

Palestine/Israel

A Fact Sheet from the
Episcopal Peace Fellowship Palestine Israel Network (EPF PIN)

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OVERVIEW

Traditional Palestine is today comprised of three geographic and political entities: the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the state of Israel. This area, known to some as the Holy Land, is geographically situated between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea, resembles a long narrow triangle, and is roughly the size of Massachusetts. The area very nearly matches the Judea, Samaria, and Galilee of New Testament times.



About 75% of the 8.5 million inhabitants of the state of Israel are Jews, about 20% are Palestinians who are predominantly Muslim, and the remainder Christian. The West Bank, sometimes referred to as the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPT), is home to about 4 million Palestinians and is additionally occupied by more than 500,000 Jewish “settlers” (see *Settlements* below). The Gaza Strip has about 1.8 million inhabitants, approximately two-thirds of them refugees from the war that established the state of Israel in 1947-'48. About 98% of Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and

Gaza are Muslim, the remainder are Christian.



CONTEXT

The state of Israel was declared in May 1948 following two significant events. First, a UN resolution and proposed partition plan was adopted in November 1947. It proposed a new Jewish state to occupy a little more than half of traditional Palestine and be comprised primarily of immigrant Jews; and the remainder of the area would be a Palestinian state for the indigenous Palestinians who had lived there for centuries. Second, before the UN proposal could be further developed, war broke out between Jewish militias who mostly originated in Europe (*Haganah, Stern Gang, Irgun, and others*) and the indigenous Palestinian people with their allies from surrounding countries (Transjordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq). During the war, about 700,000 Palestinians fled to Transjordan, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and abroad, some in fear of atrocities of the war, some forced out by the Jewish militias under pain of death, and some in hopes that the war would be brief and they might return. These people became refugees and remain so to this day, many receiving assistance from the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA), newly created in 1949 by these events. The Palestinians who remained

within the borders of the new state of Israel became citizens of Israel.

The events of 1947-'48 are celebrated by Jews as establishing a homeland and returning to their promised land, and by Palestinians as the Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic).

In 1967, Israel initiated the Six Day War and installed a military occupation of the Gaza Strip and the area west of the Jordan River that was part of Transjordan at the time and is now known as the West Bank. The occupation continues to this day.

In 1947, Jews comprised less than 30% of the population and owned no more than 10% of the land of traditional Palestine. After 1967 and to this day, the state of Israel controls 100% of the land, either under sovereignty of the state of Israel or under the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza .

THE OCCUPATION

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), for Palestinians living under the military occupation by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) there is "a protracted protection crisis with humanitarian consequences, driven by insufficient respect for international law by all sides." According to OCHA, Palestinians face a range of serious protection threats, including

- Threats to life, liberty, and security
- Forced displacement
- Erosion of livelihoods and lack of economic opportunities and access to food.
- Restricted access to basic services.

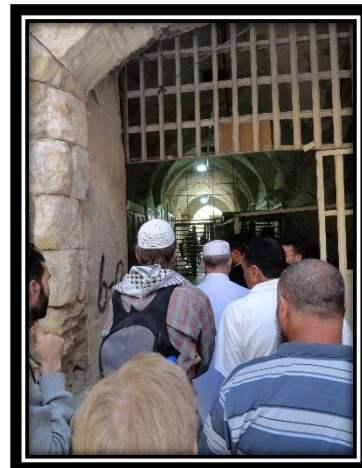
These conditions have persisted and indeed worsened since 1967 in large part because the international community has shown

unwillingness to provide accountability and effective remedy for harms to the Palestinian civilian population, and by the inability of the sides to reach a political agreement, which could end the longstanding occupation and conflict.

Israel's occupation of the West Bank is a military enterprise. This dictates and drives the methods that are used to maintain the occupation and control over the people. It means that Palestinians have no civil rights; they are completely under the authority of the IDF and have no means to appeal or redress grievances.

Restrictions of Movement

At any given time, there are hundreds of impediments to movement within the West Bank, ranging from elaborate constructions with x-rays and metal detectors to mounds of earth blocking roads. These barriers impair Palestinians' access to schools, jobs, medical facilities, places of worship, and families.



Arrests and Detentions

Because Palestinians are under military rule, they can be detained for any reason determined by military personnel and kept without charge for indeterminate periods of time, without access to legal counsel.

Thousands of Palestinians are detained and at any given time, 5-15% are children. Torture is commonly used on detainees including the children. It is estimated that 40% of all Palestinian males have been detained at some time.

Demolitions and Displacement

Demolition of Palestinian homes and structures has been a tactic of the occupation from its beginning. To date, more than 25,000 homes have been demolished, resulting in displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Reasons for demolitions include lack of proper building permits (99% of permit applications by Palestinians are denied), and punishment of families of offenders. In addition, tens of thousands of hectares of Palestinian land have been appropriated for settlement construction or through declaration of a closed military zone. No recompense is given to Palestinians for loss of their land.

It must be noted that the home demolitions referenced above do not include the destruction of tens of thousand of other homes during the various conflicts over the years.



HUMAN DIMENSIONS

- In the past five years, more than 3000 West Bank Palestinians have been killed by IDF or settlers.

Nearly 45,000 have been injured. In the same period of time, about 125 Israelis have been killed and about 3500 have been injured, the vast majority of them IDF soldiers.

- Displacements of tens of thousands of people by home demolitions and destruction. Families are forced to live in makeshift structures or burden relatives which leads to further harm to the fabric of society.
- At the end of 2015, more than 6000 Palestinians were held in Israeli prisons, about 400 of them children.

