3,895			
	Beit Jibrin (1950)	1,727			
Hebron	Fawwar (1949)	6,419			
	Arroub (1950)	8,470			

LIVING CONDITIONS

Common characteristics of camp life include overcrowded housing conditions, poor infrastructure (unpaved streets and open sewers), poverty and unemployment. Schools often run on double shifts with an average of 50 pupils per classroom. Some 5.5% of all registered refugees are considered special hardship cases, with the largest shares in Lebanon (10.8%) and Gaza (8.6%).

One of the main problems Palestinian refugees face is that most of their Arab host states do not grant them full residency status and civil rights, and their attitude towards the refugee population is mainly characterized by considerations of state security. It must be said in this regard that Arab governments have often been utilizing the Palestinian plight for their own political aims and alliances in the region. Because of their problematic citizenship status, Palestinian refugees are particularly vulnerable to expulsion. Two recent examples are the over 300,000 Palestinians who were forced to leave Kuwait and other Gulf states during the 1990-1991 Gulf Crisis, and the 30,000 Palestinians in Libya, who were expelled in 1995 in response to the PLO-Israeli accords.



WEST BANK - GAZA STRIP

Although all camps in the West Bank and Gaza (except Shu'fat Camp in Jerusalem) are today under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), daily life has always been and still is deeply affected by the Israeli occupation.

Most of the refugees in the West Bank stem from areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron and the northern West Bank (Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem), lesser numbers are from the Lydda-Ramle-Jaffa triangle or the Tiberias region.

In Gaza, the majority of the population are refugees and the density in the camps is among the highest in the world. Expansion is difficult as the areas designated for refugee camps are limited and usually surrounded by urban areas. Most of Gaza's refugees fled in 1948 from the areas of Jaffa, Al-Majdal and Beersheva.



LEBANON

The second largest Palestinian Diaspora community lives in Lebanon, mostly originating in the Galilee and coastal towns. The refugees in Lebanon face the harshest conditions; a hostile attitude towards them prevails since the 1975 civil war and although they have been allowed to stay on a non-permanent basis they are denied any social rights. Their Lebanese travel documents are not recognized by most countries in the world, they must obtain work permits issued by the Lebanese authorities and are not allowed to work in the public sector at all, nor in over 70 other professions. Unemployment is consequently very high and aggravated by the fact that job-seekers have to compete with Syrian guest workers, who do not need to apply for residence or work permits. Refugees cannot own property without special permission, nor open any business. So far, the Lebanese government, which has declined to participate in the multilateral talks on refugees, has refused to even consider permanent settlement and/or naturalization of Palestinians on its territory, mainly because of the fragile balance of the Muslim and Christian populations.



JORDAN

After the 1948 War, when an estimated 100,000 refugees crossed the Jordan River, four refugee camps were set up in Jordan, followed by another six after the 1967 War, to accommodate additional refugees. Most of the refugees came originally from the Lydda-Ramle-Jaffa triangle and/or the Palestinian West Bank.

In Jordan, Palestinians are granted citizenship (since the 1954 Nationalities Act) and carry regular Jordanian passports, they are entitled to vote and to hold office, enjoy full rights to public services, and can work in the government sector. An exception are the ca. 100,000 stateless 1967 refugees from Gaza, and the 'latecomers', whose entry permits have expired; both groups are only eligible for temporary Jordanian passports. However, it should also be noted that especially since the armed clashes between Hashemite troops and Palestinian fighters in 1970 ('Black September'), Palestinian refugees are perceived as a potentially destabilizing factor in national politics and thus kept under the special scrutiny of state intelligence.

SYRIA

Most of the Palestine refugees who fled to Syria in 1948 were from the northern cities of Palestine, such as Safad and Haifa, while most 1967 refugees fled from the Golan Heights. The refugees enjoy the same rights as Syrian citizens with the exception of the right to vote, hold office, or possess Syrian passports. Instead, they hold travel documents, which are not recognized by many governments and thus limit their freedom of movement, but otherwise Palestinians are integrated, allowed to own certain kinds of property, and have access to educational facilities as well as the labor market. Their political rights are restricted, however, and there is a separate body - the Office for Palestinian Refugees - to supervise them. Syria, like Lebanon, has refused to participate in the multilateral talks.





