

# FACT SHEET #1: Palestine and the Palestinians

## WHAT IS PALESTINE?

The area known to the Greeks as Philistia and the Romans as Palaestina became Arab after the spread of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From that time and until 1948, the majority of the population was predominantly Muslim. Christian and Jewish communities also maintained a continuous presence in the area since these religions were established. The modern borders of Palestine were drawn by the British, whose forces occupied this part of the Ottoman Empire in 1917-18. The stage for conflict was set when Britain declared that it viewed “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”<sup>1</sup>, ignoring the legitimate national rights of the Arab people and its own promise to the Arabs to support their independence from Ottoman rule.<sup>2</sup>

British mandate rule opened the door to large-scale Jewish migration from Europe. Unlike existing Jewish communities in Palestine, the new immigrants were Zionists, meaning they believed in establishing a Jewish

state as the solution to European anti-Semitism. In 1947, the United Nations proposed the partition of Palestine into an Arab state on 43% of the land and a

### Palestine 1914

Pop. 689,272  
Arabs 629,272 - 92%  
Jews 60,000 - 8%

### Palestine 1946

Pop. 1,912,112  
Arabs 1,303,887 - 68%  
Jews 608,225 - 32%

Source: The Anglo-Palestine Yearbook 1947-8 (London: Anglo-Palestine Publications, 1948), p.33



Source: United Nations Department of Public Information, Cartographic Section, June 1997.

Jewish state on 56%, with Jerusalem given international status and open borders.<sup>3</sup> Arabs, who comprised two thirds of the population and owned 93% of the land, rejected the UN Partition Plan as unjust.

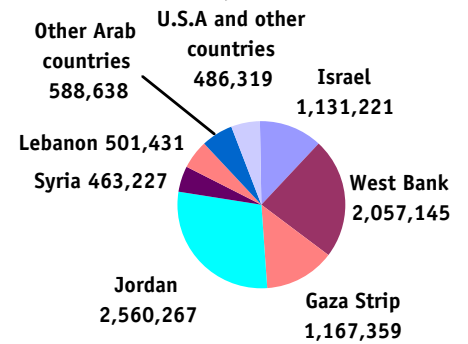
In the 1948 War, Jewish forces conquered additional territory and established the state of Israel on 78% of mandate Palestine. Some 750,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes.<sup>4</sup> Israel was established; Palestine was not. Egypt took over Gaza and Jordan annexed the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Israel conquered the rest of Palestine and has since ruled Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, through military occupation.<sup>5</sup>

## WHO ARE THE PALESTINIANS?

Today there are close to 9 million Palestinians in three major population groups:

- ◆ 3.2 million live under Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem;
- ◆ 4.6 million live in exile, with 2.2 million in refugee camps; and
- ◆ 1.1 million are citizens of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

## ■ Palestinian Population Worldwide



Estimated Palestinian Population in the World by Place of Residence - End Year 2000. Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics <http://www.pcbs.org/inside/selcts.htm>

## ■ Palestinians Under Occupation

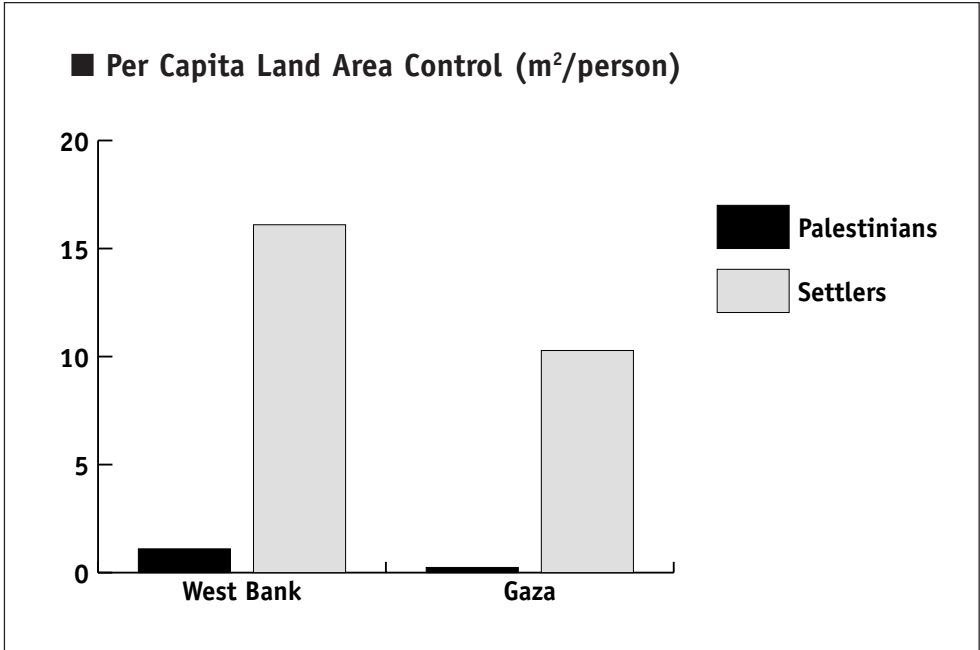
The West Bank and Gaza total only 1,000 sq km (smaller than Delaware).<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 – the legal basis for the Oslo Agreements<sup>8</sup> – calls for Israel’s withdrawal from occupied territories based on the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. It is also against international law for an occupying power to transfer its own population into occupied territory.<sup>9</sup> Yet in the →

