

## ANNUAL REPORT 2000

### The Year That Was

The year 2000 began with Israelis and Palestinians reaching an agreement on the delayed transfer of land to the Palestinian Authority (PA), and on 5 January, Israel did transfer 2% of Area B territory to Area A status, and 3% from Area C to Area B. The same day, PA Secretary-General Tayeb Abdul Rahim stated that this year would see the independent Palestinian state established on all lands occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. This was the first such statement of a series which followed, although the year ended with the declaration of the Palestinian state still pending. On the domestic level, the last two signatories of the 'Petition of the 20', which had criticized the PA's performance in late 1999, Ahmed Shaker Dudin and Dr. Abdel Sattar Qassem, were released from prison. On 12 January the official announcement of Pope John Paul II's visit to the Holy Land from 20-26 March 2000 was made simultaneously in Rome and Jerusalem and raised hope for an economic boost - especially in the tourism sector, which had been far below expectations thus far. Less than a week later, a bomb explosion in Hadera injured 26 Israelis; in Beirut, the 'Omar Al-Mukhtar Forces' claimed responsibility. In Jerusalem, Israeli plans to build a Jewish settlement in Abu Dis stirred unrest, as did the Israeli interference in renovation work being undertaken by the Waqf at Al-Aqsa Mosque. In a show of solidarity, King Abdullah II of Jordan, on 20 January, confirmed that the Palestinian cause is the core of the Middle East conflict and that without returning Palestinian rights and establishing their state, there would be no peace in the region. The month ended with Palestinian and Israeli negotiators starting marathon talks aimed at reaching a framework agreement for a final peace treaty under US mediation.



February began with Israel presenting a final status map to the Palestinians offering 55-60% of the West Bank and calling for annexation of the remaining 40%; it was rejected outright. On 2-3 February, the PLO Central Council convened in Gaza to discuss the peace process and the declaration of the Palestinian State, which was to take place during the year. On the regional level, tensions between Israel and South Lebanon intensified, leading to Israeli air raids on 8 February and the destruction of power stations in Lebanon; the Israeli aggression was internationally condemned and within the Arab World voices calling for an end to normalization with Israel were on the rise. On 13 February the PLO Central Council resolved that statehood would become a reality by September 2000. Internal affairs were for the rest of the month dominated by the teachers' strike for higher salaries, during which numerous teachers were either dismissed or transferred to schools in remote areas. Meanwhile, on 15 February in Rome, Pope John Paul II and Chairman Arafat signed a Vatican-PA agreement to the strong disapproval of Israel. On 19 February, in talks with German President Rau in Bethlehem, Chairman Arafat reiterated the Palestinians' right to declare a state after 13 September and pushed for a more effective role by Germany and the EU in the peace process. On 26 February, protesting students attacked French PM Lionel Jospin during his visit to Birzeit University (BZU) after he made provocative statements describing the Lebanese resistance against Israeli occupation as 'terrorism'. The PA employed strict measures against students who participated in the

assault. A day later, Palestinian figures in the Diaspora launched a worldwide campaign for the Palestinian refugees' right of return. The month ended with yet another assault on Palestinians, when the Israeli army forcibly removed 15 Palestinian families, some 100 people, from their homes in caves in the south Hebron region for being too close to Jewish settlements and military camps. After heavy protests and appeals to the High Court, they were allowed to return on 29 March.

March began with Israeli forces storming the village of Taybeh, inside the Green Line, searching for alleged Hamas members. In an exchange of fire, four Palestinians were killed. On 4 March, the PA announced once more that the 13 September deadline for the state declaration was final and non-negotiable. On 11 March, the Foreign Ministers of the Arab League met in Beirut and called on Arab countries to freeze normalization with Israel in response to Israel's raids on Lebanon. On 14 March, Israel and the PA agreed on maps detailing Israeli redeployment from 6.1% of the West Bank, approved by the Israeli cabinet the next day, and executed on 21 March, the same day that final status talks resumed in Washington. After the land transfer 18.2% of the West Bank became Area A and 24.7% Area B. On 22 March, Pope John Paul II began his historic visit to Palestine in Bethlehem; it ended on 28 March in the Old City of Jerusalem, where the Pope declared that a peace granting justice to everyone was 'inevitable'. Also in late March, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which regulates net addresses, granted the PA its own two-letter suffix, 'ps' for Palestinian State.

