

Palestinian National Authority السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية

Ministry of Information

وزارة الإعلام



اللاجئون الفلسطينيون

وحق العودة

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
AND THE
RIGHT OF RETURN

المكتب الصحفي

Press Office

شباط 1995

FEBRUARY, 1995

NO. 6

Ministry of Information - Press Office. Tel. 02-954041 Fax. 02-954043 P.O.Box 17167

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Introduction

Throughout decades of bitter conflict between Israel and the PLO, the question of Palestinian refugees was given paramount significance by Palestinian officials. It was also the subject of numerous resolutions taken by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly. This sensitive issue implies three basic elements - the right to self determination, the right to self rule, and the right of return, ensuring the legitimate rights for over 2.5 million Palestinian refugees are not violated.

While the P.L.O and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are currently engaged in direct negotiations with the Israeli government to implement the interim stage of the Oslo Accords signed in Washington on Sept. 13, 1993, there are over 2.5 million Palestinian refugees waiting anxiously the start of the final stage of negotiations. The final stage is anticipated to tackle a variety of outstanding issues including the refugee problem, Jerusalem, settlements, and the final frontiers. This should be in parallel and in conformity with the Declaration of Principles, in particular to article (5) regarding the interim period and permanent status negotiations. According to article (5), item (3) states, "It is mutually understood that these negotiations will cover pending issues including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, frontiers, bilateral relations, cooperation, and other issues of mutual interest". Simultaneously, paragraph (2) of the aforementioned article states, "Negotiations of permanent status is scheduled to commence between the government of Israel and representatives of the Palestinian people as soon as possible but not exceeding the beginning of the third year of the interim period".

The security council and the United Nations General Assembly issued a series of resolutions concerning the issue of the Palestinian refugees reiterating their right of return and to equitable compensation. In view of a report submitted to the General Assembly in 1947 by two UN envoys, Count Barnadot and Ralph Panch, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 194, which permits all Palestinian refugees willing to return and live in peace and harmony with their neighbors to do so as soon as possible. It also called for compensating those who prefer to stay abroad. Although these resolutions were explicit, successive Israeli governments didn't abide by its provisions which were accepted by the

P.L.O. The successive Israeli governments resorted to argument and procrastination by linking the resolution of this issue with a comprehensive peace settlement considering it as an inseparable part of solving the question of the Jewish immigrants, who voluntarily left their native homeland.

Overwhelmed by the misleading information propagated by the Israeli authorities before initiating the final status negotiations with the Palestinians, the Press Office at the Palestinian Ministry of Information has prepared this report in order to disclose all facts related to the refugee issue since 1948. The report also investigates the conditions of over 2.5 million Palestinian refugees, and the impact it has had over the various Arab-Israeli peace tracks.

Palestinian Refugees in 1948

The turbulent political conditions that prevailed in Palestine during the period 1920 up to 1948, have significantly contributed to the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians from their homes to become refugees, living in camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Jordan. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the partition of Palestine resolution, adopted in 1947, aggravated the already inflammable situation in the region. The British mandate imposed over Palestine contributed to the political administrative, and economic instabilities and upheavals in the country. Furthermore, article (6) of the mandate charter stated, "The British mandate government should encourage, in cooperation with the Jewish Agency, the mobilization of Jews on state-owned lands throughout Palestine". Article (1) of the same charter called upon the mandate government to create a certain situation which would allow among other things, the assembly of people on agricultural areas in coordination with the Jewish Agency, provided the latter establish and run public service utilities, because the mandate government does not administer such jobs directly". The Jewish Agency invested these provisions in the charter to serve its own interests. It also worked in coordination and cooperation with the mandate government to capture more Palestinian land and exhaust the natural resources.

The British High Commissioner in Palestine was nominated under this charter as the guardian of the Palestinian land. Therefore, he was in a position to donate or lease any piece of state-owned land or natural resource, temporarily and under the conditions that he deemed appropriate provided that he observed the general provisions prescribed by relevant laws and legislation. It was stipulated that any donation or lease or similar act be made without prejudice to the applicable laws and legislation in Palestine. Accordingly, the British High Commissioner in Palestine, Mr.