OTHER COUNTRIES

There are almost a million Palestinians in **Israel**, including the 'internal refugees', who remained in the country after fleeing their homes in 1948, and the tiny number of refugees who have been allowed to return to places in Israel other than their original homes, on condition that it is made clear that the decision to grant these permits does not constitute a recognition of a 'right of return'. Palestinians in Israel are treated as second-class citizens.

In **Egypt**, Palestinians enjoyed socioeconomic and civil rights until the mid-1970s, but since then have been treated just like other foreigners. They have had difficulties obtaining travel documents and, consequently, work permits as well. Those several thousand Palestinians who live (again) in **Kuwait**, are under strict surveillance and enjoy only very limited rights; the same goes in general for the Palestinians in **Saudi Arabia**. In **Iraq**, Palestinians have social, but no political rights and naturalization is provided.

Over the past decades almost half a million Palestinian refugees have, individually, been granted asylum in the **US, Canada and Europe**, where they are generally treated in the same way as any other refugees.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE WORLDWIDE, END OF 1999

INSIDE		OUTSIDE			
			I ¹	II ²	
West Bank & Gaza Strip ¹	3,084,880	Jordan	2,434,130	2,472,501	
		Lebanon	449,735	456,824	
		Syria	486,826	494,501	
		Egypt	51,001	51,805	
		Saudi Arabia	287,250	291,778	
		Kuwait & other Gulf	149,786	149,786	
		Libya and Iraq	77,660	78,884	
		Other Arab countries	5,796	5,887	
Areas Occupied in 1948 ²	1,094,350	The Americas	209,705	216,196	
		Other Countries	267,077	275,303	
		Total Inside	4,179,230	Total Outside	4,418,966
					4,495,826

¹ PCBS, Projected Population, March 2000

² Salman Abu Sitta. Palestine 1948 - Commemoration of Al-Naqba. London: Palestinian Return Center, May 2000.

THE PEACE PROCESS AND THE FINAL STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

The question of Palestinian refugees has been a core issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948, and yet a solution remains nowhere near. Since the **Madrid Middle East Peace Conference** in 1991 the approach was to tackle the issue of the 1967 displaced people first, while deferring that of the 1948 refugees until the 'permanent status' talks, as it was considered easier to resolve the question of people displaced from 'Occupied Territory' than from what became Israel in 1948.

In 1992, the **Refugee Working Group (RWG)** was formally initiated in Moscow as part of the multilateral track to look into ways of improving the living conditions of the refugees; chaired by Canada, it was to focus on themes such as human resources development, health, welfare and infrastructure. To date, eight plenary sessions have been held, the last in Geneva in Dec. 1995.

In 1993, the **Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DoP)**, stated as its intention the reaching of a permanent settlement based on UN Res. 242 and 338, while Res. 194 was not mentioned. Finding a solution for "persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967" was to be addressed in quadripartite talks (Israel, Palestinians, Egypt and Jordan), while the issue of (1948) refugees was postponed to the "permanent status" talks.

Likewise, the **Gaza-Jericho Autonomy Agreement** of 4 May 1994 only referred to the 1967 displaced persons (Art. XVI); to discuss the issue, a "Continuing (Quadripartite) Committee" was established, which failed to achieve much (due to major differences over definitions and numbers) and ceased to meet in 1997, when the peace process as a whole deteriorated.

The **Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty** of 26 Oct. 1994 (Art. 8), recognized "the massive human problems" the refugee question poses and reiterated that finding a solution lies with a quadripartite committee (in the case of displaced persons), and with the RWG and the permanent status negotiations (in the case of refugees).

Again, the **Oslo II Accord** of 25 Sept. 1995 failed to explicitly mention the right of return, while Art. VII of the **Abu Mazen-Beilin Agreement** of 31 Oct. 1995 (the existence of which had been denied and was only exposed in Sept. 2000) acknowledged the right of return as just and lawful, but stated that in light of the realities "that have been created on the ground since 1948" its execution is not viable. It also called for the creation of an "International Commission for Palestinian Refugees" to define criteria and develop programs for compensation (for moral and material losses), resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees.

In May 1996, the **final status negotiations** were formally opened, but substantial negotiations never took place and the parties have as yet come no closer to an agreement.

