

REMEMBERING PALESTINE

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60 Years of Al Nakba: The Refugees Will Return

In 1947-1948, over 60% of the Palestinian population were dispossessed of their land and driven from their homes by Zionist militias who went on to found the Israeli state. Palestinians call this process of ethnic cleansing, Al Nakba, or 'The Catastrophe'. The Ontario Committee to Commemorate 60 Years of Al Nakba is proud to present the first edition of 'Remembering Palestine', a short monthly bulletin that will be distributed throughout 2008 to record our history and to proclaim loudly that Palestinian refugees will return.

<<QUICK FACTS>>

- * From 1947-1948, 60% of the Palestinian population, around 800,000 people, were driven from their homes and lands by Zionist militias. 531 Palestinian villages were destroyed and eleven urban neighborhoods emptied of their inhabitants.
- * In 1947, Jewish settlers owned less than 6% of the land of Palestine and constituted only one-third of its population.
- * Mass killings, rape and house demolition were a common feature of the attacks by Zionist militias on the Palestinian population. Massacres were deliberately used to instill fear in the population.
- * 350,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from Palestine by Zionist militias prior to the establishment of the Israeli state in May 1948 (i.e. in the period December 1947 - early May 1948).

<<THIS MONTH IN HISTORY>>

29 November - 31 December 1947

On 29 November 1947, the UN adopted Resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. This resolution was the first step in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. It gave the Jewish settler population, which constituted only one-third of the population and owned less than 6% of the land, more than half of the territory of Palestine. The Partition Plan incorporated the most fertile land in the country into the area that would be given to the Jewish settler population. It also included 400 Palestinian villages. Palestinians naturally rejected such a plan. In the words of the Palestinian historian, Walid Khalidi, Resolution 181 "granted half of Palestine to an ideological movement that declared openly already in the 1930s its wish to de-Arabise Palestine."

In December 1947, Zionist militias began attacking Palestinian villages and urban areas. At this stage, Zionist leaders were in the process of developing a deliberate plan to expel

the Palestinian population. These initial attacks were usually surprise assaults on defenseless areas, used to try out tactics, test the response of Palestinians, and create a sense of fear among the population. Some of these initial attacks included:

Khisas: On 18 December 1947, Zionist troops attacked the Palestinian village of Khisas and randomly started blowing up houses while the occupants were asleep. Fifteen villagers, including five children, were killed in the attack.

Ayyub: Troops entered the village of Ayyub, which had about 500 inhabitants in mid-December 1947, and began randomly shooting at houses in the area. The village was later ethnically cleansed (in April 1948) and reduced to rubble.

Haifa: In this coastal city located on the incline of a mountain and home to 75,000 Palestinians, residents were subject to a campaign of terror throughout December. Zionist troops would shell and snipe at Palestinian residents from houses built higher up on the mountain. They would roll barrels full of explosives and huge steel balls into the Arab residential areas. They would then ignite these barrels through pouring oil mixed with fuel down the roads. When Palestinian residents came running out of their houses, they would be sprayed with machine gun fire. On 31 December, Zionist troops went into the Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Rushmiyya, drove the residents out and blew up houses.

Balad al-Shaykh: This village was the burial place of one of Palestine's most revered leaders of the 1930s, Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, who was killed by the British in 1935. On 31 December, Zionist troops surrounded the village. The commander was given an order to encircle the village and kill the largest possible number of men. In a three hour attack, over sixty Palestinians were killed.

Salameh: According to Israeli military sources, the first Palestinian village targeted by the Haganah (the precursor of the Israeli army) was Salameh, which they refer to as "Salameh, the village with the bad reputation". On December 5, 2007 (only a week after the partition resolution), Zionist machine gun fire, sniping and raids began against Salameh and continued for two days. Several of Salameh's families fled for fear of their children's lives, mostly to nearby Al-Lyd and Ramleh. The first major raid was on December 19, and it was also the first defeat of the Zionist forces at the hands of the Palestinian resistance. On 29 December 1947, the Zionist forces tried again. This time they tried to confuse the Salameh resistance by launching a diversionary raid from the settlement of Petah Tikvah, and then sent a main force from the settlement Ramat Gan. The Palestinian resistance in Salameh turned back this assault, and were later joined by fighters from Abassiya and Al-Lyd to carry out their own counter-assault on Petah Tikva. (To learn more about Salameh and the Toronto theatre troupe named in its honor, visit <http://www.palestinehouse.com/salameh.html>)

Source: Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, pp. 55-60.

<<KEY TERMS>>

Zionism: Zionism arose in Europe in the late 1880s as movement to create an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine. It was a settler-colonial project that viewed the indigenous Palestinian population as 'strangers', or refused to even acknowledge their existence on the land. It was initially a minority or fringe current among the Jewish population in Europe. From the 1920s, however, the Zionist movement received the support of colonial powers such as Britain. With the Nazi Holocaust against the Jewish population in Europe, many Jews came to support the Zionist movement. Anti-Semitic policies in the UK, US, and other European countries meant that these countries largely closed their borders to Jewish refugees fleeing from fascism. These countries encouraged the colonization of Palestine and saw the future state of Israel as a potential ally for their interests in the region.

<<QUOTES FROM HISTORY>>

Joseph Weitz, head of the settlement department of the Jewish National Fund, writing in 1940:

"Transfer does not serve only one aim - to reduce the Arab population - it also serves a second purpose by no means less important, which is: to evict land now cultivated by Arabs and to free it for Jewish settlement. the only solution is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries. Not a single village or tribe must be left off." Joseph Weitz, My Diary, Vol 2. p.181.

Al Nakba Event for December : Film Screening: "GOAL DREAMS" on Thursday
December 27, 6 PM at Palestine House

<<USEFUL WEBSITES>>

www.palestineremembered.com

Website with oral history of Al Nakba, detailed records of Palestinian villages destroyed, and a message board where Palestinian refugees can connect to each other.

www.badil.org

Palestinian refugee rights organization active in building the right of return movement globally. See www.badil.org/campaign40-60 for a list of Nakba-related events happening around the world in 2008.