Herbert Samo'yel, enacted in 1920 the transfer of property code along with a number of annexes. By virtue of these laws, more Palestinian land was expropriated for security reasons. The annexes were considered at a later stage as "independent laws", a fact which prompted the High Commissioner to issue a decree on July 1, 1920, confiscating 3390 square dunums at Karm Abu Hussein area in Jerusalem. In August 1924, the British mandate government also confiscated 3313 dunums in Sarafand and 49 dunums in Ramla city. The confiscation order permitted the military commander to confer with the land owners on details of compensation. However, the law empowered the military commander to confiscate Palestinian land even if the landlords refused to sell.

By virtue of this law, the British mandate government confiscated large areas of Palestinian land, indifferent to the outcries and complaints made by the real owners. The mandate government also had the right to sell or donate land to any person without regard to the actual ownership of the land. The Jewish Agency was the sole beneficiary of this law which covered all the properties prescribed in the Ottoman land law issued in 1858, the individual property, and the Wakf lands.

The British mandate government donated to the Jewish Potash Company 75,000 dunums and to the Jewish Electric company 18,000 dunums free of charge to build up their Jewish projects. The transfer of land enabled the Zionist movement to establish a Jewish state in Palestine at the expense of thousands of expropriated Palestinian land during the period 1920 - 1948. Due to these coercive measures, the Palestinians were deprived from their main source of livelihood, agriculture, which represented over 80 percent of the Palestinian national income at that time. In accomplishing the objectives of the mandate program in Palestine, the British High Commissioners worked relentlessly to expropriate more Palestinian land for the construction of new roads for Jewish settlements. Palestinian villages were completely ignored and the roads leading to these villages were themselves confiscated under various British codes and regulations.

Joint possession characterized the nature of Palestinian land when the British mandate government came to power. A certain village or piece of land was owned by many Palestinian individuals, thus impeding the smooth transfer of property among people. According to the prevailing circumstances at that time, a limited number of people were named to cultivate the land every year. This system constituted an obstacle before the transfer of property to the Jews and hence, curtailed the efforts being exerted by the mandate government to provide large areas of land for the Jewish expansionists. The British mandate government established an ad hoc committee in 1923 to find solutions for joint possession ownership. The committee concluded that about 56 percent of the Palestinian lands were

collectively owned. In view of the above conclusions, the British government enacted new legislation to eliminate collective ownership and established a special administration for this purpose, under the chairmanship of Frederick Skolmon. The new legislation met with Jewish requirements by usurping the fertile and the irrigated lands and those subject for irrigation in the future. It was evident later on that the British policy was dedicated to extracting as much as possible, Palestinian land for the benefit of the Jewish state, and under the pretext of "unexplored areas". The British mandate government called the so-called "unexplored land" as state-owned land in a bid to ease its transfer at a later stage to the Jews.

Only through these twisted techniques and unjust laws, Great Britain was able to meet all the requirements of the Balfour Declaration, committing itself to enforce its rules. The 1947 resolution on the partition of Palestine came only to complement the unjust laws and military orders enacted by the British mandate government. The Palestinian people didn't accept the Balfour Declaration at anytime. Britain promised under this declaration to give the Jews land not belonging to her in order to establish a Jewish state, an illegal and morally unacceptable act. The partition of Palestine was also groundless and illegal because it failed to consult the majority of the Palestinians estimated at that time at 90% of the total population of Palestine. Furthermore, the resolution lacked justice and equality because it gave the Jewish minority about 56% of the land, most of which was located at the fertile coastal areas and 43% to the Palestinian majority, land lying in rugged mountainous areas.