The beginning of April was marked by discouraging though familiar news concerning Israel's expansionist settlement policies: On 7 April, a Peace Now report showed that there were over 7,000 settlement housing units under construction, and three days later the Knesset approved \$400 million for security in settlements and the construction of 12 bypass roads. With regard to the negotiations, the head of the Palestinian delegation, Yasser Abed Rabbo, conveyed to his Israeli counterpart Oded Eran on 11 April the following five Palestinian demands to advance the peace talks: (1) No to conceding any part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including Arab Jerusalem; (2) no to the legitimacy of Jewish settlements; (3) no to adjourning final status issues like Jerusalem and refugees or accepting a partial framework deal; (4) no to any Israeli military presence inside the Palestinian state from the Jordan River to the borders with Egypt; and (5) no to accommodating Palestinian refugees outside their homeland. In late April, the PFLP's Secretary-General George Habash resigned from his post after 33 years; he was replaced on 8 July with his deputy Abu Ali Mustafa.

The death of a Palestinian child killed in a traffic accident on the Ramallah-Jerusalem road at Qalandia Camp on 2 May triggered violent protests between angry residents and Israeli soldiers over the state of the road, the improvement of which Israel refused to allow despite available funding allocated by Japan. On 9 May, the Arab League informed the UN Security Council that Arab participation in multilateral talks would be suspended until there was progress in the peace process. On the domestic front, many Palestinians as well as regional and international bodies condemned the Palestinian Bar Association's removal of dozens of lawyers working with human rights groups or NGOs from the list of practicing lawyers. On 15 May, marking the 52nd anniversary of the Nakba, Palestinians observed a general strike and clashes with Israeli troops erupted, which lasted several days and left six Palestinians killed and over 1,000 wounded. Meanwhile, the Likud Party proposed a bill to amend the Israeli Basic Law on Jerusalem to ensure that no part of the city would ever be transferred to the PA, and in Eilat, Palestinian negotiators rejected Israel's proposed final status map

comprising of separate Palestinian autonomous cantons on only 66% of the West Bank. At about the same time in Stockholm, where "secret" negotiations were underway, the Palestinian delegation rejected an Israeli proposal for Jerusalem that would give the PA civilian rule of Arab neighborhoods, but leave overall sovereignty with Israel (the talks were ordered halted on 21 May by Prime Minister Barak). On 23-24 May, after announcing its intention to depart ahead of schedule, Israel completely pulled out of South Lebanon after 18 years, a move seen by Palestinians as proof that no occupation can last forever. On 29 May, the Israeli government postponed indefinitely the long-awaited transfer of Abu Dis, Izzariyya and Sawahreh villages to the PA. On 31 May, hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli jails ended a month-long partial hunger strike after a promise from Israel to improve prison conditions.

Events in June began in Jerusalem, with the Higher Islamic Council issuing the 'Jerusalem Pledge', confirming the claim to full Palestinian sovereignty over the city as the political capital of an independent Palestinian state, while right-wing Israelis erected a fence around part of the confiscated area in Abu Dis, for which a new settlement was planned. On 10 June the region was hit by the news of the death of Syria's President Hafez Al-Assad; the PA declared three days of mourning and President Arafat traveled to Syria to attend the funeral. On the Israeli front, meanwhile, Shas withdrew from Barak's coalition, leaving a minority government of 52 out of 120 MKs. In response to recent rumors, Israeli Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz threatened on 17 June to use heavy armament to confront and curb any new Intifada that may erupt in the Palestinian Territories. On 23 June, while the target date for the completion of the third Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories - including three villages near Jerusalem - and the release of 230 Palestinian prisoners passed unobserved, PNC speaker Salim Zanon reiterated that the Palestinian state was to be declared this year no matter whether a peace agreement was reached or not, though it later became known that he had not consulted with the PLO Council before making this statement.

