



THE NAKBA AND PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

What is the Nakba?

In 1947-1949, over 750,000 indigenous Palestinians were driven from their homes, towns and lands by well-armed Zionist militias. The term Nakba, which means “catastrophe” in Arabic, refers to this mass expulsion, a catastrophe for the Palestinian people that continues to the present day.

The Nakba was not accidental or unintended; instead, it was a systematic, deliberate act of ethnic cleansing designed to produce a Jewish majority state in Palestine. In order to produce this result, the forced expulsion of the vast majority of the Palestinian population - the indigenous Arab people of all religions - was a necessity.

There were over 450 Palestinian cities and towns that were destroyed and depopulated by Zionist militias between 1948 and 1950, three-quarters of the Palestinian villages inside the areas occupied by Zionist forces. Over 4 million acres of land were expropriated by the Israeli state from Palestinian peasants and landholders; 78 percent of historic Palestine was occupied.

The vast majority of Palestinian refugees were forced into the remaining 22 percent of Palestine, especially in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; to Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt; and internally displaced inside occupied Palestine '48.

What happened to Palestinian refugees?

While Palestinian refugees forced from their homes and lands lived in makeshift camps with only tents and minimal aid to provide protection, the newly declared Israeli state enacted a series of laws designed to seize their property and prevent their return: The Absentee Property Law, the Law of Return, and the Entry into Israel Law.

Meanwhile, the right of the Palestinian refugees to return was recognized by the United Nations in General Assembly Resolution 194, a right already upheld in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite the fact that even Israel's admission to the United Nations referred back to the refugees' return, Palestini-

ans seeking to return to their land were labeled “infiltrators,” facing death or imprisonment for attempting to return to the homes from which they were displaced.

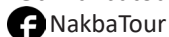
Nonetheless, for nearly 70 years, the Israeli state has completely refused to implement Palestinian refugees' right of return for the sole reason that they are of an unwelcome ethnicity and religious identity on their own land.

Today, according to statistics by Palestinian NGOs and the United Nations, there are over 7 million Palestinian refugees around the world. One of the largest groups of Palestinian refugees is on the border of Palestine - in Lebanon.



The North America Nakba Tour

Web: nakbatour.com



Email: info@nakbatour.com



Palestinian refugees in Lebanon today

There are 12 recognized Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon today, where over half of the 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live. Still denied their right to return to Palestine for over 70 years, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are struggling for a decent life and their human and civil rights in Lebanon as part of their struggle to return to Palestine and seek the liberation of their occupied land.

There are over 36 banned professions for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Even if a Palestinian refugee obtains an education in law, medicine, engineering or pharmacy, they cannot work in their chosen profession - or even in public transportation or farming.

In order to work at all, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon must obtain an annual permit; the process is bureaucratic, difficult and employer-dependent, forcing refugees into unemployment or black-market work.

56 percent of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are unemployed and over two-thirds are considered to be living in poverty or extreme poverty. Furthermore, Palestinian refugees cannot own land and property. Inside the camps, electricity and water shortages are common, while make-shift wiring is run from building to building with few safeguards.

While Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were once the center of the Palestinian revolution to which socially conscious people around the world came to be part of the Palestinian struggle, following the 1993 Oslo Accords or the so-called "peace process" in Palestine, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have only become more marginalized.

In this situation, Palestinians continue to be displaced as many Palestinian youth are forced to seek asylum abroad in order to support their families - part of the ongoing Nakba.

Resisting the Ongoing Nakba

The Nakba is not simply a memory of the past. Over 7 million Palestinian refugees around the world are actively denied their right to return.

Inside occupied Palestine, Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship who remained on their land after 1948 are subject to over 50 discriminatory laws. In Jerusalem and the West Bank, Palestinians in the remaining 22 percent of Palestine seized in 1967 live under military occupation, subject to home demolitions, land confiscations, killings and illegal settlement construction.

In the Gaza Strip, the 70 percent of the population who are Palestinian refugees struggle to survive with their compatriots under ongoing and devastating siege, lack of water and electricity and frequent military assaults.

Palestinians - in their homeland and in exile and diaspora, in the refugee camps in the Arab world - are resisting the ongoing Nakba as they have for 70 years. People around the world can join that resistance by:

- **Advocating for and defending Palestinian rights**, especially the right of seven million Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands after 70 years of dispossession. Tell your representatives to stop U.S. aid to Israel now.
- **Building the boycott of Israel** - including academic, cultural, economic and military boycotts. The Israeli state doesn't accomplish its ongoing Nakba alone. By joining boycott campaigns, people of conscience can provide a material boost to Palestinians' struggle for return and liberation.



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