The exclusion of UN Res. 194 from the Oslo framework along with the fact that the Palestinian side agreed to defer the difficult issues - refugees, borders, Jerusalem, settlements and water - to a later stage led to a deep sense of marginalization among Palestinian refugees. The three **key concepts** that have shaped discussion so far are as follows:





- ◆ *Repatriation* (implementation of UN Res. 194, i.e., the right of return)
- ◆ *Compensation* (various scenarios for financial reparation)
- ◆ *Resettlement* (either in the Palestinian state, as naturalization in host countries with improved living conditions, or in third countries)

POSITIONS

Before looking at the various (official) positions, it should be noted that the Palestinian refugees themselves believe that their inalienable rights per se cannot be negotiated between Israel and the PA. With reference to International Law they stress that agreements, which deprive civilians of recognized human rights, including the right to repatriation and restitution, are null and void. The concept and vision of "returning home" is still at the very core of the Palestinian national identity and is one of the reasons why criticism of the Oslo Accords is very much related to the abandonment of the refugee question.

To date, no serious progress has been made in the negotiations on the rights and the future of the refugees. Following the Camp David talks in July 2000 it has been confirmed there can be no stable peace in the region without an accepted solution to the refugee question.

■ With regard to the **1948** refugees Israel rejects **UN Res. 194** as a basis for talks on the grounds that the responsibility for the refugee tragedy lies with the Arab governments, who started the war and who asked the Palestinians to leave to make way for the liberation of Palestine from the Zionists, and that the **right of return** would be a direct demographic and security threat to Israel's statehood. The Palestinians, conversely, insist on the implementation of UN Res. 194, and demand the absolute and unconditional 'right of return' to the area of Mandatory Palestine for all Palestinian refugees of 1948, saying the refugee tragedy was a direct result of expulsion and fear based on military attacks and massacres of Jewish forces upon Palestinians.

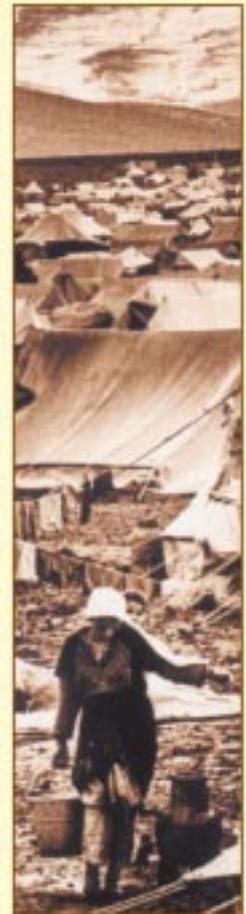
■ While Israel only counts those refugees who fled during the **War of 1967**, numbering them between 200,000 and 300,000, Palestinians and Arab countries include those who became refugees in 1947-49 and 1967 and put their original number at around one million. However, the numbers are estimated and disputed, especially by the Israelis, and the matter is further complicated by the question of 'who is a refugee'. In Lebanon, for example, UNRWA counts over 370,000 registered refugees, while the PLO cites figures as low as around 150,000 (mainly in an effort not to interfere with the country's religious and ethnic divisions), while other observers average them around 200,000.

■ On the issue of **repatriation**, Israel rejects the notion of refugees returning to their original homes and is only willing to admit a small number of refugees (Camp David 2000: 5-10,000 over a 5-10-year period) under "family reunification" schemes. Contrarily, Palestinians demand the unconditional return of all persons regardless of what caused their displacement. It must be said, however, that there are Palestinian voices suggesting that one must distinguish between the essential principle and the problematic practicality of exercising that right, as a mass return to homes and lands in pre-1948 Palestine is idealistic and the ability of the PA to absorb huge numbers of people limited.

Israel further argues that besides everything else there is no space for refugee repatriation due to overcrowded conditions. Palestinians counter that this argument has no basis, since Israel has had no problems absorbing about a million new immigrants over the past decade. One of the injustices perceived is that Russian immigrants can claim to be Jewish and live on Palestinian land, while its rightful owners - Palestinian refugees - are denied their return.

■ Israel further insists that the issue of **compensation** will only be dealt with in reciprocity, i.e., including consideration of the cases of Jews who were "expelled" from Arab countries after the creation of the state of Israel. Palestinians hold against this that Jews left those countries not as the result of expulsion or war but strongly persuaded (if not coerced) to do so by Israel and that Jewish property in the Arab world is not their responsibility but would require negotiations with Arab states.

