



## 5. Refugees

### ■ Background

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as the result of two wars (*An-Naqba* of 1948 and *An-Naksa* of 1967), massacres, and other aggressions perpetrated by Jewish terror groups such as Haganah, Irgun, and Stern. After the War of 1948, the UN Conciliation Commission estimated that 726,000 Palestinians (75% of the Arab population of Palestine) had fled outside (“**1948 refugees**”) while 32,000 remained within the armistice lines. Some 531 villages and towns were destroyed or resettled with Jews. The total losses of destroyed or confiscated Palestinian property is estimated at US\$209 billion. In addition to the refugees, there are the **internally displaced** Palestinians, who were expelled from their villages – located in what became Israel - during the 1948 War. At the end of the war, they numbered some 30-40,000 people who were not allowed internally to return to their homes and placed under military rule to facilitate the expropriation of their land. Until today, Israel does not recognize internally displaced Palestinians, whose number is estimated at 263,000-300,000 (BADIL Center, Bethlehem).

In 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with **UNRWA**. In 1967, some 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from the WBGS (“**1967 displaced persons**”), including around 175,000 UNRWA registered refugees who became refugees for a second time.

**Today**, the total 1948 **refugee population** is estimated at 5.5 million, incl. 4 million registered with UNRWA and 1.5 million not registered (either they simply did not register or did not need assistance at the time they became refugees). In addition, there are 263,000 internally displaced (of 1948) and some 773,000 1967 displaced persons. (PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, *Factsheet on Palestinian Refugees*, May 2003).

### UNRWA Registered Refugees (June 2007)

RR = Registered Refugees	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Total
1950	- <sup>1</sup>	198,227	506,200 <sup>1</sup>	82,194	127,600	<b>914,221<sup>2</sup></b>
RRs 1975	292,922	333,031	625,857	184,042	196,855	<b>1,632,707</b>
RRs 2007	734,861	1,030,638	1,880,740	446,925	411,005	<b>4,504,169</b>
Increase over 2006	3.4%	2.9%	2.2%	2.1%	1.1%	<b>2.5%</b>
% of total RRs	16	23	42	10	9	<b>100</b>
No. of refugee camps	19	8	10 <sup>3</sup>	9	12	<b>58</b>
RR living in camps (in % of RR)	187,916 (26)	481,180 (47)	330,468 (18)	120,383 (27)	217,441 (53)	<b>1,337,388 (30)</b>
RR outside camps	546,997	549,458	1,550,272	326,542	193,564	<b>3,166,781</b>
<b>Facilities:</b>						
Schools	92	193	177	118	86	<b>666</b>
Training Centers	3	1	2	1	1	<b>8</b>
Primary Health Care	37	19	24	23	25	<b>128</b>

<sup>1</sup> West Bank figures included in Jordan until 1967. <sup>2</sup> Excl. 45,800 people who received relief in Israel from UNRWA until 1952. <sup>3</sup> Three other neighborhoods in Amman, Zarqa and Madaba are considered ‘unofficial’ camps by UNRWA. (Source: *UNRWA in Figures*, UNRWA HQ, June 2007.)



**After Oslo**, all camps in the WBGS except Shu'fat Camp in Jerusalem came under the control of the PA, but the overall fate of the refugees remains one of the most complex issues still awaiting a solution in the context of the 'final status' talks between the PLO/PA and Israel. Israel rejects the 'right of return' for the refugees and displaced persons, given the demographic threat to the Jewish state, and wants to solve the problem by resettlement in Arab host countries, international efforts to improve the refugees' living conditions, and restricted readmission based on humanitarian considerations.



The Palestinians, conversely, demand the absolute 'right of return' to the area of mandatory Palestine for all 1948 refugees, based on **UNGA Res. 194** (Dec. 1948), which recognized the right of refugees to return or receive compensation and 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, even though Israel's admission to the UN in 1949 was conditional upon accepting UN Resolutions, incl. 194!

### Distribution of UNRWA Registered Refugees by District and Camps (RC)

West Bank *			Gaza Strip		
District	Camp (year of est.)	Population	District	Camp (year of est.)	Population
Nablus	Askar (1950)	15,591	Gaza North	Jabalia (1948/49)	106,846
	Balata (1950)	22,855		Gaza City	Shati (Beach) (1949)
	Camp No. 1 (1950)	6,683	Gaza South		Khan Younis (1949)
Jenin	Far'a (1949)	7,540			Rafah (1949)
	Jenin (1953)	15,854	Gaza Central	Deir Balah (1949)	20,215
Tulkarem	Nur Shams (1952)	8,998		Nuseirat (1948/49)	58,727
	Tulkarem (1950)	17,981		Bureij (1949)	29,805
Ramallah	Ama'ri (1949)	10,377		Al-Maghazi (1949)	23,161
	Deir Ammar (1949)	2,335			
	Jalazon (1949)	10,966			
	Qalandia (1949)	10,759			
Jerusalem	Shu'fat (1965/66)	10,717**			
Jericho	Aqabat Jaber (1948)	6,264			
	Ein Sultan (1948)	1,828			
Bethlehem	Dheisheh (1949)	12,804			
	Aida (1950)	4,715			
	Beit Jibrin (1950)	2,054			
Hebron	Fawwar (1949)	7,912			
	Arroub (1950)	10,246			

\* In addition to the listed numbers, there are over 4,500 ex-Gazan refugees distributed in the WB camps.

\*\* The de facto camp population is much higher as many refugees and non-refugees have moved into the camp in the past years to avoid losing their residency rights in Jerusalem.

(Source: UNRWA, as of June 2007.)

