



5. Refugees

■ Background

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as the result of two wars (*An-Nakba* 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, or were expelled, outside what became Israel (**"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 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 (incl. their descendants) is now estimated at 263,000-300,000 (Badil Center, Bethlehem).

In the aftermath of the 1948 WAR, UN General Assembly Res. 302 (IV), of 8 Dec. 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. In 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with UNRWA. In 1952, the Israeli government effectively **denationalized** the Palestinians who had fled or were expelled by adopting the Israeli Nationality Law. Their property was seized and ultimately transferred to the State of Israel.

During the 1967 June War, about 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from the WBGS (**"1967 displaced persons"**), including around some 175,000 UNRWA registered refugees who became refugees for a second time.

Today, the total 1948 **refugee population** is estimated at over **7 million**, incl. 4.6 million registered with UNRWA and over 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 350,000 internally displaced (of 1948) and some 950,000 1967 displaced persons. (PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, *Palestinian Refugees*, May 2008).

Around 70% of all Palestinians worldwide are refugees, constituting the world's largest refugee population. Around half of them are stateless. The vast majority of the Palestinian refugees live in the OPT or neighboring countries.

UNRWA Registered Refugees (June 2008)

RR = Registered Refugees	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Total
1950	- ¹	198,227	506,200 ¹	82,194	127,600	914,221 ²
RRs 1975	292,922	333,031	625,857	184,042	196,855	1,632,707
RRs 2008	754,263	1,059,584	1,930,703	456,983	416,608	4,618,141
Increase over 2007	2.6%	2.8%	2.7%	2.3%	1.4%	2.5%
% of total RRs	16	23	42	10	9	100
No. of refugee camps	19	8	10 ³	9	12	58
RR living in camps (in % of RR)	191,408 (25%)	492,299 (47%)	335,307 (17%)	123,646 (27%)	220,908 (53%)	1,363,496 (30%)
RR outside camps	562,855	567,285	1,595,396	333,337	195,700	3,254,645
Facilities:						
Schools	92	241	176	119	83	684
Training Centers	3	2	2	1	1	9
Primary Health Care	40	19	24	23	28	134

¹ West Bank figures included in Jordan until 1967. ² Excl. 45,800 people who received relief in Israel from UNRWA until 1952. ³ Three other neighborhoods in Amman, Zarqa and Madaba are considered 'unofficial' camps by UNRWA. (Source: *UNRWA in Figures*, UNRWA HQ, June 2008.)

After Oslo, all camps in the WBGS except Shu'fat RC 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. At Camp David in 2000, Israel refused to discuss the rights of the Palestinian refugees, arguing that it bore no responsibility for the refugee problem or its solution. At the subsequent Taba talks (Jan. 2001), Israel continued to press for an abandonment of the right of return, while a year later, the Arab Peace Initiative called for "A just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon" based on **UNGA Res. 194**, which recognizes 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 its admission to the UN in 1949 was conditional upon accepting UN Resolutions, incl. 194!



The **right to return** is further embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 Dec. 1948 (Art. 13 (2)), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 21 Dec. 1965 (Art. 5(d)(ii)), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 Dec. 1966 (Art. 12(4)) and has been applied in the cases of Bosnian, East Timorese, Kosovo, and Rwandan refugees.



While Israel rejects the 'right of return', 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 demand** their rights according to international law, incl. - besides the right of return - the recognition of Israel's responsibility in the creation and continuation of the refugee issue; the restitution of Palestinian refugee properties; full compensation for those properties (in cases where restitution is not possible or the refugee chooses compensation for losses), and compensation for the longstanding displacement and suffering of the refugees.

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)	16,030	Gaza North	Jabalia (1948/49)	107,295
	Balata (1950)	23,480			
	Camp No. 1 (1950)	6,811			
Jenin	Far'a (1949)	7,644	Gaza City	Shati (Beach) (1949)	81,591
	Jenin (1953)	16,266			
Tulkarem	Nur Shams (1952)	9,250	Gaza South	Khan Younis (1949)	67,567
	Tulkarem (1950)	18,465			
Ramallah	Ama'ri (1949)	10,606	Gaza Central	Deir Balah (1949)	20,653
	Deir Ammar (1949)	2,391			
	Jalazon (1949)	11,281			
	Qalandia (1949)	11,088			
Jerusalem	Shu'fat (1965/66)	11,066**	TOTAL		492,299
Jericho	Aqabat Jaber (1948)	6,488	* In addition to the listed numbers, there are over 4,500 ex-Gazan refugees distributed in the WB camps.		
	Ein Sultan (1948)	1,943			
Bethlehem	Dheisheh (1949)	13,017	** 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.		
	Aida (1950)	4,797			
	Beit Jibrin (1950)	2,101			
Hebron	Fawwar (1949)	8,171	(Source: UNRWA, as of June 2008.)		
	Arroub (1950)	10,513			
TOTAL		191,408			

Recommended Research Sources:

- <http://www.badil.org/> (Badil Center for Refugee and Residency Rights)
<http://www.shaml.org/> (Shaml Palestinian Diaspora & Refugee Center)
<http://www.prc.org.uk/> (Palestinian Return Center, London)
http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/mepp/new_prn/C/o/McGill/University
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMD180102007> (Lebanon)
<http://www.plands.org/index.htm>
- <http://www.un.org/unrwa/index.html>
<http://www.palestineremembered.com/>
<http://al-awda.org/>
<http://www.pcrp.org>
<http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo043/>
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