Israel is also only willing to contribute an unspecified lump sum into a yet to be established international



fund to compensate refugees and oversee compensation and resettlement issues. Palestinians, in turn, insist on direct reparation or compensation to individual refugees based on refugee's rights to restitution and compensation. The total losses in destroyed or confiscated Palestinian property is estimated at US\$250 billion at today's value, and double this sum if non-material losses are included (BADIL Center, Bethlehem). Such calculation still does not include the billions to be claimed by host countries like Jordan.

- What Israel advocates instead is **resettlement** in host countries, improving the quality of camp life, and restricted readmissions based on humanitarian considerations. Palestinians reject all attempts leading to re-settlement unless based on the refugees' choice.
- At the beginning of **Jan. 2001**, the Palestinian negotiating team rejected the so-called **US bridging proposal**, which was a last attempt by the outgoing Clinton administration to secure a peace deal. On the refugee issue, the US proposed recognizing the right of return while stressing that there is no such specific right with regard to today's Israel, but rather to the Palestinian state, including areas proposed for a 'land swap', or rehabilitation in Arab states, or resettlement in third countries. The Palestinians refused, saying the proposal "fails to provide any assurance that refugee's rights to restitution and compensation will be fulfilled" and neither secures "the establishment of a viable Palestinian state nor the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes."

THE FEASIBILITY OF RETURN

Recent research by **Salman Abu Sitta** (*Palestinian Right of Return - Sacred, Legal and Possible*. London: Palestinian Return Center, 1999) divided Israel into three demographic areas - A, B and C - and demonstrated that the majority of Israeli Jews (68%) is concentrated in Area A - 8% of Israel - which is largely the same area in size and location as the land which the Jews had purchased or acquired in 1948. Area A is mainly urban centers, many of which have grown out of originally Palestinian towns. In Area B - 6% of Israel with a largely mixed population - another 10% of Israeli Jews live. In other words, 78% of Israeli Jews live in 14% of Israel, while Area C - 86% of Israel - is home to the remaining 22% of Israeli Jews, and comprises by and large the area (by size and location) of Palestinian refugee homelands.

Abu Sitta's study shows then that the argument that Israel is already too populated and has no 'spare' space is but a myth, stating, for example, that of the Jews living in Area C, less than 200,000 reside in rural areas, while some 5 million refugees are crammed into hopelessly overcrowded refugee camps, often only a few kilometers away beyond the Green Line. Area C is thus the perfect area for any future absorption of returning Palestinian refugees. The scenarios Abu Sitta is drawing on include the following:



If all registered refugees in Lebanon were allowed to return to their homes in Galilee, which is still largely Arab, it would only be felt in Area B, while there would be almost no impact on Area A (Jewish concentration) and Area C (least populated). The same is true for the refugees in Gaza: if they were allowed to return to their homes mostly in the - rather empty - south, the Jewish majority in Area A would drop by only 6%. According to Abu Sitta, the number of rural Jews in the south who may be affected by the return of Gaza refugees does not exceed 78,000 or the size of a single refugee camp.



Dutch geographer **Jan de Jong** made a study on practical and realistic steps that could be taken to solve the refugee question according to the principle of equitably respecting the rights of both peoples and upholding the Palestinian right of return. In acknowledgement of two separate nationalities de Jong has formulated a 'Palestinian-Israeli Adapted Partition Plan' guided by the 1947 UN Partition Plan and based on a division of the land into areas where both populations, including up to two million returning refugees, could enjoy their national rights to the maximal extent in what was and is, or has become their home.



Estimates of the number of Palestinian refugees wishing to return differ, but the main question is what would be needed to reconcile Israel's established national rights with a restoration of the Palestinian rights that were alienated after 1947?

