

Issue 13

Autumn 1998

Published by [Sabeel](#) Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center

We welcome your questions and comments: sabeel@planet.edu

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Living in the Hope of Return

by Naim Ateek

When the time comes to move into final status talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, there is a number of important issues which will have to find resolutions. These issues have been considered the stickiest in the conflict and have intentionally been left to the last phase of the negotiations. These are Jerusalem, refugees, Jewish settlements, and borders. In this issue of *Cornerstone*, we would like to focus on the refugee problem. It was fifty years ago with the creation of the state of Israel that the Palestinian refugee problem originated.

We know today, more than we did in the past, that there was a definite policy on the part of the Zionist Jews to displace the Palestinians in order to make room for the

establishment of a Jewish state. The Zionists admitted from the beginning that there was no room for both. If there would be an Israel, Palestine had to go; and Israel must be "as Jewish as England is English."

As we look back at the last fifty years, three periods stand out in the history of the Palestinian people's displacement from their country: the 1948 and 1967 wars, and the ongoing creeping displacement of Palestinians by the Israeli government. In 1948, according to Dr. Salman Abu Sitta, over 800,000 Palestinians were displaced. This was tantamount to 85% of the Palestinian population that was living in that part of Palestine which became the state of Israel.

An important footnote is needed here. We need to define what we mean by the word 'refugee'. For most of us, it refers to people who due to oppression, persecution, or other hardships, flee their home country and take refuge in another. It is estimated that there are no less than 15 million refugees in the world today who have left their homes for reasons of race, religion, or nationality. In the case of the Palestinians, most of them did not leave of their own volition, they were driven out at gun-point in 1948 by the Zionist Jews. They were seen by the world as refugees but in actual fact they were exiled, displaced, and dispossessed. True, some of them fled because they were frightened of what the Jewish forces would do to them after news of massacres, but most of them were forced out. When the war was over, none were allowed to return.

For many years, the Palestinians were perceived and treated by many people in the world merely as refugees, i.e. people who had fled by their own volition and were in need of the world's sympathy and humanitarian assistance. The truth of the matter is different. They had been deliberately exiled, and for the last 50 years they have been dispersed all over the Middle East and throughout the world. Most of them ended up in refugee camps either on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or in neighboring Arab countries. They stayed in close proximity to Palestine because they lived in the hope that the international community would implement its resolution 194 and that their return would be made possible in a matter of a few weeks. Tragically however, UN resolution 194 was never implemented and justice was never done.

The second wave of the refugee problem took place nineteen years later during the 1967 war. Many of the Palestinians on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were displaced during this brief war. Some of them for a second time. Approximately half a million were displaced in all.

Throughout the last 50 years and especially since 1967, there has been a slow, covert displacement taking place through various Israeli government policies and regulations, forcing Palestinians to leave Jerusalem and the West Bank. This gradual ethnic cleansing can be seen in the demolition of Palestinians' homes, the loss of their

residency rights and subsequent expulsion from Jerusalem. These and other actions by the Israeli government add up to the same result, namely, the negation of Palestinian political and human rights and the prevention of the just establishment of a Palestinian state. It is estimated that by March 1998 approximately 7,000 Palestinians had been displaced from Jerusalem after losing their residency rights.

Dr. Abu Sitta calculates the total number of Palestinians in the world today at almost eight million. He has estimated that two thirds of them are refugees, approximately five million men, women and children.

As Christians, we may recall that one of the earliest stories in the Gospel of Matthew is about Jesus being made a refugee (Matthew 2). It is a horrific story about the slaughtering of the innocents by King Herod. Herod had asked the magi, who were looking for a newborn king, to go to Bethlehem and search for the infant and return to let him know where the baby was. The magi found Jesus and presented him their gifts but did not return to Herod because they were guided by God not to do so. Consequently, Herod became angry and ordered the slaughter of all the children of Bethlehem under two years of age. Joseph and Mary being warned about the impending danger, took Jesus and fled to Egypt where they found refuge. Subsequently, they returned to Palestine after the death of Herod, but instead of living in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary chose to reside in Galilee, in the small town of Nazareth where Jesus was brought up.

What theological lessons does Jesus the refugee have for us today as we consider the problem of Palestinian refugees?

1. The world has not changed in its misery and sinfulness. Evil still resides within us human beings; and especially in those of us who abuse power. The Herods of this world are blinded by their greed, ambition, and selfishness to the extent that it drives them to commit all kinds of crimes against innocent people. They teach us that most refugees are the victims of the abuse of power whether political, economic, or religious. At the basis of it all is human sin and evil.
2. They teach us to be thankful for those countries that provide asylum and refuge for the millions of refugees who flee persecution or oppression. These countries have opened their doors and have risen to the challenge of absorbing thousands of refugees in an effort to give them back their humanity and open for them and their children the possibility of a life of respect and dignity. Unfortunately, it has not always turned out this way. Most of the

world's refugees today live in the South, which cannot afford to offer them the needed protection and assistance. The refugee problem must always be seen as an international concern that needs to be tackled through international solidarity. Many of the asylum countries, who are poor themselves, have been crying out for greater burden-sharing.

3. They teach us to exercise compassion. One of the central characteristics of Jesus' ministry was his emphasis on mercy and compassion. And from the beginning of the history of the church, the community of faith has reached out in compassion in the footsteps of its Lord. Similarly one can point out that the ecumenical movement, through the World Council of Churches, was involved with refugee work almost since its inception at the end of the 1940's. In the 1960's, it had a staff of 500 persons working with refugees in 70 countries. Since then, service to refugees has continued with the responsibility shared on the regional, national, and local church levels. Compassion is part of the essence of the gospel.
4. They teach us that refugees have a right of return to their country if they choose to do so. Refugees must be supported and encouraged to exercise this right. It is paradoxical that in Jesus day there were open borders more than at the end of the 20th century. The holy family was able to return from Egypt to Palestine. The repatriation of refugees is a right and not a courtesy. It has to do with rendering justice to those to whom injustice was done . That is why we cannot stop with humanitarian assistance. We must recognize the roots of the injustice and become effective advocates for their return. Most of the time the refugees are victims of political, economic, religious, or social injustice. As people of faith, we must be prepared to lift their voice through our voice in seeking and demanding justice for them.
5. There is always the possibility of healing and reconciliation. One does not have to go through life bearing a grudge and resentment against those responsible for the injustice. Most people accept that once an acceptable justice is rendered and adequate compensation is given one should not live in the past but look for a better future. As Palestinians continue to insist on their right of return, they should make it clear that they are open toward the future, open toward healing and reconciliation. Although Palestinians believe that the state of Israel was founded on injustice, most of them have come to accept its existence and are willing to live with it in peace, as a good neighbor. The possibility of healing and reconciliation is real when justice is done.
6. We need to remember that when Jesus the Jewish Palestinian refugee grew up, he became a strong advocate for justice for the poor and oppressed. He proclaimed justice and liberation for them (Luke 4). The Old Testament

context of the passage in Isaiah (chapter 61) which Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth had to do with the return of the exiled from the Babylonian captivity; it had to do with a new age dawning and new possibilities arising between God and people. It was a message of hope and liberation. It was nothing less than the proclamation of a jubilee - when God restores justice to those who have been oppressed and opens before them vitality and renewal.