As a result of the Balfour Declaration and the Partition Plan, the racist policy of the British mandate government, and the brutalities perpetrated by the Jews against the Palestinians, a total of over 750,000 Palestinian refugees were forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in neighboring Arab countries. This large number of people didn't leave their country voluntarily, but were forced to flee following the Zionist massacres committed against unarmed Palestinians. An Israeli writer, Amnon Kabilok wrote in the Palestinian Studies Magazine, "The Argon", an organization led by former Israeli Prime Minister Begin, and the "Shtern" underground organization were waging wars to terrify Palestinians, in order to displace them from their land. He also stated that the Palestinians didn't participate in the war according to David Ben Gorion himself. Mose Sharit, head of the political section at the Jewish Agency, quoted Ben Gorion as telling his army, "you should strike violently to demolish Palestinian cities and towns and expel the Palestinian people, to pave the way so that our people can replace them". Working under these instructions, the Jewish gangsters perpetrated many massacres which terrified Palestinians, forcing them to abandon their homes and properties.

Among these massacres were Deir Yasin, Nasser El Dein near Tiberias, and Dawayma massacre west of Hebron, which were committed in October 1948. According to Mr. Sharit, the Jews were rejecting all forms and initiatives for peace, particularly those concluded between some Palestinian villages and Jewish settlements before the breakout of hostilities. The peace package reached between Deir Yasin village and Givat Sha'ol settlement didn't protect Deir Yasin villagers from the brutal massacre perpetrated against them.

Since 1920, the British mandate government has put Palestine in a difficult economic, administrative, and political situation, facilitating the establishment of a Jewish state and the displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians through four successive waves of immigrations.

The First Wave: Approximately 30,000 Palestinians were forced to leave the country during the period from January 1947 up to March 1948.

The Second Wave: Over 300,000 Palestinians left West Jerusalem, Tiberias, Haifa, Jafa, Beishan, and those who survived the Deir Yasin massacre. These huge numbers were forced to leave during the period from March 1948 up to May 1948. They were terrified by the horrible massacre committed by Hagana and Stern forces against innocent civilians in Deir Yasin village where the death toll reached 250 persons including children, women, and elderly people.

The Third Wave: The Israeli armed forces deported approximately 100,000 Palestinians from Lod and Ramlah cities to Jordan during the period from May 1948 to December 1948.

The Fourth Wave: In view of the Israeli hostilities which continued even after the 1948 war, over 200,000 Palestinians were forced to move to the Gaza Strip.

Outcome of the 1967 war

As a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, approximately 360,000 Palestinians were forced to leave the West Bank and Gaza Strip for Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. More camps were constructed to absorb this large number of refugees. The military victory scored by Israel against the Arab armies, encouraged her to launch air strikes against Palestinian cities and towns adjacent to the 1948 truce line. The air raids pushed scores of thousands of Palestinians to flee their villages and towns to seek shelter out of the range of Israeli artillery bombardment to more secure areas like Ramallah and Jericho cities. However, the continued Israeli hostilities against civilian targets prompted more people to leave these cities and

towns for Jordan, where UNRWA had established camps at Nemrein and Karama village east of the Jordan river. As a result of the war, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 242, which called upon Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories occupied during the 1967 war. Israel rejected this resolution and sought instead to contact UNRWA to continue its relief operations in the occupied territories. The successive Israeli governments refused to accept the return of displaced Palestinians to the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. However, Israel announced at a later stage to accept the return of some displaced families to the West Bank provided that a comprehensive peace package should be concluded with all the Arab countries.

Israel argued that the return of the Palestinian refugees will create more security problems for Israel. The Israeli attitude also applied to all Palestinians who left the country to seek jobs in the Gulf states, USA or Europe. They were denied the right of return by all successive Israeli governments under the pretext of being outside the country prior to June 4, 1967. Israel drafted complicated and difficult procedures for those wishing to apply for family reunification from the civil administration departments. Israel approved one reunification request out of the 200 family reunification requests per year during the past 27 years of Israeli occupation. Approximately 200,000 Palestinians left for Jordan and the Gulf States during the period from 1967-1990, due to the harsh economic conditions caused by the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Moreover, the continued harassment against individuals, the destruction of the infrastructure of the Palestinian society and the imposition of restrictions and military orders have also contributed to the displacement of the Palestinians.