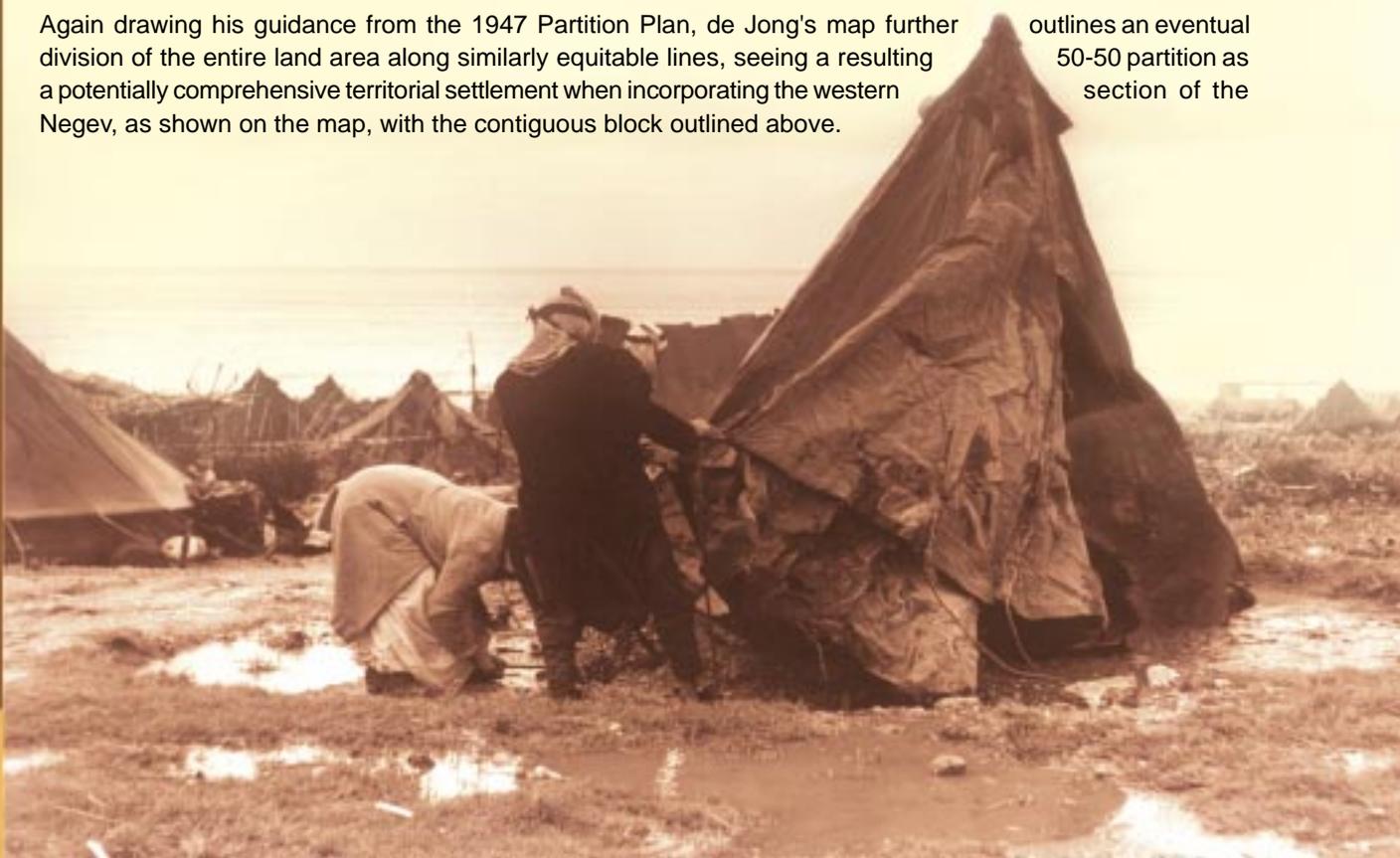
There is little dispute amongst geographers that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, even when constituted as an independent Palestinian state, are in no condition to accommodate an additional two million refugees, not least because of high current and projected population growth rates. Accordingly, the feasibility of refugee-return is intimately linked to the equally urgent issue of the Palestinian state's overall viability.

Quite substantial areas in Israel are scarcely inhabited by Jewish citizens, due to their remoteness and a shortage of jobs and services. These include areas that Israel conquered in the final stages of the 1948-49 War, where most indigenous Palestinians managed to stay put, and where today they still make up the overwhelming majority of the local population. While marginal on these accounts for Israel, de Jong argues that such areas are crucial to make the return of Palestinian refugees feasible, while at the same time decisively improving the prospects for Palestine's development, at little to no cost for Israel, which would even benefit from a greatly expanded consumer market.

The map shows two areas (light orange) with a negligible Jewish population, that if opened up to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would improve economic viability while creating an area capable of accommodating up to two million returning refugees. The area in the north comprises the core of the Galilee and the Wadi Ara region, that in the south links the West Bank with Gaza. In each area one large and several smaller cities could be constructed. De Jong argues that spreading the demographic burden of such refugee-absorbing cities over areas which - on account of their land and market bridging functionality - are economically focal, would create vital space and jobs for the incoming population and benefit the entire area by increasing the demand for goods and services.