As we focus on the refugee problem, we would like to make it clear that the general policy which we aim to establish is first of all the *right of return* for the exiled Palestinian refugees. Those who cannot be fully repatriated must be compensated and given the choice of living in Palestine (the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem) or wherever they choose and are allowed to go. No just solution can be envisaged without the return of the exiled and their due compensation.

The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is director of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

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Palestinian Refugees - Still Waiting

by Norma Masriyeh

It is now 50 years since "Al-Nakba" when the first great wave of Palestinian refugees occurred. The open sore thus created and added to in 1967, has not yet been healed.

The Palestinian expression for refugee is Lagi' - one who has to bear exile and suffering. In this sense, none of us can avoid knowing what it is to be a refugee. The refuge we all seek is protection from forces that wrench us away from security and comfort, physical and mental, which give dignity and meaning to human existence.

The number of Palestinians displaced in 1947-8 was put at 726,000 in a 1949 UN Economic Survey Mission report. However, although this is the generally accepted figure, other figures have been suggested based on differing definitions of a refugee. The United Nations designed the most common definition used for refugees in the post Second World War era in 1951. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in its 1951 convention and its Protocol of 1967, define a refugee as: *A person who is outside his country because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality and other. And owing to such fear, is*

unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and who is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR)

However, UNRWA in 1950 adopted for the administration of its relief services a narrow definition of a Palestinian refugee. The definition requires at least two years' residence before 1948 in Palestine, proof of current residence in one of the host countries, and proof of continuing need. Refugees within this definition are eligible for UNRWA assistance (UNRWA 1990). Keely argues, that the question of "who is a refugee?" is the wrong question to ask. Rather, the starting point should be, "how to deal with people displaced by war, who struggle for independence, rather than to stretch and trim a definition from another context." (Keely, 1981)

It should also be noted that Israeli sources continue to try to downplay the scale of the refugee situation, which further confuses the picture. However, the current status (end of 1996 figures) is that UNRWA has 3.4 million registered Palestinian refugees. Of these, 32.7% live in UNRWA's 59 camps - in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The West Bank and Gaza Strip is home to 40% (1,224,996) of all refugees; another 40% (1,328,768) live in Jordan. The remaining 20% reside in Syria (342,507) and Lebanon (349,773).

In 1994 the number of refugees globally was put at about 18 million. This means that one in five immigrants on the move is a refugee. But this figure increases almost daily. Eleven million of those refugees originated from the Middle East, Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, the Western Sahara, Iraq, Iran, and other Third World countries. The Palestinian dimension of this global tragedy is further complicated by a number of factors. Firstly that some of the refugees have been displaced twice over, as a result of the 1967 war. This war produced 470,000 (first and second time) refugees from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The majority of these went to Jordan, with a smaller number taking refuge in Lebanon.

In addition, there are people who consider themselves refugees, though they are not registered as such. These are people who, while not exiled from their country, have still experienced "ghourba" (exile) from their native homes, villages, surroundings, and lands.

The 1991 Gulf War brought about further dislocation, as 350,000 Palestinians and Jordanians working in the Gulf area suddenly found themselves back in Jordan, homeless and jobless.

It has been pointed out that there are still large areas of ignorance about many aspects of the Palestinian refugee situation. The way to address this need is to mount a major effort to collect oral histories from the displaced people themselves.

In 1948, following the first wave of refugee migration, UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) was adopted. The General Assembly has since reaffirmed this resolution annually. Paragraph II addresses the question of return:

Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in 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. (UN 1978)

After the second wave of Palestinians were forced out of Israel, UN Security Council Resolution 237 was passed, in June 1967. This resolution invoked the 1949 Geneva Convention obligations, and requires Israel to: *"facilitate the return of those inhabitants who have fled the area since the outbreak of hostilities."*

Both these UN resolutions are backed up by the original 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (11), which proclaimed a Palestinian right to sovereignty and national independence. They reminded Israel of its obligations under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 to facilitate the return of those inhabitants who have fled the area since the outbreak of hostilities. The above mentioned Resolutions 194 and 237 established undeniably the Right of Return as a legitimate issue deserving international scrutiny.

Israel defends her refusal to implement the above UN resolutions on the grounds that a regional peace agreement with the Arabs is required (rather than a piecemeal one with the Palestinians).

On the other hand, if nothing is done to bring the refugees back, what is to happen to them? They are not welcome in either Lebanon or Syria and have only a qualified welcome in Jordan (where a certain proportion of refugees are valued, in keeping the delicate balance between them and the Jordanians). At least some leading figures in the Israeli establishment are concerned about the Palestinian dilemma. Several months ago, Shimon Peres opened "The Peres Center for Peace" in Tel Aviv. Al-Quds reported his feelings: "He feels ashamed, both as a Jew and as an Israeli, for the suffering of the Palestinians, four years after the Oslo agreement" (*Al-Quds*, October 22, 1997).

What hope is there for refugees in the political developments over the past decade? The PLO's recognition of the state of Israel in 1988 was followed by Israel's recognition of the PLO in 1993. This brought some hope for the refugees, especially those in the Palestinian diaspora. However, the 1993 Declaration of Principles mentions the refugee question only twice, and generally consigns the subject to the final status negotiations. Similarly, the Gaza-Jericho First Deal addressed only resettlement and rehabilitation, but not repatriation of the displaced. (Except for some tens of thousands of 1967 refugees, who would be permitted into the West Bank and Gaza Strip.)

This postponement of a solution to the refugee issue seems to match up with Israel's goals, whereby domination of the Palestinians is achieved, not only politically, but also in respect to land, water, overall security, and foreign relations.

Summing up this whole approach to the question, Professor Edward Said (*The Guardian*, September 1993) called it "The Final Dispossession."

Public opinion among the Palestinian population (based on a 1998 survey and polls), values the right of return as being more important than that of compensation. However, both Palestinian and Israeli communities viewed the situation realistically - neither group expect a "mass return" of refugees, as a result of a peace agreement.

The question of Palestinian refugees pre-dates the current debates about refugees in general, by almost half-a-century. The issue of the Palestinian refugees is considered the longest standing in modern history, and many have argued that the crisis is unresolvable.

The importance of studying and understanding the Palestinian refugees stems from their unique experience, which differs from other refugee experiences (except the Armenians') in four vital respects.

First, the nature of their uprootedness is different because the *majority* of Palestinians became refugees, which Weinstock describes as "a deviant pattern of colonization."

Second, the Palestinian refugees' insistence on return gives them a unique posture. As such they see themselves not as refugees, but as very temporary absentees, whose situation can only be rectified through restitution and not resettlement.

Third, their unique collectivity, which they have managed to maintain. This collectivity evolves around the Palestinian idea, both culturally and politically.

Fourth, through their struggle and persistence which fueled Palestinian nationalism by asserting the broad collective will of an entire people for independence (Hazboun, 1994).

"In any real sense, justice is not now attainable for the Palestinian refugees."