The Declaration of Principles signed by the Palestinians and the Israelis in Washington on Sept. 13, 1993, tackled in the first appendix the issue of displaced Palestinians. In clause (3) of the first appendix it states, "The future status of the displaced Palestinians who were registered on June 4, 1967 who couldn't take part in elections, should not be jeopardized". Regarding cooperation with Jordan and Egypt, article (12) states, "The two parties will extend invitations to the governments of Jordan and Egypt to take part in establishing more cooperation between the government of Israel and representatives of the Palestinian people from one side, and the governments of Jordan and Egypt from the other side, to promote cooperation between them. These arrangements include the establishment of a committee to decide modalities of permitting displaced Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 to return home. This should be made in conformity with appropriate procedures to prevent public disorder. The committee will be assigned with relevant matters of mutual interest. According to article (16), item (2) of the Cairo agreement

concluded on May 4, 1994 concerning cooperation with Jordan and Egypt it states, "a committee on refugees represented by the PLO, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, mutually agrees on modalities of permitting displaced persons from the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 to return home. This should go in harmony with relevant procedures to avoid disturbances and disorder.

In accordance with the enclosures of the above mentioned article, President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Perez, called for a meeting to be attended by the PLO, Israel, Jordan and Egypt to discuss the issue of displaced Palestinians. Before holding this meeting, the Palestinian Authority was engaged in bilateral talks with Jordan, on December 7, 1994 and January 9, 1995, with Egypt on December 26, 1994, in addition to holding a meeting with Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO on January 22, 1995. Four main topics were discussed during these meetings, namely:

1. The right of return for all displaced people.
2. Modalities and types of return.
3. Scheduling return according to the interim period clarified by the Declaration of Principles .
4. The priority of return.

The Palestinian delegation presented a background paper during these meetings, which included a definition of the displaced, their numbers, coincidence between the return of the displaced Palestinians and schedule of return, promoting Arab coordination, and the role of UNRWA and the international community in this issue. A lengthy debate was made with Egyptian and Jordanian delegations during which the following definition was reached regarding the word "displaced". According to this definition, "the displaced are those Palestinians who were registered citizens in the West Bank , Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem on the evening of the June war (June 4, 1967) and lost their residency and were displaced as a result of the war or due to the procedures and practices of the occupation authorities". Preliminary statistics derived from Jordanian sources put the number of displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Jordan at 1.1 million Palestinians. However, UNRWA statistics, duly confirmed by Egyptian sources revealed the number of displaced at 210,000 in Jordan, 125,000 in Syria, and 220,000 in Egypt. These figures cover Palestinian families which left the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including Jerusalem, before June 5, 1967 for study, work, medical treatment, visits, or other purposes. The figures also include the displaced Palestinians to Jordan and Egypt during and after June 5, 1967 as a result of the war, compulsory expulsion cases, former holders of Israeli permits and laissez - passer, who left abroad for work, study, medical treatment or visits and didn't have these documents renewed due to the complexity of renewal procedures stipulated by the Israeli occupation authorities.

Draft Plans for the Problem of Refugees

Prior to the breakout of the 1948 Arab - Israeli war, several attempts were made to work out more practical solutions for the problem of refugees. These attempts were made in the wake of mass expulsion and emigration of great numbers of Palestinians during the period from January 1947 up to March 1948. Following the adoption of the partition resolution of Palestine by the United Nations in 1947, and in view of the hostile actions perpetrated by the Zionist terrorist movements against unarmed Palestinian citizens, approximately 30,000 Palestinians were forced to leave during the period from January 1947 up to March 1948. An estimated 200,000 to 300,000 refugees left the country from March 1948 to May 1948 as a result of attacks launched by the Zionist Hagana and Stern movements, particularly following Deir Yasin massacre where 250 people were massacred. An initiative was taken by some Palestinian villages and nearby Jewish settlements to declare a state of reconciliation and non aggression. representatives of the Palestinian villages and the Jewish settlements agreed to refrain from waging wars or any hostile actions against each other. But the Zionist military movement violated this accord and committed its brutal massacre against Deir Yasin villagers in addition to the expulsion of all the inhabitants of Boram village. The people of this village were not allowed to return home despite a decision issued to this effect by the Israeli supreme court. All these attempts, either those made at the local or the political levels, were initiated by Palestinians in an endeavor to satisfy the Jews and to live together in Palestine. The main objective of these attempts was to put an end to the Zionist expansionist greed in the region.

