



# **on Middle East REFUGEES**

## **MINISTERIAL REPORT**

**Published by the Ministerial Commission  
for Solving the Middle East Refugee Problem**

**November 1983**

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 1 August 1982, the Government of Israel appointed a ministerial commission to deal with the refugee problem in the Middle East. The commission was charged with the task of formulating principles, methods and means of solving the Middle East refugee problem by resettling the refugees in their places of residence.

The commission was composed of the following members: Minister Mordechai Ben-Porat, Chairman; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Construction David Levy; Minister of Defence Moshe Arens; Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir; Minister of Justice Moshe Nissim; Minister of Economics and Inter-Ministerial Coordination Yaacov Meridor; Minister of Science and Development Yuval Ne'eman.

With the aid of a team of experts composed of government officials, and with the participation of scholars from the Shiloah Institute, the commission held meetings, visited refugee camps in Samaria, the Gaza district and Lebanon, and collected information and data. The commission also requested the Shiloah Institute to conduct special research on the subject.

The recommendations of the commission have been approved by the government. Its report and findings are summarized in the pages that follow.



## SUMMARY OF REPORT

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### A. Middle East Refugees: Jewish and Arab

The war launched by the Arab states against Israel in 1948 created two groups of refugees: Jewish refugees who fled to Israel and elsewhere from Arab lands - and Arab refugees who fled from Israel to other parts of Palestine and elsewhere. The two groups are roughly the same size, and their cases are clearly interrelated.

It is the Arab states that are responsible for the creation of this double-problem. Yet they have made no move to relate to the Jewish refugees and their claims. At the same time, they have exploited the Arab refugees as a political and propaganda weapon against Israel. Most Arab states have sought to freeze the Arab refugees' situation and status and to hinder their integration in their societies. Jordan has granted Jordanian citizenship to the refugees and has absorbed many of them into the social, political and economic fabric of the nation. But this has been the exception, not the rule.

### B. Arab Policy: Keep the Problem Alive

Ever since 1948, the Arab states have done all in their power to perpetuate the Arab refugee problem, using it as the spearhead of their ongoing campaign against Israel.

Instead of helping their refugees integrate, as speedily as possible, in the life of the nation, as Israel did, they isolated them and denied all responsibility for their welfare and rehabilitation, placing this on the shoulders of the UN and others. Proposals aimed at helping these people become normal and productive members of society have been strenuously resisted by the Arab governments.

Still, in the course of the years, the natural process of absorption could not be entirely held back. Where it was helped along, as in Jordan, it moved forward more quickly; where the government put obstacles in the way, as in most of the Arab countries, it took longer. Over the years it became more and more difficult to continue presenting the Arab refugees to the world as needy, miserable, homeless people.

The Arab states, therefore, began to shift the emphasis from the humanitarian aspect of the problem to its political-national aspect. But the basic strategy remained the same: to perpetuate the refugee problem in one form or another.

C. Israeli Policy: Rehabilitate Refugees Where They Are

Israel's consistent policy concerning the refugee problem has been to do what it could to help in the rehabilitation and integration of the refugees - Jewish and Arab - within the area of its control, while offering to participate in a discussion of the problem as a whole within the framework of peace negotiations.

Before 1967, Israel concentrated on resettling the Jewish refugees in Israel and facilitating the return to Israel of more than 40,000 Arab refugees under its family reunion programme.

Since 1967, when Judea-Samaria and the Gaza district came under Israeli control, Israel has begun acting also to ease the lot of the Arab refugees who live in these areas. During this period, another 70,000 refugees have been allowed back into the area, for family reunion: a total, then, of some 110,000 refugees who have returned under the programme.

Since the refugees in Judea-Samaria had the benefit of Jordan's policy of allowing integration into Jordanian life, whereas in the Gaza district the refugees remained largely isolated and suppressed, Israel's rehabilitation efforts have concentrated mainly on Gaza, where the problem is well on the way now to its practical solution. In the past twelve years, more than 50,000 refugees - or about one-quarter of the camp-dwellers in that area - have been resettled in new and superior housing facilities, with most of the remaining number awaiting resettlement.

A highly revealing document, in this context, is the resolution passed on 13 December 1977 by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/32/90) calling upon Israel "to take effective steps immediately for the return of the refugees concerned to the camps from which they were removed in the Gaza Strip."

Rehabilitation efforts in Judea-Samaria, on the other hand, have been hampered by the negative influence of the PLO and its agents in that area, who have largely succeeded in prevailing upon the remaining camp-dwellers in Judea-Samaria to resist Israeli moves to resettle them in permanent quarters.