Therefore, this unique character of the Palestinian people requires a new approach for studying their conditions and aspirations. There is a necessity to record the Palestinian experience in its various aspects and stages. As Migdal noted, "Despite the impact the Palestinians have had in current world events, they remain a relatively 'understudied' group" (Migdal, 1977). The most effective way of redressing the imbalance is by oral evidence from the Palestinian refugees themselves. As Samuel and Thompson write:

Oral memory offers a double validity in understanding the past, in which, as still today, myth was embedded in real experience: both regrouping from it and helping to shape its perception (Strauss, 1969).

Palestinian literature, poetry and art in general stressed the sense of tragedy and misery and affirmed loyalty to the native soil, often using symbolic language to evade censorship and probable persecution (especially under occupation). Dr. Amnon Kapeliuk, an Israeli journalist, wrote that the Arabic word "al-Awda" (return) of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland terrifies many Israelis. The censors disliked this word and censored it; he argues that "this word does not threaten Israel's existence, but rather that it makes Israelis feel guilty" (Friedman, 1980).

This feeling of guilt is multi-layered and is not confined to the Palestinian refugees, but extends to the Palestinian people as a whole, as expressed by Peres in the aforementioned speech at The Peres Center for Peace in Tel-Aviv.

Following the Israeli state's recognition of the PLO in September 1993, preceded by the PLO recognition of the existence of Israel in 1988, Palestinian optimism centered on their ability to reconstitute their rights for return and for self-determination, after decades of confrontations and conflict. The Palestinian refugees - particularly those in the diaspora - perceived this new development as the beginning of the end to 45 years of dispossession. Yet, they doubted that Israel would actually allow the repatriation of the old (1948) and the new (1967) refugees, as well as a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories. Their skepticism found roots in a long history of Israel denying them the "right of return," social, economic, and human rights. They are

critical of the absence of an explicit stipulation in the Gaza-Jericho First Deal regarding their situation.

"Nothing can recompense them for the hardship and lost years of their lives as refugees. Nor can they be recompensed for the destruction of their country or their way of life."

However, in the Declaration of Principles of 1993, the refugees were mentioned only in two places - in article V and article XII. The first concerns the final status negotiations (which include refugees, settlements, and security arrangements). The second is related to the return of 1967 refugees. In spite of this, Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for "a just settlement of the refugee problem" is confirmed in the Declaration of Principles, but the phrase "just settlement" is meaningless. No one can do real justice to the refugees of Palestine now, for all they have suffered since 1948. In the words of Edward Said: "In any real sense, justice is not now attainable for the Palestinian refugees. Nothing can recompense them for the hardship and lost years of their lives as refugees. Nor can they be recompensed for the destruction of their country and way of life."

It is no surprise to see the refugees expressing feelings of unease and concern about their future. Their dissent stems from the PLO's failure to satisfactorily address their issue. As refugees' speculations go, the 'first deal' brought dismay, because it entails only resettlement and rehabilitation, but not repatriation. The "sign of goodwill" by Israel is seen in its approval to accept tens of thousands of 1967 refugees to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Apparently, this right is denied to 1948 refugees. Yet, at the same time, Israel is opening its doors to thousands of Soviet immigrants. For the Palestinian refugees who have been fueling the Palestinian national struggle, making sacrifices in every sphere of their life, the Declaration of Principles may be, as Edward Said wrote in *The Guardian* of September 9, 1993, regarding their final dispossession:

Their [Palestinian refugees'] national rights as people made refugees in 1948, solemnly confirmed and reconfirmed for years by the UN, the PLO, the Arab governments, indeed most of the world, now seem to have been annulled.

The main question remains: to what extent would the quadripartite Committee (with representatives from Jordan, Egypt, Israel and Palestine) be successful as to the issue of 1967 refugees' return?

The Middle East Council of Churches in a recent conference on Palestine declared that:

The new world order cannot be established on the foundation of peace, justice and equality unless the historic wrong that was done to the Palestinians is reversed and the issue of refugees is finally solved, once and for all.

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The Catastrophe of Palestine: a Personal Testimony

by Anis Sayegh

One sunny morning in early February 1948, I said good-bye to my father and drove to Sidon in southern Lebanon to continue my high school education. In the meantime, my father was taking my mother to the Scottish Missionary Hospital in town [Tiberias] because that morning she had had another heart attack. (She had suffered from heart disease for more than 10 years.) I threw parting looks from the rear window at my house and the town, not knowing that they would be my last glances. I had said to my parents that I would be back in 10 weeks to spend Easter vacation with them.

Two days before Easter, I got a car and began to drive towards Tiberias. However, I was stopped about 20 kilometers after crossing the Lebanese-Palestinian border, by a British soldier who told me that the road was too dangerous and travel was forbidden, because the Haganah forces had besieged a number of Arab villages along the road. The Haganah was a Zionist military organization which owed its expertise to a British, fundamentalist Christian and racist officer by the name of Orde Wingate, who supervised the Haganah's training and their preparations for the expulsion of the Arabs from Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state in the country. Orde Wingate believed that God had chosen him specially to carry out this "sacred mission" as a

fulfillment of God's promise to the children of Israel, that they would own the land of milk and honey.

I returned to Sidon. A few days later, on April 18, my parents followed. A British officer had called my father and asked him to discharge my mother from the hospital, so as to take her in a military truck to the Lebanese border, where it was safer. Tiberias, he said, was going to fall in a few hours to the Zionist forces, who were preparing to enter the tiny, peaceful town which lies comfortably on the western coast of the sea of Galilee.

The officer gave my father no explanation and no opportunity to refuse the order, since he was responsible for lives in the Protestant parish and for transferring parish inhabitants out of Palestine.

"It is the will of God". This was the officer's answer to my father's questions. It was God's will to "bring the children of Israel back to their country after 2,000 years of exile so they may establish their state. You know, my dear priest, this is their land and now they are returning."

This priest didn't know. This priest, who had studied theology in the best religious school in Jerusalem, obtained his degree, became a priest, studied and was engrossed in Christian theology, wrote books and researched. This priest who had given hundreds of sermons did not know that the will of God would occur in 1948 resulting in the expulsion of the legitimate people of the land, whose historical roots extended back dozens of centuries, so that another people could take their place.

Neither Father 'Abdallah, the Protestant pastor in Tiberias, nor his wife Afifa, cultured and also well-informed in religious matters and the head of the Protestant Women's Society in town, nor any of the three-quarter million Palestinians, forced by the Jews to leave their homes in that tragic year, believed or even were aware that this was God's will. And today, 50 years later, the Arab-Palestinian people - whose population now numbers more than seven million, more than half of whom are living in the Diaspora, and who are not permitted to return to their homeland - also do not believe that this is the will of God, a God of righteousness and good, justice, equality and peace, the God they worship in their churches and mosques.