The goal of the Zionist movement towards these initiatives, was to establish their own state at the expense of the original inhabitants of Palestine. The Jews refused all the Arab appeals for peaceful coexistence and for a self-autonomy rule in Palestine and Jordan. All the Arab and international attempts sought to convince the Jews to accept self autonomy rule in Palestine, were doomed to failure. The Jews insisted on taking all of Palestine to establish their Jewish state. Nevertheless, the Jews accepted the UN resolutions on the partition of Palestine with some reservations prompted by their own ideology which called for the occupation of all Palestine. This fact has been confirmed by Joseph Whitz, president of the Zionist movement in Palestine in 1940. Among these plans was the 1934 "Walchob" proposal which called for the establishment of a joint Palestinian-Jewish legislative council. A second plan named the "Pell" project drafted in 1937, also called for the partition of Palestine into three parts. The third and fourth plans called "Woodheed" and "Necomb" proposals were suggested in 1938 and 1940 respectively. They called for

the establishment of a Palestinian state in which the other minorities will be entitled limited authorities at the municipality level. Two more plans were also drafted by the Anglo-American fact finding committee and Lord Morrison in 1946. Several attempts were made at the international level, but were dismantled due to the arrogant Israeli position. Among these was UN resolution 194, calling for the partition of Palestine between Jews and Palestinians. This resolution was adopted by the security council at the end of several visits made to the region by UN envoy Count Barnadot. The UN resolution guaranteed the right of return for all Palestinians wishing to return and live in peace with their neighbors. It also secured the right to fair and equitable compensation for those who preferred to stay abroad. The resolution charged the reconciliation committee with the task of facilitating the return of refugees and to provide them with fair compensation.

In view of reports and recommendations released by the International Reconciliation Committee in Lusan and Paris, the UN Security Council decided to set up the "International Documentation Committee". The newly established committee recommended the return of some of the Palestinian refugees and compensation for the rest. Following its meeting in Paris in 1951, the committee called upon Israel to accept the return of a limited number of Palestinian refugees and to compensate the others. But Israel rejected both demands despite a previous pledge in 1948 to allow the return of 100,000 refugees. After accepting her as a member of the United Nations organization, Israel dissolved itself from implementing this resolution. Working under direct instructions from the United Nations, secretary-general, Mr. Dag Hamarshield tried to find an appropriate solution for the problem of Palestinian refugees. After paying several visits to the area in 1959, the Secretary General pointed out that Israel is reluctant to implement UN resolutions 181 and 194, particularly the terms applicable to refugees. He proposed the expansion of rehabilitation programs for refugees through UNRWA.

The Israeli point of view towards local and international Solutions

As previously stated, Israel initially accepted the return of 100,000 Palestinian refugees in 1948. But Israel later reversed its position immediately following its acceptance of membership to the United Nations Organization. Israel instead submitted a series of plans including the "Levi Ashkol" plan in 1965. According to this plan, Israel expressed its readiness to contribute financially to the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in return for granting her free trade access with the Arab countries. The same proposal was reiterated by Israeli Foreign Minister Mr. Abba Eban in 1968. Mr. Eban called upon holding a peace conference for Middle East countries with the aim of rendering assistance to Palestinian refugees.

through their integration in Arab societies, within a comprehensive peace plan. The "Afneiri" plan proposed in 1968, called for the return of a limited number of Palestinian refugees, to be mutually agreed upon between the two parties. Other proposals were disclosed calling for the extension of Israeli frontiers with Jordan to accommodate the Palestinians there. In 1972, Yigal Allon submitted another plan which called for drafting a comprehensive economic plan to solve the refugee problem on the basis of local and international cooperation. The plan envisaged the construction of model settlements for Palestinian refugees. In conclusion, the Israeli successive governments were reluctant since 1948 to discuss the return of refugees to their homeland, even though it had expressed its readiness on several occasions to financially contribute to solving this problem, in return for free trade access to the Arab markets.