### United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV), dated 8 December 1949, established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to address the humanitarian and human development needs of Palestine refugees.

UNRWA began its field operations on 1 May 1950. It was mandated to carry out direct relief and works programmes in collaboration with local governments as well as to plan for the time when relief was no longer needed. The Agency was envisaged as a temporary organization. Its mandate has been renewed by the UN General Assembly every three years pending a just and comprehensive settlement of the refugee issue.

Over the decades, in the face of wars, conflict and ensuing turbulence, UNRWA has assisted Palestine refugees affected by recurrent displacement. Today the Agency is by far the largest UN operation in the Middle East, employing around 28,000 staff members - most of them refugees - as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, as well as in other professional fields. It continues to be the main provider of basic services in the areas of education, health, relief, social services, infrastructure and microfinance to some 4.4 million registered Palestine refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

### 60 Years of UNRWA Assistance to Palestine Refugees - A Brief Chronology

**1948-1966. The exodus. UNRWA brings relief aid to refugees.** UNRWA begins operations to cater for over 700,000 Palestine refugees who have lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. Relief accounts for 69 per cent of the budget. UNRWA provides medical services, sets up the first schools and begins to re-house the 87 per cent of camp refugees who are living in tents. The first vocational training centres are established in Qalandia and Gaza. During the Suez War, UNRWA's supply lines in Gaza are cut, the Agency's services disrupted and food supplies looted. In 1958, UNRWA's work in Lebanon is hampered by the political crisis and subsequent events there. The Agency pioneers the first mass use of oral rehydration of salts. Teacher training centres are inaugurated in all fields of operations including the Ramallah Women's Training Centre, which is the first of its kind in the Middle East. By 1966 registered Palestine refugees exceed 1.3 million.



**1967-1981. The 1967 War. UNRWA again helps refugees rebuild their lives.** The 1967 Arab-Israeli war breaks out causing the displacement of tens of thousands of refugees from the West Bank and Gaza into neighbouring Arab states. UNRWA begins an emergency aid programme. The occupation weakens an already stagnant economy in the Gaza Strip. Unrest among the population disrupts the Agency's services. In 1973 renewed Arab-Israeli hostilities lead to the further displacement of refugees. Supply lines in Lebanon and Syria are interrupted and UNRWA's programmes disrupted. The Nabatieh camp, rebuilt by UNRWA in south Lebanon, is destroyed in an Israeli air raid. UNRWA HQ relocates from Beirut to Vienna as a result of the civil war. The 1978 Israeli incursion into south Lebanon displaces some 67,000 refugees. The Agency provides emergency aid. By 1981 the number of registered refugees increases to 1.9 million.

**1982-1986. Crises in Lebanon. UNRWA delivers emergency aid and other services.** Israel invades Lebanon and tens of thousands of Palestine refugees are again made homeless. The Agency's USD 52 million emergency relief programme assists 177,000 refugees including some 7,000 non-registered refugees. Lacking adequate resources, the general distribution of rations by UNRWA is discontinued in all fields except Lebanon. Instead, the special hardship case programme is set up to provide food, small cash grants and other assistance to the neediest refugees. By 1986 relief activities comprise only 12 per cent of the Agency's regular budget. Relief operations in Lebanon end in March 1984. However, in 1985 the "camps war" in and around refugee camps there displace 18,000 refugees, necessitating another emergency relief programme.

**1987-1992. The 1<sup>st</sup> intifada. Expanded Programme of Assistance.** UNRWA launches an Expanded Programme of Assistance in the West Bank and Gaza to deal with the socio-economic consequences of the 1<sup>st</sup> Intifada and Israeli counter-measures. The crisis in the Gulf results in over 300,000 Palestinians leaving Kuwait, mainly to Jordan; UNRWA joins other international agencies in providing them with aid. In 1991 UNRWA expands its income-generating programme, setting up revolving loan funds in the West Bank and Gaza. A special environmental health programme is created to improve the physical environment of refugee camps by installing sewerage and drainage systems.

**1993-1999. The Oslo Years. UNRWA starts Peace Implementation Programme.** Israel and the PLO sign the Declaration of Principles in September 1993. UNRWA launches its Peace Implementation Programme to improve infrastructure and create jobs. In the context of the new Oslo peace accords, the return of many Palestinians to the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the Agency believes it is preparing for the time when its mission will come to an end. UNRWA HQ relocates to Gaza and Amman. By 1995 the number of refugees reaches 3.2 million.



**2000-2008. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada. 60 years of UNRWA assistance to Palestine refugees.** With the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada, UNRWA launches a number of emergency appeals for assistance to refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, which succeeds over a period of 3 years in raising more than USD 320 million. In 2002, Israel begins construction of a separation barrier in the West Bank, restricting the Agency's access to the oPt and impacting the delivery of humanitarian aid assistance. UNRWA's 2006 Lebanon-Israel War Flash Appeal ensures the Agency can maintain essential services whilst also delivering emergency aid to Palestine

refugees and to about 5,500 displaced Lebanese. Forty years have passed since the flight of the 1967 refugees. In June 2007 UNRWA launches a Flash Appeal for USD 12.7 million to address the urgent needs of thousands of displaced Palestine refugees following intense fighting in and around Nahr El-Bared camp in North Lebanon. In September 2007, UNRWA launches a 2<sup>nd</sup> Flash Appeal; this time for USD 55 million to fund the first year of rehabilitation and to meet the emergency needs of the affected camp population.

#### Recommended Research Sources:

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<http://www.shami.org/> (Shami Palestinian Diaspora & Refugee Center)  
<http://www.prcuk.org> (Palestinian Return Center, London)  
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