I am one of the seven million Palestinians prohibited by Israel from living in my homeland to enjoy my national sovereignty and rights which are guaranteed me by numerous covenants and charters, so that I may live a free and dignified life and practice my traditions, develop my culture and carry on my heritage, so

that I may establish a democratic system - which most people desire. The only thing I can do when I am overwhelmed with longing to see the beautiful house where I was born and raised, is to go to the Um Qays heights [Gadara, one of the Decapolis cities during the time of Jesus] in the north-western strip of the East Bank (Jordan) and look across the comforting lake with the beautiful and enchanting town behind it. My childhood memories of the first 16 years of my life appear before my eyes, accompanied by images of Jesus, his deeds and sermons as they were imprinted in my mind from Sunday school and Bible readings at home and in church. It was near this town and its lake that Jesus gave most of his sermons and performed many of his miracles. He chose most of his disciples from around Tiberias and healed people there. I see them all in my imagination, from afar, on the hill of Um Qays which overlooks the lake. But I can never go down to the banks of the lake or enter the town or sit under the shade of the mimosa tree at the entrance of our house. Because I am an Arab and the Arab, rightful owner of the land, its child for thousands of years, is not allowed to return. One of five million immigrants (or children of immigrants) who have flooded into Palestine over the past 100 years will have taken my place and raped the land which is not theirs.

Many Palestinians wonder why citizens of Russia, Poland, Germany, Holland and dozens of other countries have the right to come to a foreign land after the expulsion of its inhabitants and establish a homeland.

This question, which may seem naive within the context of the international political game, is directed to Cohen (I don't know the rest of his name), the Chinese Jew who allowed himself the liberty of living in my family's house in Tiberias (actually the Scottish missionary house). Part of the house was turned into a fish restaurant for tourists, visitors and pilgrims coming to the holy sites in Tiberias. But the question is asked more insistently and with astonishment, of those who made it easier for Cohen and people like him to leave their native countries and come to Palestine to occupy homes and land. Perhaps Cohen and his companions were weak-willed when faced with the temptations of coming to Palestine. However, what excuse do Western Christians have to offer to justify their role in implementing this conspiracy, by encouraging the Zionist movement and supporting it from its birth one hundred years ago, after it openly announced its plans to occupy Palestine? [The West] gave the Zionists a helping hand - financially, militarily, politically and in the media, and ensured an internationally "legitimate" cover-up for the implementation of the conspiracy in all its consecutive stages: from the infiltration of Palestine in the first fifty years (1897-1948) through the establishment of the state of Israel.

To this day, the Israelis control more than three times the area of land which had been granted to them by a slim majority in the United Nations in the fall of 1947 in order to establish a Jewish state. So from a part of Palestine in 1948 (the Jews were a minority in population and land ownership) to the occupation of all of Palestine, Israel was able to guarantee its state after evacuating the people from it. Thanks to the ongoing support of western Christians in the form of money, weapons and moral and political protection. In short, western Christians (Europeans and Americans) are directly responsible for the injustice, which befell the Palestinians, the results of which are still with them half a century later.

Excerpts from the memories of Palestinian historian Anis Sayegh on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of al-Nakba which were presented to the coalition of Christian historians in Europe. This piece first appeared in [al-Quds](#) on May 30, 1998. Sabeel adapted it from the [Palestine Report](#) of June 5th 1998.

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Interview with Antranig Bakerjian

by Leila Tarazi and Nora Carmi

Antranig Bakerjian is a Jerusalemite Palestinian Armenian and natural leader who dedicated his life to the service of the Palestinian Refugees for thirty three years (1950-1983). He acted as area officer with UNRWA in Jerusalem, Jericho and Nablus (the West Bank).

What was the definition of "refugee"?

When the UN started there was no concrete definition of who is a refugee. Ideas developed later but at no point did any official definition recognize or include the political rights of the Palestinian. How can one categorize suffering? Under no circumstances can we categorize human suffering.

What was the condition of refugees, the real situation when you joined the work?

The people that we worked with were those who had brought their suffering as well as memories of a country they had left behind, villages, homes, vineyards, a community they belonged to, and organizations they had established. In fact, a life story. They were the second wave of refugees - about 300,000 people who had fled their country before the British mandate ended. (The British army actually moved out on May 13, 1948 instead of on May 15.) The first wave made their way to Lebanon and Egypt, they were the well-to-do and more privileged. We had to bring relief and hope to the thousands of refugees who fled to Jordan. What became evident in the 1948 expulsion was the spirit of patriotism and compassion, as witnessed through the support given by kin - in Ramallah for example, through the "welcoming committees."

Did you consider the problem and the assistance as temporary? Did you ever imagine the situation would last so long?

Nobody expected the situation to be a prolonged, dragging one. Even after the 1967 occupation, I didn't imagine it would last another five years. The general feeling was that the Arabs would get even with Israel. It was this hope that enabled the people in the camps to endure it all. In the past 20 years, I have often asked myself: 'Till when?

This was the time when we preached endurance through words that became operational tools - words like *Allah kabir*: God is great, and *Bifrijhah Allah*: God will ease it, will solve it.

Some people think that UNRWA's existence and the refugees' dependence on rations hindered, or reduced the urgency of finding a solution to the Palestinian problem. Please comment.

The long history of UNRWA passed through five-year phases and each one was different. At times only lip-service was being offered, or UNRWA would act as a tranquilizer. In the first five years there was no real relief given. Later, the agency did bring about considerable change.

Out of a budget of \$250 million for the 3 years 1952-1955, only \$50 million was earmarked for relief. \$200 million was to be used to develop a rehabilitation plan that would shape the future of the Middle East, by building dams on the Yarmouk and Euphrates rivers, and by creating the Eastern Ghor Canal, and other projects. This all helped to divert world attention away from the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

Later stages were visibly more positive. A sort of miracle happened due to political events in the Arab world. For one, with the new UNRWA Director Henry Labouise, the investigations about which refugees were entitled to ration cards in the camps was eased, and replaced by a policy that all children should receive services and food. Human beings that were suffering should not be used as pawns for political gains. This had a great effect on the morale of the refugees. Also, there was a problem of idle youth. There were 500,000 young, idle and uneducated youth loitering in the camps. Vocational training schools were established, the first being in Kalandia in 1953. The importance of developing skills became clear, especially as the economy of the Middle East was to depend on oil, and job opportunities in the Gulf that were opening up.

Between the years 1960-1965, vocational training for refugees was expanded eight-fold. Progress in actual living conditions became evident when tents were replaced by 16,000 housing units. Displaced refugees everywhere need "compassion and not charity." They need empowerment to retain their dignity as human beings. Programs like summer youth camps and activities for the elderly helped promote community service and voluntary commitment. Teamwork became the pattern and model of dealing with the problem in a humane way.

This is how we dealt with the immediate human suffering, but the real solution to the problem had to be a political one.

Can you think of any particularly poignant stories that you came across during your years of service?

The long suffering of the Palestinian refugee waiting for a just solution that never came. The influx of refugees into Arab countries put an added burden on the host countries and created dissent and friction in many instances. One such case is the heartrending experiences in Jordan in September 1970. The enormity of the need there brought to light the deep bonds between the people of the West Bank camps and their kin across the river. UNRWA ran to the assistance of the refugees in East Jordan. All forces were rallied and provisions were trucked to the periphery of some Jordanian camps. Households in the West Bank camps baked a batch of bread, school-going children brought 2 hard boiled eggs to school to be sent to feed a child in Jordan. Typically, trucks would reach their destination with reduced loads, but if even 50% of the original provisions were distributed, it was an achievement.

(Antranig Bakerjian recounted this next part with tears in his eyes.) After one such truck load arrived at one camp, a woman who was being offered bread

started pulling and tearing her hair and in tears, she screamed, "I will never taste bread again, for my son died of hunger." This was an expression of anger and broken-heartedness at the injustices committed by humankind.

