

Remembering Palestine

"60 Years of Al Nakba: The Refugees Will Return"

January 2008, Issue No.2

60 Years of Al Nakba

In 1947-1948, over 60% of the Palestinian population were dispossessed from their land and driven from their homes. Palestinians call this process of ethnic cleansing, Al Nakba, or 'The Catastrophe'. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Al Nakba and will be marked by commemorative events across the globe. 'Remembering Palestine', a short monthly bulletin aimed at recording this history, will be distributed by Palestine House throughout 2008. The first issue of Remembering Palestine can be viewed at: <http://www.palestinehouse.com/RememberingPalestine-Dec07-1.pdf>

UPCOMING NAKBA COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS IN TORONTO

15 January: Press Conference to Launch 60 Years of Al Nakba Commemoration Activities in Toronto. This press conference is open to the media and invited guests. It will be addressed by survivors of Al Nakba and also detail the events planned in Ontario for this important year. To register, please email info@palestinehouse.com

3 - 10 February: Mark your calendar for one of this year's most exciting events - **Israeli Apartheid Week 2008!** IAW is a series of lectures and other events that was first held at the University of Toronto in 2004. This year, IAW has expanded to Montreal, Ottawa, London (UK), Oxford (UK), New York, Pennsylvania, Bay Area, three campuses in Palestine, and South Africa. More cities soon to be announced. Stay tuned for the schedule of lectures and guest speakers. Full information is available at www.endisraeliapartheid.net

9 February: Break the Siege! Break the Silence! A demonstration against Israeli apartheid and the blockade of the Gaza Strip is planned for Saturday 9 February as part of Israeli Apartheid Week activities. Details will be announced at www.caiaweb.org

10 February: High School Student Conference. As part of IAW activities, the first-ever conference organized by and for high school students against Israeli apartheid will be held in Toronto. If you are a high school student interested in attending, please contact haia@caiaweb.org

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

January 1948

On 4 January 1948, Zionist forces killed 26 Palestinians in a car bomb attack on the Old Government House in Jaffa. On January 5, 1948, a bombing by the Irgun (see below) at

the Semiramis Hotel in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Qatamon killed 20 people, mostly Palestinian. The Spanish Consul was also killed in this attack.

January 1948 also witnessed one of the first examples of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages. Lifta, a Palestinian village near Jerusalem was home to about 2500 people with two schools, a large shopping district and several coffee houses. On 28 December 1947, the Stern Gang (see below) attacked one of the local coffee houses in Lifta with machine guns as another Zionist militia stopped a nearby bus and begun firing randomly at passengers. On 11 January, the Haganah High Command (see below) ordered another assault on Lifta. They blew up most of the houses in the village and drove out all inhabitants, taking them on trucks to Jerusalem. The head of the Zionist movement and the first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, visited Lifta a few weeks later and viewed the destruction of the village as a template for the ethnic cleansing that followed in subsequent months.

Source: Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, pp. 66-68.

Interviews with survivors of the ethnic cleansing and more background about Lifta can be heard here (interviews in Arabic):

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Jerusalem/Lifta/index.html>

KEY TERMS

Haganah, Irgun and Stern Gang: These three bodies composed the main Zionist military force during Al Nakba. The Haganah was the official armed body and developed the plan for ethnic cleansing that unfolded during 1947-1948. It later became the Israeli army. The Irgun and Stern Gang were two smaller paramilitary forces operationally tied to the Haganah that committed atrocities against Palestinians and also terrorist attacks against foreigners in the country. Future Israeli leaders were active leaders of these organizations. Menachem Begin, Israeli Prime Minister from 1977-1983, was the head of the Irgun and led the organization at the time of its bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on July 22, 1946, killing 91 British, Arab and Jewish men and women. Another future Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, led the Stern Gang and was responsible for the assassination of the UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, on September 17, 1948.

QUOTES FROM HISTORY

"Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves ... politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves... The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view we want to take away from them their country." David Ben Gurion, quoted in Simha Flapan's "Zionism and the Palestinians pp 141-2 citing a 1938 speech.

"(The Palestinians) would be crushed like grasshoppers ... heads smashed against the boulders and walls." Israeli Prime Minister (at the time) Yitzhak Shamir in a speech to

Jewish settlers "New York Times" April 1, 1988

"[The Palestinians] are beasts walking on two legs." Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, speech to the Knesset, quoted in Amnon Kapeliouk, "Begin and the 'Beasts,'" New Statesman, June 25, 1982.

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.

Published by:

Palestine House

<http://www.palestinehouse.com/>

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