In seeking an overall solution of the problem today, Israel is using a three-pronged approach: (a) emphasis on the interrelation of the Jewish and Arab aspects of the problem and the Arab states' responsibility for the creation of this problem; (b) the rights and just claims for compensation of Jews from Arab lands; and (c) rehabilita-



tion of Arab refugees living today in the Land of Israel, under Israel administration, while demanding that the Arab states do the same for the refugees who are within their domains.

#### D. UN Refugee Relief

Assistance to the refugees on the international level is administered through the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); largely because of official Arab opposition to rehabilitation projects, its main effort has been devoted to relief. The brunt of the financial burden, in the refugee assistance programme, has been borne by the United States, which contributes about 55 percent of UNRWA's annual budget. Between 1950 and 1983, the Arab states together contributed a total of \$136.7 million ( 7%) to UNRWA's budget, while the United States alone gave \$1,067.4 million (45%). Israel's total contribution to date comes to \$11.2 million: This is more than the sum contributed by any Arab country except Saudi Arabia (\$59.8 million), Libya (\$17.9 million) and Kuwait (\$16.3 million).

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A clear-cut separation must be made between the political aspect of the Palestinian refugee problem and its economic and social aspects. The political aspect is bound up with the overall Arab-Israeli conflict and, therefore, can be resolved only when Israel's neighbours follow Egypt's example and negotiate a peace treaty with Israel.
2. The economic and social aspects of the problem, on the other hand, insofar as these relate to the Arab refugees now residing in areas under Israeli control (Judea, Samaria, Gaza), need not await future developments in the peace process, but can be dealt with now.
3. In the spirit of the age-old Jewish heritage, Israel will pursue this course as a matter of prime importance and urgency. To this end, it has evolved a comprehensive programme of action designed to rehabilitate the refugees in their areas of residence, within the shortest possible time.
4. The emphasis will be on systematizing and expediting past moves and efforts in this domain, so that the refugees will be able to become fully part of the society in which they live. To achieve this, they must be assisted to obtain proper housing

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facilities, including link-ups with all essential services, and they must be given the opportunity either to work their own plot of land or to engage in other productive employment.

### The Programme

The rehabilitation programme, to be implemented in two stages over a five-year period, is based on the following steps:

1. Establishment of new housing quarters for the camp population, and, as an interim measure, improvement of living conditions in the existing quarters: 5 percent of the camp population in Year 1, 10 percent in Year 2, 25 percent in Year 3 and 30 percent each in Years 4 and 5;
2. Each refugee camp to be either appended to a nearby municipality or granted municipal status of its own;
3. Allotment of land and financial assistance for a "Build Your Own Home" programme, according to a Master Plan to be drawn up for this purpose (a new Master Plan will be drawn up for the Gaza district, while in Judea-Samaria use can be made of the existing Plan, which, however, will have to be revised and extended);
4. Unification of health and welfare services in Judea and Samaria, and gradual integration of UNRWA's educational facilities in the national school network;
5. All these steps to be taken in full coordination with UNRWA.

### Refugees in Arab Countries - and Jewish Refugees

The Arab states must be called upon, at the same time, to take up their share of the practical aspects of this rehabilitation programme. The Arab world, with its wide expanses of territory, its need for development and for working hands, and its great wealth, must finally act decisively to absorb their own brethren in their midst.

As for the Jewish refugees from the Arab countries, and their claims against the Arab states, this entire issue should be discussed separately, by a special ministerial commission to be set up for this purpose.

The rights of these refugees go beyond the issue of financial claims for compensation in the wake of the confiscation of property and other financial losses: This can be discussed within the framework of reciprocal claims between Israel and the Arab states. But there is also the matter of establishing the rights of the Jewish people in this region from the standpoint of its long residence in it, going back to antiquity, and its considerable contribution to the wealth of the region.

#### Estimated Cost

The programme will cost an estimated \$1.5 billion - not including the cost of the lands to be allotted for this purpose and the operational costs of the various projects, which cannot as yet be realistically assessed. Financing is expected to be provided from various international sources.

A breakdown of the estimated cost follows:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost (in millions of US dollars)</u>		
	<u>Judea-Samaria</u>	<u>Gaza District</u>	<u>Total</u>
Construction Survey	0.05	-	0.05
Planning	15.00	7.50	22.50
Infrastructure	67.00	320.00	387.00
Education, Health, Religious and Commercial Facilities	85.80	200.00	285.80
Participation in Private Home Construction	170.00	500.00	670.00
Merging of Services	20.00	40.00	60.00
400 Model Housing Units in J/S (20 units for each of 20 refugee camps)	40.00	-	40.00
	397.85	1067.50	1465.35