The (status quo) of the Palestinian refugees and their attitude towards proposed solutions

A survey conducted by Powart Marx in Al-Jalazon refugee camp near Ramallah city, which was published in 1994 by novelist Najeh Jarrar in his book entitled "Palestinian Refugees", revealed that the Palestinian refugee is working arduously to emancipate himself from the miserable living conditions inside the camps and to eliminate the title "refugees". In spite of his unfortunate condition, the Palestinian refugee refused all forms of rehabilitation programs sponsored by UNRWA. This rejection emanates from his adamant belief in keeping the relief card since it stands as the only proof to his real identity and consequently his right of return to his own country. Field studies prepared by the Palestinian Academic Society for International Affairs at two refugee camps in Balata and El Far'ai near Nablus city resulted in the same conclusions. In comparing their pre-1948 status, the majority of Palestinian refugees were land owners. At that time, 84.8 percent of the refugees were land owners, 64.4 percent raised cattle, 18.2 percent had real estate properties, and only 7.6 percent were non-owners. Presently about 76.8 percent of the refugees do not possess any property, 0.7 percent have agricultural lands, and 13.8 percent run small shops inside the camps. This comparison highlights the plight of the refugee to insist on his right of return.

Jerry Afinson published a comprehensive study in 1992 about Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. The writer stated, "the economic conditions of Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank is worse than the other segments of society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. About 60% of the refugees at these camps are below the poverty line". The monthly income for a family bread winner in the camp averaged from the zero point to 200 dinars. This means that over 53% of the Palestinians in these camps are living below the poverty line. Figures indicate that the economic situation

for the refugees living in these camps is much worse when compared to other Palestinians living not far away from the area. This may be attributed to their big loss in the 1948 and the 1967 wars. Field surveys also revealed that 32.6 percent of the population of Balata and El Far'ia camps prefer to abandon these camps while 38.4 percent voted to stay there in spite of their miserable conditions. A separate study indicated that 31.9 percent refused to leave camps even if their economic situation considerably improved. About 21.7 percent gave no reply. It is clearly evident that 58% want to stay in refugee camps for purely nationalist reasons. They conceive that the extension of their camps implies the end of their national cause. Hence, any workable solution for the problem of refugees should take into account the national factor. This conclusion reflects the commitment of the refugees to deepen their roots in Palestine and confirms that their presence inside camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, and Syria is temporary. Regarding their attitudes towards a peaceful solution to their problem, about 31.6 percent advocate the return of all Palestinian lands, and 4.6 percent favors the return of refugees. However, 8.6 percent support a fair compensation for the refugees and 3.4 percent call for improving the standard of living inside the camps. However, 48.3 percent favor the establishment of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Those who favor the settlement of Palestinians in Arab countries as a solution to the problem of refugees constituted only 0.6 percent.

In view of the above facts and figures it is now apparent that the Palestinian refugee is deeply rooted to his land, a land he was forced to abandon, to a life of living in camps. The lack of land ownership has made feel inferior to the inhabitants of nearby cities and towns. The Palestinian refugee expresses the love and longing for his nation through his positive contribution in the socio-political arena. The Palestinian refugee has demonstrated through more than four decades of Israeli occupation his unshakable conviction in achieving his legitimate rights. The solid resistance of the Palestinian refugee has prompted the Israeli military authorities to diversify their techniques of encountering resistance, including the perpetration of mass massacres against Palestinians at Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Lebanon in Sept. 1982.