July began with a family dispute in Ramallah over a stolen car that escalated and sent shockwaves of disgust and disbelief throughout the entire area, when a young man from Al-Amari Refugee Camp entered a meat shop and shot the butcher's daughter dead, triggering several days of violence in the city. The man was sentenced to death; the execution is still pending. On 2-3 July, the PLO Central Council convened in Gaza and voted unanimously to declare a Palestinian state after the six-year transitional period ended on 13 September. Three days later the Palestinian leadership accepted President Clinton's invitation to a three-way summit in Camp David. On 9 July, the Israeli right-wing parties Yisrael B'aliyah and National Religious Party resigned from the Barak government over his offer of concessions to the Palestinians. While Bashar Al-Assad was officially inaugurated as President of Syria on 11 July, the Camp David summit began with a total press blackout; however, leaked reports indicated that Barak had offered the Palestinians autonomy for the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and "religious sovereignty" over the Haram Ash-Sharif compound, as well as an exchange of territories surrounding the municipal limits. In the wake of this news, tens of thousands of Jewish settlers gathered in Tel Aviv protesting against the summit and on the West Bank Palestinians clashed with Israeli troops and settlers. On 19 July, Arafat rejected the Israeli proposals, demanding full sovereignty over East Jerusalem, stressing, "The Arab leader who would surrender Jerusalem is not born yet." Along the same line, Jerusalem Mufti Sheikh Ekrima Sabri issued a fatwa forbidding Palestinian refugees from accepting compensation in place of a return to their homes on the grounds that "all of Palestine is holy land" and "compensation would be regarded as selling the land and against Islam." On 21 July, the press

reported that the US proposal included the following 'principles': the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state; no declaration of an 'end to the conflict' at this stage; Israeli withdrawal from 95% of the West Bank and annexation of the remainder in an exchange of territory; a safe passage 'bridge' between the West Bank and Gaza; a free passage from Bethlehem to Ramallah, and recognition of the "suffering" of the refugees, family unification for some of them, for others staged assimilation into the Palestinian state, compensation and rehabilitation via an international body. On Jerusalem the proposals foresaw Palestinian civil autonomy (Israeli security control) in and around the Old City (holy places under independent religious administration), a free passage to the Haram Ash-Sharif, greater autonomy for other Palestinian neighborhoods, and annexation of Ma'ale Adumim and Givat Ze'ev to Israel. However, the Camp David summit ended on 25 July without reaching an agreement. In a show of support for their leadership, Palestinians around the globe observed a general strike from 12-2 p.m. to reaffirm their non-negotiable positions. Two days later Chairman Arafat and his delegation received a hero's welcome upon returning to Gaza. The next day, President Clinton angered the Palestinians as well as other Arabs when he praised PM Barak in an interview with Israeli TV for making "courageous" compromises, warned Arafat not to unilaterally declare statehood and promised to 'weigh' again the idea of transferring the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. At the end of the month, Chairman Arafat began a tour of Arab and European capitals to enlist support for the Palestinian positions.

In August, the sensitivity of the Jerusalem issue was more than once demonstrated. On 11 August hundreds of people marched in Jordan, demanding a holy war to liberate Jerusalem and calling on Muslims to rise up against the "Jewish enemy." On 13 August in Cairo, President Mubarak warned against an explosion of uncontrollable violence in the case of any concessions on Jerusalem, saying that no Arab leader would accept surrendering East Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque to Israel. On 20 August, the PLC in Ramallah stated unequivocally that there would be no peace deal with Israel without East Jerusalem. And on 28 August, Arab Foreign Ministers met in Agadir under the banner of the Jerusalem Islamic Conference, requested by Chairman Arafat to strengthen support regarding the future of Jerusalem. For the first time, a delegation from Christian churches participated. Also in August, Israeli undercover units made the headlines twice, first, on the 15th, when they "mistakenly" shot and killed the 73-year-old mukhtar of Surda near Ramallah, Mahmoud Abdullah; and again on the 27th, when three Israeli soldiers were killed and nine wounded by friendly fire during a disastrous failed attempt to raid the West Bank village of Assira Ash-Shamalia in a hunt for 'most wanted' Hamas leader Mahmoud Abu Hannoud, who managed to flee and hand himself in to PA police in nearby Nablus. Meanwhile on 20 August in Amman, Jordanian trade unions mobilized against normalization with Israel. Bad news for those who still believed in progress in the peace process were reports stating that the first quarter of 2000 saw an 81% increase in settlement construction. On 29 August, a meeting between Presidents Clinton and Mubarak in Cairo to prepare for another Israeli-Palestinian summit failed over the issue of Jerusalem.

