



## Nakba

### Introduction

Al Nakba ('the catastrophe' or 'disaster' in Arabic) is the name given to the organised expulsion of approximately 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and land in 1948, the year the state of Israel was established. Israel's Proclamation of Independence (1948) ignored this act of ethnic cleansing and the Israeli state's official position has been one of denial and obscurantism ever since.

Palestinians who experienced this forced exodus retain painful memories of dispossession and many families still have the keys of the homes that they and their ancestors were forced to abandon. In all, 500 villages were depopulated/ demolished and many re-named with Hebrew names. 78% of Palestinian land was occupied in 1948. The tragedy of Nakba goes to the heart of the Middle East conflict and Israel has yet to face up to the injustice it perpetuated and recognise the right of return of all Palestinian refugees.



In 2011 members of the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) introduced legislation that sought to criminalise the commemoration of Nakba among the Palestinian community that comprises 20% of the Israeli population. (i) Nakba was more than a 'dispossession' for the Palestinian people- "*it destroyed their whole society and led to their fragmentation and dispersal*". That reality continues with Palestinians now dispersed across UN administered refugee camps (3-4 million), Israel (approx. 1 million), the West Bank and Gaza (3 1/2 million) as well as various countries around the world (2-3 million) (Karmi, 2007: 17-18). (ii)

Against that reality Mahmoud Darwish (1941 - 2008), the Palestinian national poet, stated that:

*"...the makers of the Nakba, of the catastrophe, failed to break the will of the Palestinian people and to eradicate their national identity, through diasporisation, through massacre, through pretending that the mirage was a reality, through the production of a counterfeit history. In the past five decades they have failed to push us into absencing ourselves or to cast us into a state of amnesic dementia"* (iii)

## The History of the Palestinian Catastrophe

1914-1939: An understanding of Nakba and its legacy for Palestinians requires a brief historical overview explaining its socio-political context. In 1914 a population of 657,000 Muslim Arabs, 81,000 Christian Arabs, and 59,000 Jewish people co-existed in the area commonly known as Historic Palestine, but as the numbers of Jewish immigrants increased, indigenous Palestinians gradually became aware of a Zionist colonising agenda dating from the foundation of the Zionist Congress in 1897. Political Zionism has always promoted the settlement of more and more Jewish immigrants in the region. Two years prior to the collapse of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, an inter European colonial carve-up (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) placed Palestine under 'international administration'. Britain was assigned this role by the League of Nations on foot of the Balfour Declaration (1917), which declared British government's support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. This was in stark contrast to their promise of independence to the Arab peoples of the region in return for their participation in the 'Arab revolt' against the Ottoman Empire. From the start the Zionist movement was involved in assisting Jewish immigrants to settle in Palestine and from the 1930s it commenced military actions against Palestinians and British colonial rule. In resisting the Zionist project the Arab Rebellion lasted from 1935 to 1939, ending with the re-conquest of Palestine by colonial Britain with a military force of 20,000 troops.

1940s - 2010s: As antagonisms intensified and the influx of Jewish immigrants after the horrors of German Nazism during WW2, the United Nations (UN) implemented the Partition Plan in 1947, allocating 55% of the land to the Jewish population and 45% to the Palestinians despite the fact that they were the majority population. Understandably, Palestinians rejected the UN Plan simply because they constituted 69% of the population and owned 94% of the land. As in most geo-political situations involving oppression, resistance follows, so after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, against the wishes of the majority population, the Arab Liberation Army invaded the territory and was subsequently defeated. According to David Hirst when the war ended in 1949 the Zionists, who had been *"allotted 57% of Palestine under the Partition Plan, had occupied 77% of the country. Of the 1,300,000 Arab inhabitants, they had displaced nearly 900,000"* (Hirst, 2003:268).

The 1948-49 expulsions were carried out by Zionist paramilitary organisations which included the Hagana, Irgun and the Stern Gang. By 1948 their military actions were directed by a secret military plan i.e. Plan Dalet. Homes were looted and their contents later auctioned to Jewish settlers. Furthermore, *"deposits totalling 1.5 billion Palestinian pounds"* owned by Palestinian account holders in Haifa banks were seized and subsequently used in the construction of the Israeli state (Cook, 2008:29).

The crimes committed by the Hagana, Irgun and Stern Gang have been well documented and Palestinians who experienced those dark days of 1948, can bear witness to the crime of 'ethnic cleansing'.

The premeditated logic of Zionism was clearly articulated in the words of David Ben-Gurion (First Prime Minister of Israel) who stated that *"We came here and stole their land"* and Moshe Dayan (former Israeli Chief of Staff and Minister) *"We are the generation of colonizers, and without the steel helmet and the gun barrel we cannot plant a tree or build a house"*.

## Nakba

Villages where Massacres were carried out by the Hagana, Irgun and Stern Gang	Number of Deaths
Deir Yassin Massacre	103-250
Yehiday Massacre	7
Al-Sheikh Village Massacre	40
Naser Al-Din Massacre	40
Beit Daras Massacre	176
The Dahmash Mosque Massacre	426
Dawayma Village Massacre	No official figure

*Source: The Palestinian Nakba, 1948-2008: 60 Years of Catastrophe. Pages 11-13 (iv)*

The Israeli historian Benny Morris has documented the events of 1948 and while he minimises the idea of an orchestrated plan behind the expulsions, he does provide evidence that the newly established Israeli state did prevent the return of Palestinian refugees following their expulsion. The loss experienced by Palestinians was not just material, it ruptured their sense of belonging, of community, of culture, of identity, of shared history and memory, both personal and collective.

The table below highlights the numbers of Palestinian refugees and their locations in 2008.

Country	No. of Palestinian Refugees
Jordan	1,827,877
Gaza	986,034
West Bank	699,817
Syria	432,048
Lebanon	404,170
Saudi Arabia	240,000
Egypt	70,245
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,660,191</b>

*Source: The Palestinian Nakba 1948-2008: 60 Years of Catastrophe. Page 17 (v)*

### Conclusion

Zionism in the 19th and the 20th centuries was a European colonial project imposed on a largely peasant Palestinian society emerging from Ottoman rule. At the heart of Nakba is the violent dispossession of 78% of Palestinian land for the creation of the state of Israel. And while the world stood in horror as news of the Holocaust spread, a blind eye was turned to the actions of Zionism, which went largely unnoticed and unsanctioned in the wider world.

## Nakba

The Zionist movement and the Israeli government has exploited international goodwill towards the Jewish people and in doing so has constructed many myths about the establishment of the state of Israel. For example, Leon Uris's novel *Exodus* (1958) and the film adaption reinforced the myth of Zionism - 'a people without a land for a land without a people'. The kibbutz movement, communal communities or settlements of Israelis citizens, continues to perpetuate these myths in such a way that the histories of those who were expelled from the land on which many of the kibbutzes are built have been erased. But the tide is turning and now millions of people around the world know of the tragedy of 1948 for the Palestinian people. The Nakba has entered the global political lexicon and Nakba Day on May 15th is now one of the most important dates in the Palestinian calendar - a day of popular mobilisation in the region and solidarity actions throughout the world.

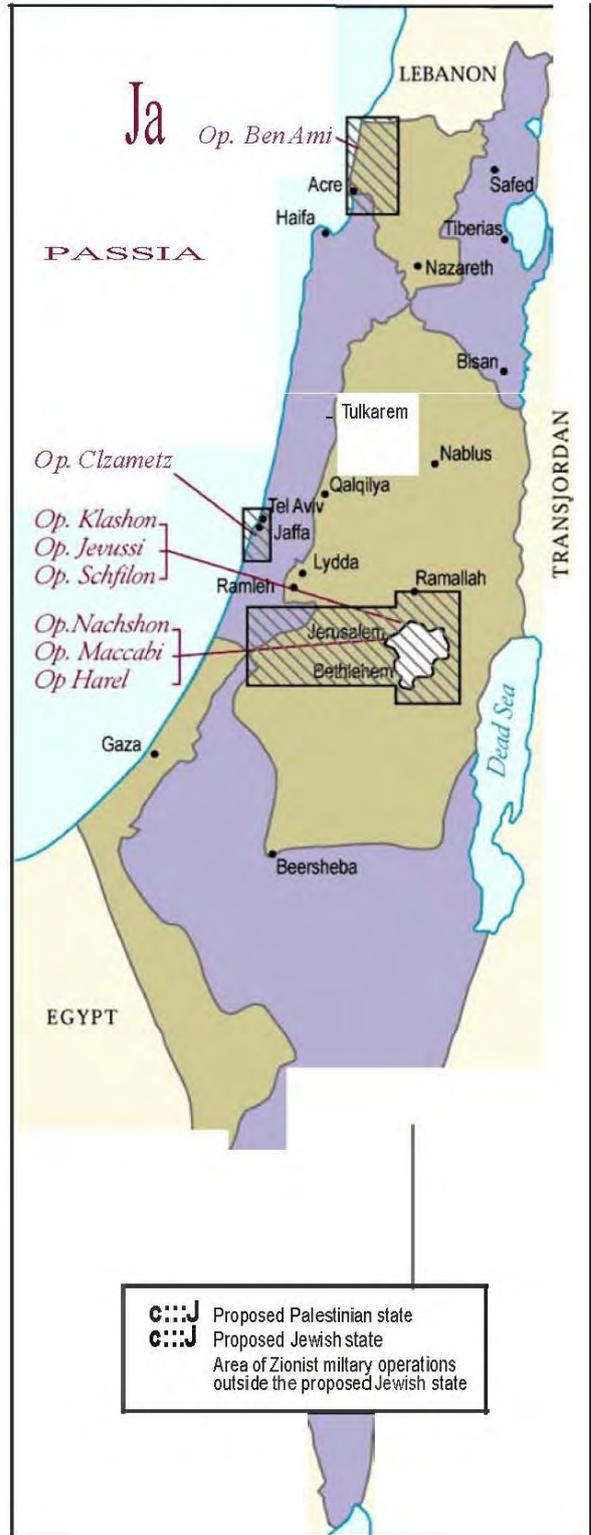
According to the leading Palestinian politician Dr Hanan Ashwari Palestine is a *"a nation in captivity held hostage to an ongoing Nakba, as the most intricate and pervasive expression of persistent colonialism, apartheid, racism, and victimization"* according to (vi). This process of *"persistent colonialism"* which commenced at the end of the 19th century continues today in the settlement policy of the Israeli state in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and so Nakba remains at the heart of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.