The history of the Palestinian refugees reads like a series of calculated political steps taken by the "powers" in order to divert attention from their right to their land. Never once were the Palestinians given political protection under the UN. UNRWA was never a branch of the secretariat, which explains why attempts to show to the full the human side of the organization failed.

What from your point of view is the solution, if any? How do you foresee the future?

The Arab/Israeli conflict had its roots in 1897. Decisions made then were designed to be implemented by political schemes and the Zionists spared nothing to achieve these, aided by their allies, friends, and by some governments.

The future of the Palestinian refugee depends on:

1. The State of Israel correcting its historic wrongdoing by deeds of redemption toward the inhabitants they drove away from their land.
2. The Arab world fully accepting that a just peace with Israel is possible under international auspices - meaning the implementation of UN resolutions.

Leila Tarazi is a life-time colleague of Mr. Bakerjian at UNRWA. She is now President of the Board of Directors of the YWCA Jerusalem.

Nora Carmi is the administrator of Sabeel, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

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The Future of Palestinian Refugees

by Salim Tamari

Of the three final status issues slated for bi-lateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in May 1996, the question of refugees has received the

least attention in terms of strategic vision. In many ways it is also one of the hardest to resolve given Israeli intransigence on this issue, and Palestinian inability to impose any conditions on their protagonists. By contrast the issues of Jerusalem and settlements have had a considerable number of futurist scenarios and even the modicum of agreement. No such debate has surrounded the issue of refugees, and yet the legitimacy of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement in the eyes of the Palestinian diaspora rests to a large extent on the ability of the PNA to ensure the return of expatriate Palestinians to their country.

"... the question of refugees has received the least attention in terms of strategic vision."

Although final status negotiations never actually started as scheduled and the transitional agreement (concerning withdrawal from areas C and B, etc.) are still to be implemented by the Israelis, nevertheless most of the outstanding issues are likely to dominate the debate over the future of refugees.

1. Linkages between the status of 1948 Refugees and 1967 Displaced Persons:

More accurately this linkage is related to the manner in which agreements made in the current negotiations over the fate of 1967 displaced persons are likely to affect final status negotiations over 1948 refugees. There are currently over one million displaced persons, if we count those who lost their residencies as a result of Israeli administrative measures among them. 1948 refugees and their descendants constitute over 2.5 million. But there is a great degree of overlap here since at least 30% of displaced persons are second time refugees from the 1948 war.

Obviously not all of these refugees will relocate to Palestine even if the opportunity was available. A number of factors will determine this likelihood, including quotas of return agreed upon, the absorptive capacity of the Palestinian economy, and the attractiveness of the new regime in comparison to the relative security or insecurity of Palestinians in the host countries.

In the transitional period (which originally was to last five years from the signing of the Declaration of Principles), it would be to the advantage of the Palestinians to separate the issue of Displaced Persons (DPs) from that of '48 refugees. I would argue for this separation on the following grounds:

- To pre-empt claims that the settlement of displaced persons in the West Bank and Gaza is part of a final package that preclude their further claims on rights inside Israel. This is particularly relevant to the status of DPs who are also '48 refugees.
- Since the issue of DPs is discussed in the context of the Quadri-Partite Committee, which is a purely Arab-Israeli committee, Palestinians would benefit greatly from the participation of the international community (in particular UN organizations) if the multi-laterals continue to debate the status of '48 refugees.
- The committee on displaced persons has been discussing the status of people who lost their residency but who are technically neither refugees nor 'displaced persons'. Those include deportees and citizens who lost their permanent IDs. It would overload the work of the final status negotiations if these categories of people are transferred to their committee.

Nevertheless there is a certain degree of linkage that is bound to merge the work of the two sets of negotiations. Those include, the manner in which the earlier returnees are absorbed; procedures for applications for return; and claims for compensation made by '67 and '48 refugees.

2. Final Status Claims: Compensation or Return?

This is a false dichotomy which is often raised in the course of negotiations. It is clear from the protocols of the Conciliation Commission Report that two modes of compensation are proposed, one for returning refugees, and one for non-returning refugees.¹ The Palestinians have taken a principled, but static position on the question of return. In the multi-lateral negotiations the Palestinian delegation have always reiterated General Assembly Resolution 194 as the basis for all political solutions to the Refugee Problem. The Israelis have in their turn been systematic in their rejection of any inclusion in the summing statements for any mention of 194 or any other specific resolution. In 1995 the United States, for the first time since its adoption, has withheld its annual commitment to this resolution. What does this mean?

"... not all these refugees will relocate to Palestine even if the opportunity was available."

Whenever final status talks on refugees are likely to commence (if at all) immense diplomatic pressure will start building on the Palestinians to give up their insistence on the right of return. The Israelis in their turn have made it clear that they will not support any categorical 'right of return' for the Palestinians--either to Israel itself or to the West Bank and Gaza.² It is inconceivable that any Palestinian authority can yield to such pressure and retain its legitimacy in the eyes of its constituents, or--significantly, by exiled Palestinians in the diaspora. *On the other hand it is clear that the Palestinian negotiators cannot simply go to the final status talks armed only with an abstract UN resolution. Concessions at the practical level are bound to happen if at least some justice is to be realized for 1948 refugees.*

"... That Israel acknowledges its moral accountability for the creation of the Palestine refugee problem, including the means of socializing this recognition to the younger generation of Israelis."

One of the most succinct proposals for a final status position in this regard was made by Rashid Khalidi, in his essay "Toward a Solution".³ Khalidi suggests a negotiated solution for resolving the claims of refugees based on six conditions:

6. That Israel acknowledges its moral accountability for the creation of the Palestine refugee problem, including the means of socializing this recognition to the younger generation of Israelis.
7. That Israel accepts in principle, the right of Palestinians and their descendants to return to their homes. The Palestinians--in return--will recognize that this right cannot be literally exercised inside 1948 Israel, and will have to exercise it in the state of Palestine. However as part of this conception, Israel should take into its domain several tens of thousands of refugees. Particularly those that have family members living inside Israel.
8. A distinction should be made between reparations (for those who will not be allowed to return), and compensation (for those who lost property in 1948.⁴ Khalidi suggests the figure of \$92-147 billion for property loss (1948 figures, based on Kubursi and Hadawi's assessment); and \$40 billion in reparations, based on an estimate of \$20,000 per person for 2 million people.

9. Palestinian exiles should have the right to return to the future Palestinian state, or (implicitly) to the areas under the control of the Palestinian National Authority.
10. Palestinians who choose to remain in Jordan would be offered the choice of having full citizenship rights, or "limited rights" as citizens of the Palestinian component of the Jordanian Palestinian confederation.
11. Palestinians in Lebanon would be offered a choice; repatriation to the Palestinian state, return to Galilee and acquisition of Palestinian citizenship, or the granting of permanent residency in Lebanon.

It is obvious that Khalidi is proposing here a package deal which will have to be negotiated simultaneously with the governments of Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan. While Khalidi's proposal is both original and practical (in the operational sense), I would differ with him on two crucial points: (1) Rights of return to the areas of the Palestinian National Authority should not be conditional, or even linked, to the realization of claims to compensation or repatriation. It should be a separate act of sovereignty. In particular Palestinians should not enter into negotiations with Israel where the right of return to a mini-Palestine should be bartered off with the right of return to Israel itself. (2) Reparations to Jews who lost their homes in their original Arab countries should be a bi-lateral issue between Israel and the respective Arab states, and not one in which Palestinians would be embroiled as a party.

I would further add, given the complexity of assessing individual claims for lost properties, for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, that two separate forms of reparations be made. The first would be collective compensation, to be negotiated by the Palestinian state on behalf of Palestinian refugees in general, the results of which will be used to rebuild the infrastructure of the Palestinian state--which will be, in part the 'state of the returnees'. The second would be based on individual claims which will be negotiated between the state of Israel and representatives of the refugees. Since many of these refugees are not the subjects (or even future citizens) of the Palestinian state, the PNA would not be a direct party to this second set of negotiations. The Conciliation Commission Report (1950) discusses precedents of such modalities applied in WWI and WWII, and to the Indo-Pakistani conflict in 1947.⁵

"Family reunification schemes which are available to West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, limited as they are, are virtually denied to Jerusalem Arabs."

3. Jerusalem and the Refugee Negotiations:

The status of Jerusalem was inadvertently linked to the refugees issue as a result of several moves on the part of the Israeli Government and the [Olmert] Jerusalem Municipal Council that were seen as preempting final status negotiations.

First was the attempt to restrict the conditions of residency of Jerusalem Palestinians who lived outside municipal zones (June 1995) by withdrawing access to health and national insurance services for Jerusalemites who cannot establish actual residence within the city boundaries. Family reunification schemes which are available to West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, limited as they are, are virtually denied to Jerusalem Arabs. The Jerusalem census planned for October 1995 (not to be confused with the national census of 1996) was seen as a prelude to get rid of those Jerusalemite Arabs driven out of the city by building restrictions and local taxes to the northern suburbs.

"Meron Benvenisti, former deputy Mayor of Jerusalem confirmed that much of the property in which West Jerusalemites live belonged to Arabs before 1948. "

This was followed by a campaign to close down Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem that were described as affiliated with the PNA. In August 1995 the Health Council, the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, and the National Broadcasting Authority (TV and Radio) were closed down by police order. Proceedings started against the Orient House, centre for the Palestinian Negotiating Team. These attempts were later rescinded under the condition that Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem publicly dissociate their connections with the PNA.

In reaction to this campaign to shut Palestinian institutions Faisal Hussein reminded an Israeli audience on May 25th, 1995 that 70% of West Jerusalem property belonged to Palestinian Arab refugees from Talbieh, Lifta, Qatamoun, Baq'a, and other suburbs and villages that later formed the bulk of Israeli West Jerusalem.⁶ Meron Benvenisti, former deputy Mayor of Jerusalem confirmed that much of the property in which West Jerusalemites live belonged to Arabs before 1948. In the 1967 census it was found that about 10,000 Palestinians

living in East Jerusalem (16% of the population then) were born in the Western part of the city.⁷ With their descendants they constitute today over a quarter of the population of Arab Jerusalem. Today Palestinian Jerusalemites are treated as absentees as far as their West Jerusalem property is concerned, while Jews who have had property in the Eastern part are allowed to, and often establish their rights, to their pre-1948 property.⁸

The confrontations which began in 1995 and continue today over residency rights and uneven access to property claims have hastened the need for a clearer strategy over Jerusalem. The cornerstone of this strategy showed that *the postponement of the Jerusalem issue to final status negotiations (in May 1995) should not allow Israel to make major demographic and zoning (settlement) changes to ensure Jewish hegemony in the Arab sections of the city. In other words the status quo in Jerusalem should be preserved in such a way to ensure the survival of Palestinian institutions and the national integrity of the Arab population in the transitional period.*

With the impending start of final status negotiations, Palestinians are still caught in a situation where the repetition of an objective ('Arab Jerusalem is the capital of the future Palestinian state') has substituted the adoption of a strategy to bring about such an objective. The strategy should be developed along the following lines:

- In negotiating issues of residency rights and family reunification East Jerusalem should be seen as a regional extension of the West Bank.
- In negotiating the modalities of admission of displaced persons East Jerusalem should have equal status to the repatriation of its refugees from the war of 1967.
- Arab properties and material losses in West Jerusalem, part of the corpus seperatum in the partition plan, should be raised as Israeli Jews are making claims (and appropriating) properties in Silwan, Atarot (Qalandia) and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The Palestine Conciliation Commission has already established the aggregate inventory of these claims.
- The right of return to lost homes and properties in West Jerusalem should be raised on par with Jewish claims (and actual movement) to homes and properties in Arab Jerusalem.
- Jewish settlements in Arab Jerusalem (Ramat Eshkol, Ramot, Neve Ya'cov) should be treated in the same manner as the status of Israeli colonial settlement in the West Bank and Gaza.

Finally the fact that Israelis today appear more intransigent on the issue of Jerusalem, elevating it to a non-negotiable status, is itself a strategy of psychological intimidation. The claim of non-negotiability is itself a violation of the Oslo Accords. The rights of West Jerusalem Palestinian refugees should have a high priority in the Palestinian agenda for final status negotiations since it combines two of the main postponed items in one category.

4. The Status of Refugee Camps

A distinction should be made here between refugee camps in the Arab host countries (particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan), and those in Palestine. For many years a mistaken view was prevalent among Palestinians that improvements in the conditions of life among camp refugees would weaken the will of refugees to fight for their historic rights. The practical consequences of this view (particularly in Lebanon) was large-scale individual migration to the West (Canada, Scandinavia, and the US were the main recipients of migrants). Today the Palestinians have adopted the view that refugees in the camps of the host countries should be entitled to improve their standards of living, and to receive the amenities and privileges accorded to permanent residents of those countries. Jordan is a case which presents a sharp contrast with Lebanon in this regard, with refugees receiving all the legal benefits of citizens outside the camps. Syria has adopted an intermediate position, with refugees having full access to employment, health and educational opportunities, but no political rights.

Within the areas that came under the control of the PNA in 1994, particularly in Gaza, infrastructure planning has incorporated urban refugee camps within schemes that served the city as a whole (sewage systems, electricity, etc.). This is often necessitated by logistic and technical considerations but it also reflects the PNA's position not to consider the juridical status of refugee camps until final status disposition of the refugee issue is resolved. In the meantime programs for health, job-training, education and research among refugees are almost invariably extended to the non-refugee population in the area.

In general social-class mobility has been a critical factor in the restructuring of the lives of refugee camp residents in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Jordan (but not Lebanon) with those refugees who become successful moving out of the camps, and integrating with the lives of local communities where they live. But this has been an issue of free individual choice and not one imposed on the refugee population. By contrast Israel has made several efforts to re-locate camps from Gaza city to Rafah and Khan Yunis, as well as from the Gaza district to Jericho.⁹ More recently the Ministry of Displaced Persons in

Lebanon made an unsuccessful bid to relocate refugees from Beirut to the Shuf Mountains. The only scheme for housing development for Palestinian refugees approved unanimously by the Refugee Working Group (RWG) in the multilateral negotiations was a US grant to rebuild destroyed shelters in Sabra and Shatilla (Beirut), but this scheme was never approved by the Lebanese government.