SETTLEMENTS

The West Bank is riddled with hundreds of Jewish settlements, enclaves with populations ranging from a handful to 45,000 or more. Some settlements consist of a few trailers; some are small cities with commerce, professionally groomed neighborhoods, and luxurious amenities.

The presence and continued construction of settlements has been one of the most contentious issues in resolving the current situation.

- The presence of the settlements violates the Geneva Convention and multiple UN resolutions, most recently Security Council Resolution 2334 passed in December 2016, yet Israel has never complied or been held to account for violations of resolutions by further measures such as sanctions.
- Land for settlements is appropriated by Israel's military forces and Palestinians are not compensated for the loss.
- Every settlement is accompanied by the presence of IDF troops, reinforcing the hostile militarized existence of Palestinians.

- Roads connecting settlements to Israel are off-limits to Palestinians who must add unnecessary miles to their journeys to avoid these roads, further burdening their lives and ability to move freely.
- Many settlers are fanatical and violent, killing Palestinians and destroying homes and mosques. These incidents are almost never prosecuted. Other settlers are not violent but live there to obtain benefits offered by the state.

GAZA

The Gaza Strip was occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. In 2005, by order of the Israeli government, the few thousand settlers there were removed. Following this action, Israel has claimed that it has relinquished control and has no permanent presence in Gaza – that Gaza is not “occupied” - yet Israel in fact controls the borders, the coastline, the airspace, and the telecommunications spaces. No people, no food, and no manufactured goods can enter or leave Gaza without Israel’s permission. Functionally, Gaza remains under occupation, despite Israel’s disingenuous claims.

In 2006, at the urging of the US and Israel governments, the Palestinian Authority conducted parliamentary elections in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. A plurality of seats was won by Hamas, theoretically handing the Palestinian prime ministry to a Hamas official residing in Gaza. At that point, Israel tightened the existing blockade of Gaza, sealing off the borders and taking absolute control.

Hamas

“Hamas” is the Arabic word for zeal. It is also an acronym for the organization’s anglicized name (“*haraket muqawame*

islamiyye”, Islamic Resistance Movement). Hamas began in the mid 1980’s as a sectarian resistance and social movement that provided needed services to Palestinians under the occupation and was also free of corruption, unlike the major political party, Fatah. Over time, Hamas came to be highly regarded by the people and developed political aspirations.

Following the Hamas victories in the 2006 election, Hamas and Fatah fought a bloody battle for control of Gaza, with Hamas victorious. Internal control of the Strip has been by Hamas ever since.

Gaza Today

Since the beginning of the blockade of Gaza, Israel has mounted three military operations against the Strip, in 2008-'09, 2012, and 2014. The devastation of each was tremendous and because of the maintenance of the siege, no relief or recovery has been possible. Today, Gaza is in crisis, a place of untold suffering.

- In 2015, the UN Conference on Trade and Development warned that Gaza would be uninhabitable by 2020 if current economic trends continue without remedy.
- During the time of the blockade, about 5000 Gazans have been killed, tens of thousands injured. The majority in both categories are women and children.
- Hundreds of thousands have been displaced and about 100,000 remain homeless.
- Thousands of housing units have been destroyed or severely damaged.
- 1.3 million people out of 1.8 million population are food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity.
- About 450 educational facilities are damaged; 13 health structures were

destroyed and 104 were damaged. This represents a little more than 50% of all such facilities.

- Some repair has occurred; however, additional repair or reconstruction is halted by lack of funds and blocked entry of construction materials by Israeli authorities.
- 95% of water from the coastal aquifer is unfit for consumption, leaving many people with meager resources forced to buy bottled water.
- Damage to water and waste water treatment facilities affects 20-30% of the population. Partial repair of water systems has occurred but is hampered by damage to the Gaza Power Plant.



BDS

Despite decades of illegal occupation and violation of international law and UN resolutions, the occupation of the Palestinian people continues. Every diplomatic effort has failed, in part because such efforts are almost always brokered by the US who is not impartial and favors Israeli aims in every such effort. Owing to this lack of diplomatic relief, in 2005 many prominent Palestinians issued a call for a movement of boycott, divestment, and

sanctions (BDS) against institutions of Israel and international businesses that are complicit in perpetuating the occupation.

Boycott is a time-honored example of free speech and method of non-violent resistance to oppression and injustice, successful most notably in boycott movements during the US civil rights struggles and in ending apartheid in South Africa.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship supports the international BDS movement, as do some US Protestant church denominations. To date the US Episcopal Church has not supported the BDS movement for justice.

SUMMARY

The story of the Palestinian people since 1947 is too little known among people in the west. The political dimensions of the facts surrounding the violent origins of the state of Israel, the displacement of Palestinians from their homes and creation of the world's largest refugee population, the occupation and its death and destruction, and the resistance of Palestinians create an "inconvenient truth" for many Americans.

People of the church have not been exempt from this bias, which is the saddest reality of all considering that Jesus himself lived under occupation with many scholars and theologians understanding his story to be the story of liberation from oppression and the restoration of justice. The Palestine Israel Network is among this latter group. We welcome all who want to stake their lives on the Jesus movement and work toward just peace in Palestine and Israel.

References:

1. www.ochaopt.org; Humanitarian Bulletin April 2015
2. www.ochaopt.org; Fact Sheet, Occupied Palestinian Territory: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015.