The new configuration - only affecting 8% of today's Israel proper - could turn the currently fragmented Palestinian territories into one cohesive contiguous space, along a major trunk road, providing fast and unhindered passage to all districts, neighboring countries, and seaports in both Gaza and Akka. Such a configuration would not need to prejudice the established sovereign rights of Israeli citizens - Arabs or Jews - as all existing communities would remain with their current municipal arrangements, while only the unused open land in the re-absorption areas (light orange) would need to be brought under a regional Palestinian developmental authority. De Jong suggests that this leaves under 2% of either population residing in non-contiguous sovereign areas in what is today Israel proper, and demands a minimum of controlled road crossings. The map indicates sovereign road-passages for guaranteeing unlimited Israeli territorial contiguity, while ensuring the same for the Palestinian territory and its thoroughfare.

Again drawing his guidance from the 1947 Partition Plan, de Jong's map further outlines an eventual division of the entire land area along similarly equitable lines, seeing a resulting 50-50 partition as a potentially comprehensive territorial settlement when incorporating the western section of the Negev, as shown on the map, with the contiguous block outlined above.



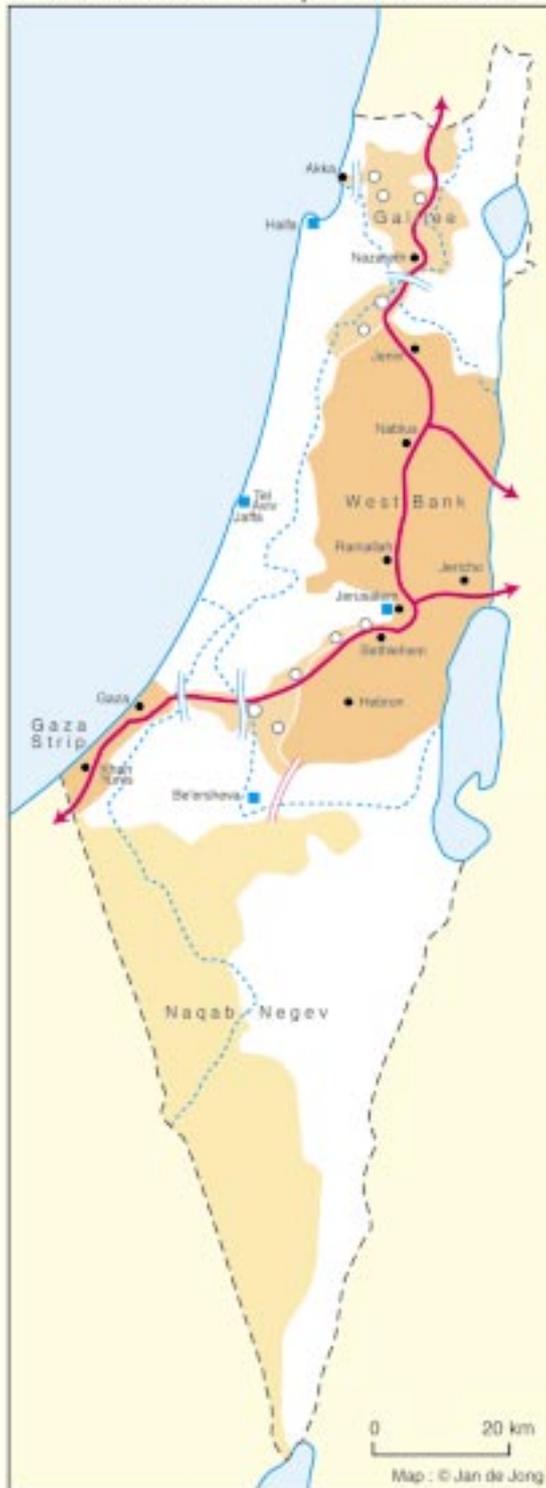


1947 UN Partition Plan



- Arab State
- Jewish State
- 1947 UN Partition Plan lines

Palestinian Israeli Adapted Partition Plan



- West Bank and Gaza Strip
- Green Line
- Refugee Absorption Areas with projected urban areas
- Palestinian thoroughfare and sovereign road passages
- Western section of the Naqab/ Negev Desert