September began with two positive events: the British Gas company began to search for natural gas on Gaza's northern shores and the Education Ministry, with the beginning of the new school year, finally launched the new Palestinian curriculum for grades 5 and 6. At the 6-7 September UN Millennium celebrations, Pres. Arafat stressed putting an end to the sufferings of the Palestinian refugees and pledged that there would be no flexibility with regard to Palestinian sovereignty on the Muslim and Christian shrines in Jerusalem. A few days later, on 10 September, the PLO Central Council again postponed declaring statehood in order to give the peace talks "another

chance." The target date of 13 September passed unnoticed with Israel and the Palestinians having failed to achieve a final peace accord. On 15 September, some 70,000 Muslim demonstrators in Um Al-Fahm inside the Green Line pledged to defend Al-Aqsa Mosque. Over the next two days, the world saw thousands of people participating in 'Return Marches' in Washington and London calling for the Palestinian refugees' right of return. In Gaza, meanwhile, a demonstration commemorating the Sabra and Shatila Massacre escalated into two days of violence. Contributing to the overall tension of the situation was the publication, on 22 September, of the text of the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement after five years of denial and concealment. Then, on the early morning of 28 September, Likud leader Ariel Sharon made his provocative visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque, with thousands of Israeli security forces deployed in and around the Old City. In the ensuing clashes with protesting Muslims, dozens of Palestinians were injured. After Friday prayers the next day, Israeli forces used excessive force against Palestinian worshippers at the site, triggering more clashes, leaving 5 Palestinians dead and over 160 injured, as well as igniting a widespread uprising in the Palestinian territories, inside Israel and the Arab World. Over the next days the Al-Aqsa Intifada, as it was quickly termed, saw many more Palestinian martyrs; with one of them - 12-year-old Mohammed Ad-Dura who was killed in his father arms - a symbol was born.

October saw more bloodshed and violence and the killing of Palestinians continued at an unprecedented pace; by the end of the month the death toll had reached over 150. For the first time Israel used anti-tank rockets and fired from helicopters - a method that would soon become all too familiar. Various international organizations arrived in the Palestinian territories to investigate the events and all pointed to Israel's indiscriminate use of force. While calls for the establishment of an international commission of enquiry as well as an international protection force increased, attempts were made to contain the new crisis before further escalation. On 4 October, Barak and Arafat met at the invitation of French President Chirac with US Secretary of State Albright in Paris, but the meeting concluded unsuccessfully after Israel refused to accept an international inquiry commission. Three days later, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1322, deploring the violence and condemning "especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians." The same day, Hizbullah abducted three Israeli soldiers in South Lebanon and Barak issued a four-hour ultimatum for their release (the fate of the soldiers was still unknown by the end of the year). On 8 October, a Jewish mob attacked Arabs in Nazareth, among them MK Azmi Bishara; two Arabs were killed and dozens injured in the assault. Amidst continuous hostilities, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's arrival in the region and his attempts to negotiate an end to the violence were in vain. The situation further deteriorated when on 12 October a Palestinian mob, enraged by the brutal murder of a villager by Jewish settlers, killed two Israeli soldiers in Ramallah city and Israel reacted by bombing Gaza, Ramallah, and, later in the night Jericho and Nablus, destroying police headquarters, military bases, as well as TV and radio broadcasting towers. In another attempt to stop the situation from escalating, a summit was called at Sharm Esh-Sheikh on 16 October. It was attended by Arafat, Barak, Pres. Clinton, the UN's Kofi Anan, the EU's Javier Solana, King Abdullah and Pres. Mubarak, but also failed to bring the conflicting parties closer. Throughout the month, Palestinians under the age of 45 were barred from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque and denied their right to worship while new reports about the deteriorating situation of all sectors - economy, employment, health etc. - continuously hit the news. In the light of such events, PM Barak announced on 21 October that Israel was to take a "time out from the peace process" and called for an emergency unity government with the Likud. Meanwhile in Cairo, an Arab League emergency summit convened (21-22 October), which allocated

US\$1 billion in funds to support the Palestinian people, and called for a UN-led "international war crimes tribunal" to investigate Israeli actions as well as for a UN presence in the territories, and advocated ending all steps toward normalization of relations with Israel. Over the following days Tunisia, Oman and Morocco announced their severing of ties with Israel and closed their representations in Tel Aviv. The month ended with the US Congress showing support for Israel by condemning the Palestinians for the current confrontations and calling on President Arafat to stop the violence.