1 Letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild – known as the Balfour Declaration – 2 November 1917. This referred to the indigenous majority population of Palestine as “non-Jewish” and did not recognize its political or national rights. It stated: “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”  
2 Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, confirmed “Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sheriff of Mecca” - second note from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein of the Hijaz, October 1915. British Government, “Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and

Sharif Hussein of Mecca,” October 24, 1915, Parliamentary Papers – Cmd. 5957 (1939)  
3 U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, which designated Jerusalem and Bethlehem as an international zone.  
4 See Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947 – 1949*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.  
5 For more on the history of Palestine, see the forthcoming CESR Fact Sheet on Palestine No. 3: *Palestine & Israel: Past, Present, Future*  
6 From Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics <http://www.pcbs.org/inside/selcts.htm> See also the Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>  
7 If UN Resolution 181 were to be implemented, the Palestinian state would

have been established on 43% of mandate Palestine. As it is, the West Bank and Gaza, seen by all U.N. member states, including the U.S., as the site of the future Palestinian state, occupy just 22% of the land of mandate Palestine.  
8 The first Oslo Accord was signed by the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In September 1993. By 1999, a dozen more accords had been signed.  
9 Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel is a signatory.

# FACT SHEET #1: Palestine and the Palestinians



past 35 years, successive Israeli governments have established over 200 Jewish-only settlements with a population of 383,000 on confiscated Palestinian land, separated from the local population through a series of bypass roads and physical barriers.<sup>10</sup> In the West Bank, Israel has seized 59% of the land and uses 90% of the water.<sup>11</sup> In Gaza, 7,000 settlers, who comprise less than 1% of the population, directly control more than 20% of the land.<sup>12</sup>

## ■ Palestinian Refugees

Palestinians are the largest and oldest refugee population in the world. The U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1948 as a temporary mechanism to address the needs of Palestinian refugees<sup>13</sup> until they could exercise their right to

return to their homes and receive compensation in accordance with human rights principles and U.N. Resolution 194.<sup>14</sup> UNRWA provides education, health care, relief assistance and social services to the 3.6 million registered refugees, one-third of whom live in 59 refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>15</sup> Due to lack of funds, average annual spending per refugee has dropped from about \$200 in 1975 to about \$70 in 1997. In Jordan, refugees are citizens and enjoy a range of economic and social rights. In Syria, refugees are not citizens but have some civil, economic, and social rights. Lebanon bars Palestinian refugees from working in over 70 job classifications, and politicians across the spectrum are against including Palestinians in Lebanese political life.

## ■ Palestinians in Israel

The Palestinians (and their descendants) who remained in Israel now comprise 20% of the population, about 1.2 million people.<sup>16</sup> Although granted citizenship when the Israeli state was established, they lived under direct martial law from 1949 until 1966. Israel currently retains 20 laws that discriminate against the Palestinian national minority in basic aspects of civic life, including laws of citizenship, emigration, education, and land ownership.<sup>17</sup> As a result of such systemic, institutionalized discrimination, Arab communities have the least access to state resources and suffer by far the lowest living standards in all socio-economic categories.<sup>18</sup> During street demonstrations in early October 2000, Israeli police used live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas against the unarmed protestors; hundreds were injured and 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed.



CESR Fact Sheets on Palestine are produced as a contribution to the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. The US Campaign promotes the application of international law to the conflict, contributing to a just peace and human rights for all – Palestinians and Israelis. If you would like more information on the US Campaign, go to [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org) or contact [us\\_campaign@endtheoccupation.org](mailto:us_campaign@endtheoccupation.org)

The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) was established in 1993 to promote social justice through human rights - [www.cesr.org](http://www.cesr.org)

10 The Washington-based Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories: A Guide*, March 2002. Go to <http://www.fmep.org/reports/2002/sr0203.html> article entitled *Creating Facts: Israel's Settlement Vision*

11 World Bank statistics quoted in <http://mondediplo.com/focus/mideast/territories-eco-en>

12 Ibid.

13 UNRWA defines a refugee as a person whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948, including the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. See <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/index.html>

14 U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194 provides for the return of the refugees to their homes in what became Israel or to compensation. Israel has formally accepted both Resolutions 181 and 194 (see the preamble of the resolution admitting Israel to U.N. membership).

15 <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/mideast/lebanon.htm> & <http://www.afsc.org/ispal/refugees.pdf>

16 From: <http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnatone52/shnatone52.htm#2>

17 <http://www.adalah.org/background.html>

18 See [http://www.merip.org/mer/mer223/223\\_yiftachel.html](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer223/223_yiftachel.html) for information about recent legislation that exacerbates racial discrimination.