Within the West Bank and Gaza the dismantling of the refugee camps should be a matter subject to a mutual agreement on their status, and acceptable to the refugees themselves, rather than an imposition dictated by Israel's conditions for a quota of returning refugees. In the Arab host countries, the liquidation of the refugee camps should be subject to the regularization of their legal and civil status within the host countries, and only after they receive the options of repatriation or resettlements. In all of these cases the refugee population should be a party to these agreements.

17. 'Compensation to Returning Refugees', Memo prepared by the Legal Advisor to the Economic Survey Mission, November 1949, UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine, *The Question of Compensation*; A/AC.25/w.81/Rev 2, 2 October, 1961.
18. Shlomo Gazit, op. cit.; Israel Government Press Office, *"The Refugee Issue"*, op. cit.
19. Rashid Khalidi, "Toward a Solution", in *Palestinian Refugees: Their Problem and Future*, The Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Washington, DC, October 1994, pp 24-25.
20. Khalidi, *ibid.*, p. 24.
21. Conciliation Commission Report (March 1950), Annex I, "Historical Precedents for the Restitution of Property or Payment of Compensation to Refugees"; A/AC.25/w.81/Rev.2.
22. Al-Quds, May 25th, 1995.
23. Benvenisiti: "Solving the Problem of Arab Property in West Jerusalem Through Compensating Citizens as Part of a Permanent Settlement", Haaretz, June 1, 1995.
24. Benvenisiti, *ibid.*
25. See Norma Masriyyeh, unpublished doctoral thesis, Leeds University, 1994 for a discussion of these schemes.

Dr. Salim Tamari is Director of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies.

(This essay was adapted from the author's monograph "Palestinian Refugees Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II", published by the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut and Washington, in 1996.)

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The Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt

"Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (Matt. 2:15)

The close heartfelt relationship of the Copts to Christianity had already begun with the flight of the holy family to Egypt and the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt. 2: 15, quoting Hosea 11:1).

It is most probable that the holy family avoided taking the usual route at that time after escaping from Palestine to Egypt. They probably joined it after passing through the Sinai Desert, at Farma or Pelusium, which stands between Al-Arish and Port-Said. Their route took them to Basta near the city of Zagazig then to Belbies and on to Ein Shams, now called Al-Matariah, where they rested under a tree, which is still named after the Holy Virgin. Then the holy family headed southward to Babylon, of Old Cairo, where they stayed for some time in the cave which is now part of St. Sergius' church. This church, which is considered one of the most ancient churches in Old Cairo, was built in the fifth century AD, in the style of the ancient Coptic art. The Iconostasis of the church is made of wood inlaid with ivory. (This art is also found in the two ancient Coptic chapels in Deir-El-Sultan in Jerusalem).

"Throughout all the places visited by the holy family, miracles have taken place and faith still shines ... A spot of light in a world of darkness."

In the Nave of the Church of St. Sergius, there is a marble pulpit and twelve columns for the twelve Apostles, as the Coptic Church is Apostolic, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner stone." (Ephesians 2:20)

Later, the holy family continued its flight to the site, which is known now as Al-Muharak Monastery (St. Mary's). It is the biggest monastery in Egypt and the whole Orient. The monks of this monastery have extended the missionary work beyond Egypt. Some of them went as far as southern and northern Europe. Others reached Ireland and stayed there.

Throughout all the places visited by the holy family, miracles have taken place and faith still shines. Tourists and local visitors throughout the year visit them. A spot of light in a world of darkness.

The flight of our Lord to Egypt was part of his suffering for our salvation. "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." (Hebrews 2:18)

Contributed by the Coptic Orthodox Church, Jerusalem.

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Shufat Refugee Camp

by Dalia Habash (Based on an interview with Mr. Sami Msha'sha')

Shufat refugee camp is the only Palestinian refugee camp situated within the boundaries of Jerusalem. In existence since 1967, the residents of the camp have been refugees since the events of 1948 and 1967. The camp was created at the end of 1966 in order to accommodate the refugees residing in Al-Mu'askar refugee camp that was situated in the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. Due to its closeness to the Wailing Wall, and due to the increasing numbers of its citizens and to lack of space in the camp, the Jordanian government decided to establish a larger refugee camp outside the walls. The Jordanian government gave a large plot of land in Shufat to UNRWA on which to build the refugee camp, and transfer the refugees from Mu'askar to Shufat. Just as UNRWA started to build the refugee camp, the Six-Day War erupted, creating a larger number of refugees, many from the Jerusalem area, who decided to seek refuge at the Shufat camp. The existence of the camp has always been a sensitive problem to the Israelis, both from a political and geographical point of view.

The camp is situated between the two settlements of Ma'aleh Adumim south of Jerusalem and Pisgat Zeev and Neve Yaacov in the north. Israel's plan for expanding Jerusalem entails relocating the Shufat refugee camp in order to join together the Jewish settlements and effectively cut off the last open corridor from the West Bank to Jerusalem.

Since the camp is also situated within the boundaries of Jerusalem, the inhabitants are the only refugees who pay taxes to any host country - though services are non-existent. The streets of the camp are not paved, there is no water network, and compared to other refugee camps administered by UNRWA, the infrastructure is the worst.

The official population of the Shufat refugee camp in June 1997 was 7,676. At the beginning of 1997, the Israeli government announced that any Palestinian not living within the Jerusalem borders would lose their Israeli identity cards. All of a sudden, the population of the camp rose to about 18,500. Today, almost a year and a half later, there are over 22,000. The refugees started to rent out or sub-lease their very humble homes to Jerusalemites who reside outside the Jerusalem boundaries, and who could not afford the high rents that landlords were asking in Beit Hanina and Shufat. In June of this year, the Israeli television, the national insurance and other tax collectors invaded the camp going from house to house to make a census as to how many people live there and are actually registered in the camp. UNRWA tried to intervene and expressed its concern, but to no avail - they were unable to do anything to stop the Israeli invasion.

UNRWA also administers two schools in the camp. According to UNRWA sources, the residents of the Shufat refugee camp are the poorest of the poor in Jerusalem, and most of them work in the service industry in Israel, such as cleaners and day laborers.

UNRWA has been able to receive funding to improve both the infrastructure and the services in the camp. Saudi Arabia donated funds to build a model school for girls, repair the whole sewage system, the water network and pave the streets. Three months ago, and with the help of the German government, UNRWA built a community center for the camp. In addition to the above, UNRWA received funds from Caritas, Canada Fund and the Palestinian Authority.

Dalia Habash is a young freelance journalist.

Sami Msha'sha' is the Arab Press Relations Officer at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

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Announcing the new *Sabeel* book

HOLY LAND - HOLLOW JUSTICE

GOD, JUSTICE AND THE PALESTINIANS

edited by - Naim Ateek and Michael Prior

This book contains the papers of the Third International Conference of Sabeel held at Bethlehem University, February 1998. Fifty years after the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, it remembers the past, assesses the present and plans for the future. It poses Israel the challenge of Jubilee, and asks 'What does God require?'