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

Special Bulletin



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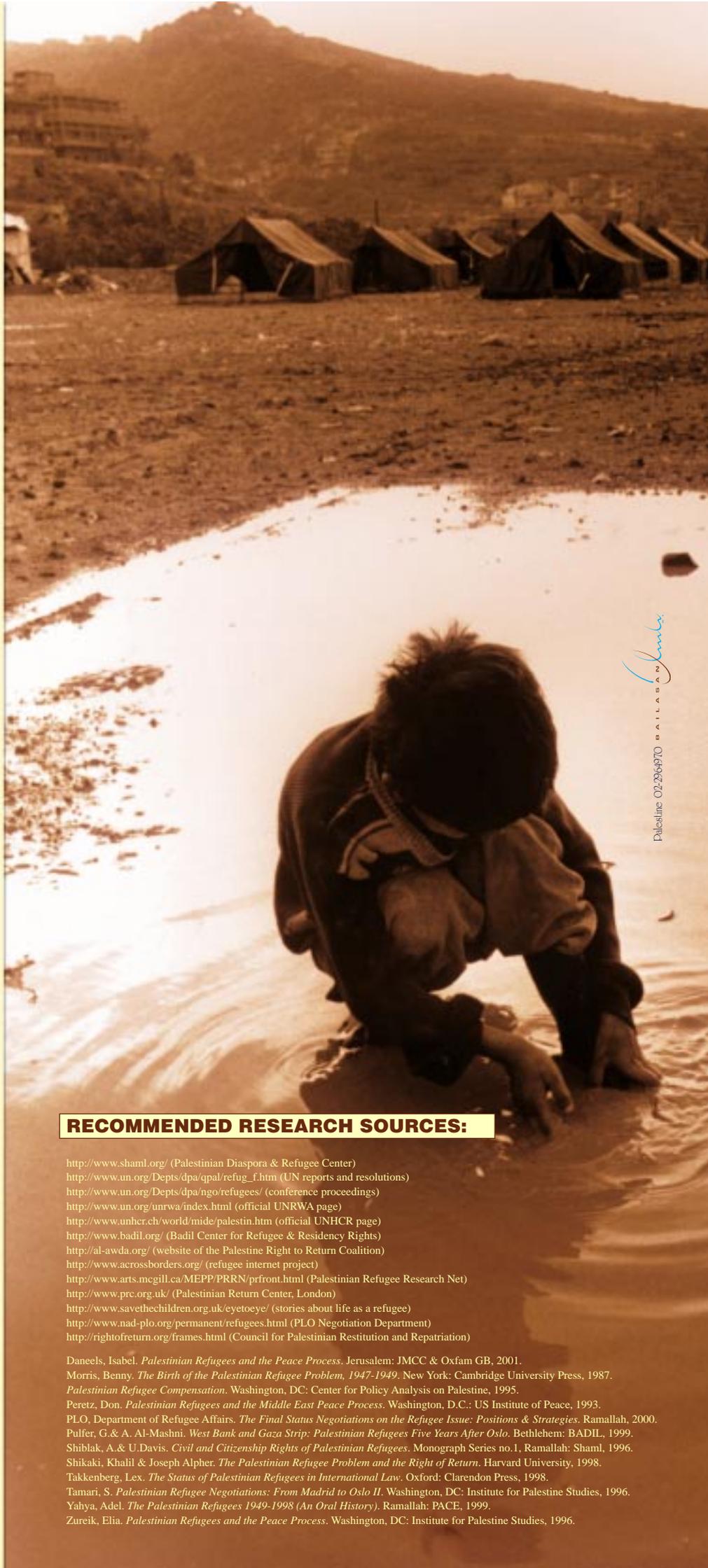
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RECOMMENDED RESEARCH SOURCES:

<http://www.shaml.org/> (Palestinian Diaspora & Refugee Center)
http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/refug_f.htm (UN reports and resolutions)
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo/refugees/> (conference proceedings)
<http://www.un.org/unrwa/index.html> (official UNRWA page)
<http://www.unher.ch/world/mide/palestin.htm> (official UNHCR page)
<http://www.badil.org/> (Badil Center for Refugee & Residency Rights)
<http://al-awda.org/> (website of the Palestine Right to Return Coalition)
<http://www.acrossborders.org/> (refugee internet project)
<http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prfront.html> (Palestinian Refugee Research Net)
<http://www.prc.org.uk/> (Palestinian Return Center, London)
<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/eyetoe/eyetoe/> (stories about life as a refugee)
<http://www.nad-plo.org/permanent/refugees.html> (PLO Negotiation Department)
<http://rightofreturn.org/frames.html> (Council for Palestinian Restitution and Repatriation)

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