

66 years of ongoing Nakba – Back to Basics

The Right of Return is a national and inalienable right.

On the 66th commemoration of the *Nakba*, the movement for Palestinian liberation is in disarray. Political parties are divided, the Palestine Liberation Organization is dysfunctional, the Palestinian Authority is dependent on foreign donors with ulterior agendas and a collective national strategy is absent. Institutions do not fulfill their purposes and the Palestinian people's capacity for grassroots mobilization is frayed.

These elements provide an opportunity for the Israeli regime to unilaterally impose 'facts on the ground' and its advocate, the USA, to strong-arm an unjust political solution. Both developments undermine the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees – the core of the Palestinian cause.

Israel denies the Right of Return to the homes of origin for 7.4 million Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. Meanwhile, Israel maintains efforts to resettle Palestinian refugees in exile and its leadership increasingly demands international recognition of the State of Israel as an exclusive Jewish state. As the Oslo negotiations falter forward, Israel attempts to legitimize 'land swaps', annexation of Area C, and control over natural resources especially fresh water. Additionally, Israel displaces Palestinians particularly targeting the Gaza Strip, the Jordan Valley, East Jerusalem and the Naqab.

As a consequence, Palestinians live under military control in the West Bank, under siege in the Gaza Strip, under institutional discrimination within Israel-proper and East Jerusalem, and in heartbreaking conditions throughout the exile.

Palestinians previously seeking refuge in Syria are living a multiplied catastrophe. They are undergoing war, further displacement, and the destruction of their lives in Yarmouk, Nierab, Sit Sainab, Khan Al Shiekh, Dar'a and other locations throughout Syria where Palestinian refugees resided. Palestinians doubly displaced to countries including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt face further humiliation and unbearable conditions leading many Palestinians to attempt escape by sea – a desperate act resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian refugees and those who disappeared without public acknowledgment.

66 years of continuous displacement instructs the Palestinian people to revert to our fundamental principles of justice and equality, and place faith in our people across the globe rather than incapacitated international and Palestinian institutions. This era calls for a return to the basics.

We, the undersigned organizations, affirm the following:

1. After 66 years of targeted displacement by the Israeli regime, 66 percent of the Palestinian people are refugees or Internally Displaced Persons. Both in principle and practice, the Right of Return is a necessary condition for achieving self-determination of the fragmented and exiled Palestinian body politic;
2. International law endows Palestinian refugees with the right to voluntary return to their homes, to restoration of their properties and to compensation. This inalienable Right of Return is not subject to negotiation, bartering, surrender or expiration;
3. Displaced Palestinians hold the Right of Return collectively and individually. The right is only fulfilled when an individual is able to exercise his or her free choice;
4. United Nations resolution 181 (1947) to partition Palestine into two states led to the displacement of between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians. Thus, the international community codified its responsibility to provide legal and physical international protection, humanitarian assistance and enable the Right of Return to the homes of

origin for all refugees and displaced Palestinians through General Assembly resolution 194 (1948) and Security Council resolution 237 (1967);

5. The Palestinian people's heroic resilience and resistance to Israel's denial of the Right of Return, to ongoing displacement of Palestinians and to absent international protection requires that an institution such as the Palestine Liberation Organization be based on authentic representation and inclusivity.

Longing for freedom and liberation, we say *YES* to Palestinian representation and holistic international protection, and *NO* to detracting from any of the rights of refugees.

Signed by the following organizations, institutions and coalitions:

- BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
- Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI)