

السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية  
Palestinian National Authority

Ministry of Information

وزارة الإعلام



"يوم الأرض"

"Land Day"

مديرية المطبوعات والنشر

Printing & Publishing Directorate

نيسان 1995

April 1995

Report # 7

## "LAND DAY"

March 30, 1995 will mark the 19th anniversary of "Land Day". The Palestinian people will commemorate this day not only to honor their martyrs, who fell in the battlefield, but also to legitimize their struggle for the defense of their land and resistance against the Israeli policy of land Judaization in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian people have continued their resistance to Israeli land confiscation and courageously confronted settlement activities launched by Jewish settlers, with the support and protection of the Israeli government. Such actions contravene with all agreements already signed by the Rabin government, and impede the peace process on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

The celebrations of this year to commemorate this occasion will be significant, taking into account the mutual respect of the interests of both the Israeli and Palestinian neighboring countries and establishing concrete pillars for coexistence between the two peoples. The celebrations of this day embody the Palestinians' right to live on their land and their long struggle against many years of Israeli occupation, the consequences of which are still being experienced by the inhabitants of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. However, the construction of new settlements on Palestinian territory will create more obstacles on the way to a comprehensive peace settlement between the PLO and Israel. It has also signaled the magnitude of racial discrimination policies being exercised by the successive Israeli governments against the Palestinians living inside Israel for the past forty-seven years, a fact which has not been denied even by the Israeli media and throughout all the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Moreover, newly published Israeli press and political reports, confirm the determination by the Israeli government to annex approximately 11% of the total area of the West Bank, in addition to its previous decision to annex East Jerusalem in July 1967.

### Land Day

On March 1, 1976, the Israeli commander in chief of the northern area, General Israel King, drafted a secret document expressing the fears by the Israeli political quarters, to the increase of the Palestinian population in the Galilee region. The document implied proposals tackling this so-called problem, the methods of eliminating the area of Palestinians, and the eventual expropriation and judaization of the Galilee. Prior to this date, the Israeli police authorities had issued on February 1, 1976, additional orders to ban the Palestinians living in the Galilee area from entering territories marked with the number "9", an area estimated at 17,000 dunums allocated for military exercises and training purposes by the Israeli army. This action provoked the Palestinians living in Israel, prompting them to call for a national conference at Sakhneen town on

February 14, 1976(i.e., 14 days after the issuance of the aforesaid instructions), to discuss the new developments and respond accordingly. Responding to the "King document", the Committee for the Defense and Protection of Palestinian Land convened the meeting at Nazareth City. In addition to the members of the committee, the meeting was attended by distinguished Palestinian figures from cities and villages of the "Triangle"(including Um El-Fahm and Wadi 'Ara) and the Galilee region. During the conference, the participants unanimously called for a general strike and demonstrations on March 30, 1976.

### Israeli Land Confiscation Policy Prior to 1976

During the past five decades, successive Israeli governments have adopted the policy of intensifying expropriation of Palestinian land. This policy was initiated immediately after the Declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948, through the confiscation of 3,175,000 dunums of the so-called "expatriates land" estimated at approximately 45% of the total number of the confiscated land.

The Israeli government adopted a series of codes and legislations during 1950 and 1951, thus transferring 17,675,000 dunums of "government-owned" land from the Palestinians to Israeli ownership. These laws were followed by others in 1967 considering land transferred to the Jewish National Fund as public property. In view of these biased Israeli laws and procedures, only 500,000 dunums were left for the Palestinians in 1976, in contrast to 1,250,000 dunums owned by them in 1957. In a move to further legitimize its policy, Israel enacted new legislation granting token compensation for all affected Palestinian land owners, estimated at that time to be 115 Israeli liras per dunum; or ten folds less than its actual market price. Other methods Israel used to confiscate Palestinian land included closing off the main water pumps used to irrigate lands that were marked for confiscation. The lands eventually became arid, hence driving many Palestinians to abandon agriculture and seek work opportunities in Israel. The arbitrary detention and harassment of Palestinian farmers and the confiscation of property, forced them to lose their land and become laborers seeking employment in Israeli industrial and agriculture projects on their own confiscated land.

The core of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, even in the stage of peace negotiations, is the subject of sovereignty. Yet another topic has overshadowed the core of the conflict, i.e., the demographic and humanitarian existence of the Palestinian people. The Israeli coercive procedures emphasized upon the control of this highly sensitive issue particularly after the 1948 war, a fact which was embodied in the "Galilee development plan". This plan was aimed at the judaization of the Galilee, a region densely populated by Palestinians. This plan was based on three fundamental principles, namely:

1. Converting the Jewish minority of the mountainous Galilee region into a Jewish majority.
2. Ensuring a right distribution of the Jewish population in the Galilee area.
3. Consolidating the economy of the Jewish population.

The plan called for the construction of eight industrial complexes in the region through the confiscation of approximately 20,000 dunums of fertile land owned by Palestinians in order to implement this ambitious plan. The primary objective of the plan was the realization of a Jewish majority in the Galilee area. According to statistics published by Israel in 1974, the Palestinians constituted 47% of the total Galilee population compared to 42% in 1961. In 1979, the number of Palestinians tripled in comparison with 1948, recording 300,000. In 1985, their number showed a remarkable increase to approximately 700,000 compared to 90,000 in 1948. The high proportion of the Palestinian population growth in upper Galilee still constitutes a source of concern to the Israeli authorities.

The Israeli government leaders have on various occasions expressed their deep concern over the figures published by Israeli statistic centers which indicated an increase in the number of Palestinians inside Israel and the occupied territories, particularly in Jerusalem. Motivated by this fact, the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin called for a public census two months ago to determine the precise and most accurate figures for the Israeli population, with emphasis on Palestinian figures.

During the past few years, Israel has been implementing a series of policies, including the confiscation of land, and the construction and/or expansion of settlements, to ensure a Jewish majority. Furthermore, the policy of both the Labor and the Likud parties in Israel, have centered over the realization of a Jewish majority in Israel and the occupied territories. New settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are a part of this policy. Successive Israeli governments (Likud and Labor) have refused to annex the occupied territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Israel, fearing that such decision would create another State where the Palestinians will constitute a majority.

Israeli policies were not restricted to the confiscation of land in the upper Galilee, but were extended to cover the Negev desert, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, aimed at displacing thousands of Palestinians and uprooting them from their land. In 1976, Israel also confiscated approximately 4 million dunums in the Negev Desert and displaced 90,000 inhabitants, leaving behind them only 15,000.

### The Palestinians and the Land

The Palestinians were fully aware of the motives lying behind the biased Israeli policies committed against them. The Palestinians of the upper Galilee comprehended the serious consequences of the "Galilee Development Plan". Their decisive reply was the declaration of "Land Day", an expression of their opposition to the plan. Land Day inflamed Palestinian resistance against the Israeli authorities, the events of which were not limited to the upper Galilee, but to all the occupied territories of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

New chapters of land confiscation and judaization policy have substituted the old ones following the first anniversary of Land Day in 1976. This policy has taken on various forms including the annexation of land owned by Palestinian farmers to Jewish regional councils, as it was the case with El-Shagor area in upper Galilee, and the imposition of the ownership tax estimated at 25% of the total cost of the land. This tax excludes "government-land" which occupies 92% of the total area of the land in Israel. Furthermore, Israel innovated a new policy of land closure in upper Galilee, the Triangle, and the Negev desert, prohibiting entry by all inhabitants under the pretext of security and military training. Confiscated land was also used for the construction of highways.

Israeli authorities are deliberately withholding the release of development plans for Palestinian villages, taking into account that about 90% of these villages in the West Bank and Gaza still do not possess applicable plans. In the occupied territories, Israel has confiscated approximately 73% of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem as well as seizing all the "government-lands", using them for settlement construction. This is in violation of international laws and forums, particularly with the provisions of article(49), item(6) of the Geneva Convention and the Hague Fourth Geneva Convention of 1907 concerning the protection of civilians in time of war. Both conventions stipulate that the Israeli authorities should refrain from creating new facts which might lead to altering the demography of the occupied territories.

#### Land Day Confrontations - 1976

Immediately after the circulation of the "King document" via Israeli media and political statements, the Palestinians intensified their preparations, characterizing Land Day as the turning point of their long struggle. Popular organizations shouldered the responsibility of inviting the Palestinian masses to mobilize and unite in order to abort the Israeli plans. On March 18, 1976, the Palestinian Students Union issued a statement calling upon the Palestinian people to regard March 30, 1976 as "Land Day". On the evening of that day, the Druze Initiative Committee in the upper Galilee decided to follow the same line, calling upon the Druze to stand by their brothers in confronting the judaization and confiscation of Palestinian land. Popular organizations at Shafa 'Amer also issued a statement on the evening of Land Day, calling on the residents of Shafa 'Amer, Tamra, Eblin, Kfur Manda, Kabol, Beir El-Maksor, and Sha'ab to abort the Israeli attempts and to abide by the general strike that was called for by the Defense and Protection of Land Conference, at Nazareth City.

The Israeli authorities responded by putting all their institutions on full alert. Senior Israeli officials were ordered to use all possible means at their disposal to quell any demonstration on that day. On March 25, 1976 the steering committee of the Israeli Labor Party, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and other ministers, the head of the Jewish Agency, Joseph El-Moggi, and the late Prime Minister, Golda Meir, recommended police reinforcements at Nazareth City and Palestinian villages and to retaliate vigorously against the

peaceful demonstrations and to stop anticipated strikes and demonstrations. The Histradut Central Committee appealed to all Palestinian laborers to cancel the strike. Prior to the appeal, the committee warned it will not support the laborers if their employers punished them for participating in the strike. During the meeting at the Chamber of Commerce in Haifa, Jewish employers threatened to suspend all Palestinian workers in event they joined the strike.

Despite the assurances given by the Palestinian popular institutions of the peaceful nature of Land Day, the Israeli authorities mobilized their army and police forces at Palestinian cities and towns on March 30, 1976 and imposed a curfew at these locations. On the morning of that day, Israeli armed forces attacked the Palestinian demonstrators who had violated the curfew, killing six people and wounding hundreds. The victims were Ra'afat A. Zuheiry from Nur Shams village, Kheir Yasin from Arraba village, Mohsen Taha from Kfur Kanna, Khadija Q.Shwahna, Raja Abu Rayya, and Khader Khalayli from Sakhneen village. The Israeli violence against the Palestinians did not stop the demonstrations from spreading to all the villages and cities in upper Galilee and Palestinian population centers in Israel. The strike extended to all cities and villages in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, which witnessed fierce confrontations with the occupation authorities in Jerusalem, Nablus and Gaza.

The Israeli looting of land and natural resources, the Palestinian people had no other choice but to resist and respond in the only positive and effective way they knew..."Land Day". This day is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of the Palestinian people. The peace march expressed their opposition over the Israeli atrocities and further expressed their commitment to defend and sacrifice for the sake of their land.

Although Israel is currently involved in peace negotiations with the PLO, it is continuing its policy of land confiscation and judaization of Jerusalem without regard to international laws and resolutions condemning such actions.

**MINISTRY OF INFORMATION**

**PRESS OFFICE**

**APRIL 1995**

**Report #7**