The Refugee Problem After the Madrid Conference:

The Moscow conference which convened in the aftermath of the Madrid conference in 1991, culminated in the establishment of five committees within the framework of multilateral negotiations including the refugees committee. The refugees committee concluded five consecutive meetings, two in Ottawa, Canada in 1992, a third in Oslo in 1993, a fourth in Tunisia in 1993 and the fifth meeting in Turkey in 1994. The representative of the

European Community defined the specific program of work of the refugees committee through a briefing at the Ottawa conference in 1992. He summed up this program in the following few paragraphs; "It is the creation of the most appropriate conditions for holding bilateral talks to the extent of facilitating the job of negotiators and positively responding to the requirements of the concerned peoples in the bilateral and multilateral peace tracks". The representative of the European Community also stressed the necessity for highlighting the political objectives to be accomplished since the problem of refugees is of a political nature. Therefore, it should not be discussed in the absence of the political aspects and must abide by international laws which recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The PLO representative called for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 194, which entitles the Palestinian people equitable compensation and the right of return. Though the majority of the participating delegations have considered the 194 resolution as a good basis for negotiations, the American delegation expressed its opposition to this resolution and threatened to ask for voting on this issue. In anticipating the influence of the US government, the PLO delegation was prompted to change his stand. It is worth noting that Israel didn't send a delegation to attend this meeting. In May 1993, the third conference was held in Oslo during which time, the Palestinian representative reiterated the implementation of UN resolutions 194 and 181. He stated according to resolution 273, Israel was made under the condition of its acceptance with these two resolutions. The fourth meeting convened in the Tunisian capital, concentrated on the reunification of families issue, particularly after the classification of Palestinian refugees into different categories including 1967-refugees. The representative of the Palestinian delegation disclosed the two types of refugees as follows:

First: Displaced Palestinians after the 1967 war.

The first category classified from the legal point of view as citizens of the territories being occupied in 1967. Their right of return was recognized by the Washington conference which witnessed the endorsement of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel. The issue of their return was referred to a committee consisting of the PLO, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. The main function of this committee was to draft modalities of their return. The second category comprised the displaced Palestinian outside Palestinian territories as a result of 1948 war. Their status will be discussed within the framework of bilateral negotiations due to tackle permanent status issues by PNA and Israel. The declared Israeli position within the framework of multilateral negotiations was revealed by the statement made by the Israeli delegation to the third meeting held in Oslo on the May 11, 1993. According to this statement, "Israel is mainly interested with all efforts being exerted to improve the standard of living

for the Palestinian refugees and those contributing towards the removal of obstacles to ensure permanent peace in the region". However, the anticipated Israeli improvement shouldn't substitute a final solution due to be discussed by the bilateral committee, since these improvements stand as a partial remedy to the problem. The just and lasting peace must respond to the political, ideological and national aspirations.

While discussing the future of the Palestinian refugees, the following prerequisites must be taken into consideration:

First: The Palestinian nationalist march succeed in politicizing the demands of the refugees. The refugee problem didn't remain a purely economic or social issue, but became a political one as well. It responded to the humanitarian and national ambitions of the refugee in connection with the establishment a political entity or a state at an advance stage through which he can preserve his national identity. The Palestinian people sacrificed hundreds of thousands of martyrs and injured during the long struggle to preserve his national identity.

Second: The political and the demographic composition of the Arab countries accommodating the refugees, can not absorb more refugees. They constitute 10% of the Lebanese population and the overwhelming majority are still living in camps. In Jordan, about 39.4 percent of the total population are refugees. About 10.4 percent of the population of Jordan are still living in camps. Contrary to Lebanon, the Jordanian government entitled the Palestinian refugees the right of election. However, the Palestinian refugees residing in Jordan are classified into three main categories according to their political affiliations:

1. **Camp dwellers:** They represent 23% of the Palestinian refugees and are reluctant to relinquish their Palestinian identity cards.
2. **Refugees:** They accepted their present status as refugees but are calling for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.
3. **This category** was able to integrate into the Jordanian society, but they continue to call for a Palestinian state.