The Jubilee challenges Israel to honour the demands of the Bible's more attractive traditions. It insists on freedom and justice, bringing release to the captives and liberty to the oppressed. The injustice done to the Palestinians is the termite that gnaws at Israel's moral core.

It is expected that the book will be out in February 1999. For further information please feel free to contact *Sabeel*, Jerusalem and Friends of *Sabeel* in North America and the UK.

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News in Brief

True Christian Church

The following is a reader's letter printed in the Jerusalem Post of October 13, 1998. It is from Dr. Harry Hagopian, LLD - Executive Director of the Middle East Council of Churches.

Sir,- With reference to the item "PA intensifying bid to control churches" (October 4) about a government report on the evolving character of the churches in the Holy Land, let me make three points which might answer some of the implicit queries the report raises.

First, surely it is normal for the local churches in the Holy Land to have a Palestinian leadership? After all, the overwhelming majority of indigenous Christians here are Palestinian Arabs. As such, it becomes quite difficult to

sustain the thesis that they should have as Head of the Church a foreign clergyman or missionary who does not come from their local culture. Imagine just for one moment the Sephardi chief rabbi in Israel electing an American Jew to head their institution!

Secondly, Christians do not view their Bible merely as an abstract religious book. Most of them view it as a social manifesto against all sorts of injustice and discrimination anywhere in the world. Their faith reflects the life and teachings of Jesus, and highlights a faith-orientated exercise in reconciliation and peacemaking. This understanding of the New Testament encourages most church leaders here to speak out in favor of issues of peace and justice which in turn, impact the political reality of the day.

Thirdly, the local church leadership here does not live in a vacuum. It enjoys organic links with its own community and reflects the collective will of those communities. Otherwise, the church as an assembly of believers would stultify and become irrelevant to the ordinary man or woman. Any statements by the church leadership here should not be gauged in terms of any pro-Israeli or anti-Israeli biases. Rather, they should be viewed in terms of how best they reflect their own ecclesial and prophetic traditions as much as the will of their people, the true Christian church.

Land Defense Report

The Palestinian Land Defense Committee issued its monthly report of Israeli violations of Palestinian rights for September 1998. According to the report, 39 Palestinian homes were demolished; 1,900 olive trees were uprooted; owners of 110,500 dunums were handed confiscation orders while 5,300 dunums were confiscated; and 200 ID cards were confiscated from Jerusalem residents. The committee also reports that nine Palestinians were abducted by settlers and 14 Palestinian cars were stoned by Israelis (WAFA).

Source - [Palestine Report](#): October 9, 1998.

Another senseless death

The collective punishment of closures and the violation of medical human rights at the Israeli checkpoints continue within the Occupied Territories. The

horrors that occurred at the end of August, when two infants died after their mothers were detained by Israeli soldiers, have not shown the occupying authority the need for changing their policy. As such, closures remain and medical emergencies still do not receive the free passage that is necessary to save lives.

On Saturday, October 10th 1998, forty year-old Horiyya Mohammed Abu Hmaid, went into labor. Complications set in, however, and the delivery required a caesarian section. The operation could not be performed in her village of Yatta, so she and her family were forced to head into Hebron for treatment. Along the way, they were stopped at the Israeli checkpoint. Despite the fact that a woman in labor is a unmistakable example of a medical emergency, the soldier did not allow her to pass. She and her family had to take a circuitous route to Hebron, taking an extra forty minutes over unpaved roads. Along the way, further complications set in. Soon after reaching the hospital, Horriya Abu Hmaid passed away. She left behind four children, including the new-born, whom the doctors were able to save.

Source - taken from an action alert by the [Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees](#).

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Snapshots of Our Activites

Clergy Programs

The ongoing clergy meetings have taken up new momentum in anticipation of the forthcoming First Ecumenical Clergy Conference that will be held February 1-4, 1999 at the Sea of Galilee Center in Tiberias. The purpose of this conference will be to nurture unity and love among the clergy and to foster movement toward a fresh vision of ministry as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. As a biblical motto, we have chosen I Cor. 4:1 "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ, and stewards of God's mysteries." It is hoped that between 50 and 100 clergy from Israel, Palestine, and Jordan will participate in the conference.

Trip to Turkey

Sabeel's first long-awaited Bible Study Trip to Turkey finally took place! On October 11, twenty-three participants started their pilgrimage to the sites of the seven churches as part of a study on the book of Revelation. For a whole week, the group - comprising eighteen women, three clergymen and two laymen - lived in Christian fellowship, exploring part of the New Testament background, and discovering the rich beauty of Turkey. In addition to the usual historic and religious places, the group had the opportunity to visit with the Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Istanbul; they also worshiped with the Anglican and Roman Catholic communities of Izmir.

Groups

Though the summer is usually a slow season for pilgrims, *Sabeel's* program of "Meet the Palestinians" welcomed 11 groups, around 200 people in all. These included college students from the Coalition of Christian Colleges, USA; theology students from Birmingham, UK; Lutheran pastors from Switzerland; World Vision volunteers from the UK, and Women of Vision from the USA; teachers and journalists from Union Aid in Australia; a delegation of Native Americans from South Dakota, Winnipeg, and Labrador; as well as other groups. We appreciate the special effort of fact-finding groups and would like to encourage all leaders of pilgrimages to include in their program the personal encounter with members of the living church in the Holy Land.

I Cor. 4:1 "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ, and stewards of God's mysteries."

The Seattle Experience

Upon the invitation of the Palestine Concerns Task Force of the *Church Council of Greater Seattle*, Cedar Duaybis, Hilary Rantisi and Nora Carmi embarked on a speaking tour of two weeks, September 25 - October 8, 1998, visiting several church congregations. They met with children, high school and college students, parishioners, theology professors, a group of Rotarians and a rabbi. Encounters were facilitated at a Peace Breakfast, a retreat at Seabeck and

pot luck meals. The host churches were Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational.

The two official events of the program were: 1. "The Palestinian Story and the Gospel Story," a one-day conference held at First Presbyterian Church on September 26 with Canon Naim Ateek as the keynote speaker. The Palestinian *Sabeelers* explained the effects of occupation on all aspects of family life; they also discussed the danger of religious fundamentalism and extremism in all its forms, and presented their vision of a shared Jerusalem. Tom Getman of World Vision, Jerusalem was also one of the speakers at this conference. 2. A World Communion Day worship service at the First Baptist Church on October 4, 1998.

The Jerusalem *Sabeelers* express their heartfelt thanks to their host families whose warm welcome made the task of sharing the Palestinian story an easier one. It is hoped that through this visit a greater solidarity and partnership in prayer have been established.

Farewell and Welcome

As *Sabeel* bids farewell to Laurel Nelson and Patrick Bealey, we wish to express our appreciation to them for their good work and commitment to Peace and Justice. We hope that their experience at *Sabeel* will help them in their chosen 'Way' of life.

To Janet Lahr Lewis, who will be doing *Sabeel* work from the USA, we wish all the best.

A warm welcome to the newcomers, Catherine Gordon - our Presbyterian Young Volunteer, and Sawsan Bitar - the new *Sabeel* secretary.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations in this issue are from the New Revised Standard Version (NSRV).