At the beginning of November Regional Cooperation Minister Shimon Peres launched yet another attempt to stop the Intifada and met with President Arafat in Gaza to discuss terms for a cease-fire. On 9 November President Arafat traveled to Washington to discuss Clinton's "bridging proposals" but with no result. On the West Bank, meanwhile, Israeli units assassinated Fateh-Tanzim activist Hussein Abayat in Beit Sahour, firing at his car from a helicopter, also killing two female bystanders. This was the first in a series of political assassinations of Palestinians to come (two days later, Hamas activist Ibrahim Bani Odeh, 34, from Nablus was killed, on 22 November four Tanzim activists in the Gaza Strip). On 12 November, Israeli settlers attacked UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNCHR), Mary Robinson in Hebron, while on a tour to investigate Israeli human rights violations. At the same time, the 9th OIC summit convened in Doha preceded by the Qatari government's closure of Israel's representation, and condemnation of Israeli atrocities, demanding international protection for the Palestinian people. On 14 November in London, the UN's Kofi Annan tried to launch a new initiative to restart the peace process, proposing an international 'peace summit' chaired by the UN and attended by the US, EU, Russia, China, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and possibly Saudi Arabia. With 15 November, yet another target day for the announcement of the declaration of the independent Palestinian state passed unobserved. A growing anti-Israel sentiment in the region became evident on 19 November, when unions and associations in Jordan published a blacklist of people and companies that had refused to sever their "normalization" ties with Israel. On 20 November the situation worsened once more when Israel, in retaliation for a bomb attack on a settler school bus in Gaza, which left two Israelis killed and 12 injured, destroyed dozens of dunums of cultivated land, farms and homes with bulldozers and missiles. In protest at this aggression, President Mubarak recalled Egypt's Ambassador to Israel Mohammed Bassiouny the next day. On 22 November a car bomb detonated in Hadera, killing two Israelis and injuring over 50. A new attempt to calm the situation down was made when GSS Chief Avi Dichter and head of Preventive Security Service in Gaza, Mohammed Dahlan, met in Cairo on 26 November to discuss renewing security coordination between the two sides. That same night, five Palestinians were killed in cold blood by Israeli soldiers who opened fire at them near Qalqilya. Over the next two days the Knesset voted in favor of a bill aimed at blocking the return of Palestinian refugees to Israeli territory as well as changes to Jerusalem municipal boundaries by requiring an absolute majority. The month ended with saddening statistics released by UNICEF, according to which 97 Palestinian children had been killed in clashes with the Israeli army since 28 September, and over 4,000 were injured.

On 1 December the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling Israel's imposition of "its laws, jurisdiction and administration" on Jerusalem illegal. The facts on the ground were that only some 20,000 Palestinians were allowed to pray on the first Friday of the holy month of Ramadan in Al-Aqsa Mosque while an estimated one quarter of a million others were prevented from even entering the city. Also at the beginning of December the Israeli-imposed curfew on Palestinians in Hebron's Old

City entered its third month, the Jordanian Parliament in Amman discussed a memorandum calling for canceling the peace agreement with Israel, and a Peace Now study on the Oslo period showed that settlement housing had grown 52.49% and the settler population about 70% since 1993. On 5 December, in separate statements, US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk and UN Middle East peace envoy Terje Larson warned of a regional war if the current situation continued. On 8 December, four Palestinian security forces and a civilian were assassinated in the Jenin area, leading to more violent clashes throughout the Palestinian territories; two days later another Fateh activist fell victim to an Israeli assassination. On 10 December, former PM Benjamin Netanyahu announced his decision to stand for the post of PM, while the Labor Party nominated once more Ehud Barak as their candidate. The next day, the international fact-finding commission, headed by Ex-Senator George Mitchell, arrived in the country amidst more assassinations, as Israel killed an Islamic Jihad activist from Arabbeh and a Tanzim member from Al-Khader village, followed - over the next few days - by two Hamas activists from Hebron and Gaza as well as two Fateh activists from Qalandia and Nur Shams camps. On 18 December, disappointment prevailed as the Palestinian demand for a UN observer force was defeated in the Security Council. The next day, as a new round of negotiations began in Washington, the Knesset voted against the bill to dissolve itself and Sharon was formally declared the Likud's candidate for premiership. The month - and the year - ended as violently as had become typical over the past 12 weeks; with two explosions on a bus in Tel Aviv and a car in Netanya leaving dozens of people injured and yet another political assassination, this time of senior Fateh official Dr. Thabet Thabet near Tulkarem, that almost coincided with the killing of right-wing extremist Binyamin Kahane, son of the slain anti-Arab Rabbi and founder of the meanwhile outlawed Kach movement Meir Kahane near the Ofra settlement. With uncertainty cast over the future of the peace process, mourning hundreds of dead and many more injured, and under tight siege, facing Israeli tanks, troops and checkpoints, the Palestinian people awaited a new year.