A bulletin published by Don Pertes in 1973 showed that approximately 500,000 Palestinians are distributed throughout the Arab countries who are not living inside camps. They were deprived of identity cards and were required to have their problem solved. Half of the population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are from the 1948 refugees. However, 20 percent of the population is still living inside camps. Taking into account the poor situation of the economic infrastructures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, we can estimate the strenuous efforts and the high economic cost required to revive the economy of these areas.

Third: About 80 percent of Jewish ownership in Palestine is legal property, duly registered and authenticated, belonging to the Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, about 25 percent of buildings used by Jews in 1954 belonged to Palestinian refugees. The Jews also seized 120,000 dunums of citrus fruits, 40,000 dunums of pine trees and 10,000 dunums of fruitful trees, 95 percent of olive trees were previously owned by Palestinian refugees. At the end of the British mandate rule over Palestine, refugee ownership was 2.5 folds more than the Jews. The Jews also seized 4 million Palestinian pounds deposited at local banks before the occupation of Palestine. Initial estimates put the 1990 value of this seized amount at around 25 billion US dollars. Such amount which Israel is required to refund the refugees is ample to develop Palestinian territories and absorb the return of refugees. All preliminary social studies so far conducted on the Palestinian refugees indicate that they are entitled to fair compensation. The refugees are refusing to continue as a burden to international society.

Table (A): Camps in the Occupied Territories:
Distribution of Refugees by District and Camps, 1994

REGION	CAMP	IN	OUT	TOTAL
West Bank: Nablus	Askar	10,164		
	Balata	15,897		
	Camp No.1	4,933		
Jenin	Far'a	5,305		
	Jenin	11,138		
Tulkarem	Nur Shames	6,178		
	Tulkarem	12,367		
Ramallah	Ama'ri	6,672		
	Deir Ammar	1,677		
	Jalazoun	7,186		
	Kalandia	7,025		
Jerusalem	Shu'fat	7,683		
Jericho	Aqbat Jabr	3,607		
	Ein Sultan	1,172		
Bethlehem	Dheisheh	8,676		
	Aida	3,262		
	Beit Jibrin	1,466		
Hebron	Fawwar	4,841		
	Arroub	6,697		
Total		128,284	369,674	497,958
Gaza Strip: North	Jabalia	76,021	31,900	107,921

Gaza city	Gaza city Shati	59,276	122,698	122,698 59,276
Gaza MID	Deir Balah Nuseirat Bureij Al-Maghazi	13,849 40,279 24,779 16,976		
South	Khan Yunis Rafah	47,151 68,112	62,876 37,398	110,027 105,510
Total		346,443	288,656	635,099

a). Including others, e.g. those who moved from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. Source: PASSIA Archives.

By 1992, there were some 2.6 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. Only 38% of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East live in the OPT.

Table (B): Distribution of Refugees inside and outside camps according to host countries (1993).

	Lebanon	Syria	Jordan	Gaza	West Bank	Total
Registered Refugees	324,219	306,042	1,042,123	582,863	472,573	2,727,820
Refugees in Camps	169,321	88,924	237,677	320,467	124,307	904,696
Number of Camps	12	10	10	8	19	59
Percentage of Refugees at Camps to the total number of refugees (in the same country)	52%	29%	23%	55%	26%	33%

Table (C): Palestinian Refugees 1950 -1992

Host Countries	Total No. / In Camps (1950)		Total No. / In Camps (1992)		No. of camps
Lebanon	127,600	100,000	320,000	155,562	12
Syria	82,194	75,000	300,000	76,252	10
Jordan	206,200	70,000	1,000,000	215,187	10
West Bank	300,000	280,000	460,000	119,987	19
Gaza	198,227	190,000	560,000	299,755	8
Total	914,221	715,000	2,640,000	866,743	59

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Press Office

February 1995