**United Nations Partition Plan 1947  
UN Resolution 181**



**Zionist Military Operations Outside the  
UN-proposed Jewish State.**  
1 April 1948 - 15 May 1948



## References

- (i) The official title of the Nakba Law is: 'Budget Principles Law (Amendment 39) – Reducing Budgetary Support for Activities Contrary to the Principles of the State'.
- (ii) The more recent population statistic for the combined population of the West Bank and Gaza is approximately 4 million people.
- (iii) 'Our catastrophe was the creation of Israel' by Mahmoud Darwish *The Guardian* 14 May 2001 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/may/14/comment.israelandthepalestinians>
- (iv) *The Palestinian Nakba 1948-2008: 60 Years of Catastrophe*. Pages 11-13  
Published by Friends of Al-Aqsa PO Box 5127 Leicester
- (v) *The Palestinian Nakba, 60 Years of Catastrophe*. Page 17. Published by Friends of Al-Aqsa PO Box 5127 Leicester
- (vi) Hanan Ashrawi, (2001) World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Re-lated Intolerances <http://www.i-p-o.org/palestine-ashrawi.htm>

## Bibliography

- Abu Dheer, Ala (2007) *Nakba Eyewitnesses: Narratives of the Palestinian 1948 Catastrophe*. Edited by Liam Morgan and Alston Morris[Ed] Palestinian Media Unit (Zajel) Public Relations Dept. An-Najah National University. Nablus, Palestine
- Cook, Jonathon (2008) *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair*. Zed Books, London and New York
- Hirst, David (2003) *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* ThunderMouth Press, Nation Books. New York
- Karmi, Ghada (2007) *Married to Another Man: Israel's Dilemma in Palestine*. Pluto Press. London and Ann Arbour
- Sa'di, Ahmed H. & Lila Abu-Lughod (2007) *Nakba, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Colombia University Press, New York
- The Palestinian Nakba, 1948-2008: 60 Years of Catastrophe*. Published by Friends of Al-Aqsa PO Box 5127 Leicester

## Electronic Resources on the Nakba

- Al Nakba: The Palestinian Catastrophe 1948 – a 58 minute video by [Benny Brunner](#) & Alexandra Jansse based on Israeli historian Benny Morris' book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49*. <http://vimeo.com/3714871>

# Nakba

Nakba Fact Sheet. Jewish Voice for Peace

<https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/301/images/Nakbafactsheet1.pdf>

Palestine/Israel History since 1878 (Video) <http://www.blip.tv/file/3467330>

The Nakba - Israel's 'War of Independence' and Palestine's catastrophe by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/files/0802nakba-factsheetFINAL.pdf>

The Nakba of Palestine (Video, 2008) By Ilan Pappé

<http://www.countercurrents.org/pappe240810.htm>

Map of United Nations Partition Plan, 1947

[http://www.aqsa.org.uk/Portals/0/Maps/14\\_Map%20of%20United%20Nations%20Partition%20Plan,%201947.pdf](http://www.aqsa.org.uk/Portals/0/Maps/14_Map%20of%20United%20Nations%20Partition%20Plan,%201947.pdf)

Map of Zionist Military operation 1948

[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Zionist\\_military\\_operations\\_outside\\_UNproposed\\_Jewishstate.htm](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Zionist_military_operations_outside_UNproposed_Jewishstate.htm)

Image of a key been passed on from adult to child

<http://uprootedpalestinians.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/nakba-62-we-will-not-forget-we-will-not.html>



Maan Image: Wissam Nasser

*Sadaka supports a peaceful settlement in Israel/Palestine based on the principles of democracy and justice, be that in two states or in one state. We maintain an independent position on internal politics within Palestine, favouring neither Fatah, Hamas nor any other Palestinian political organisation.*