

Palestine: Anti-colonialism, health and human rights

A resource developed for the People's Health Movement

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May 2022

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Historical Background

Understanding the current circumstances or the health of Palestinians today requires an understanding of the history of Palestine. This section aims to provide an overview of this history, which will facilitate an understanding of how Palestine came to be colonised, and what led to the fragmented situation that Palestinians are in today. It is important to note that a report as short as this cannot provide a thorough enough understanding of this history, but it should provide a brief overview on which further understanding can be built if desired. The main sources used for each section are listed at the end of the report and can also serve as a recommended further reading list.

The colonisation of Palestine

This section will briefly outline the key points and developments in the colonisation of Palestine, from the end of the 19th century, when the contemporary Zionist movement was established, to the middle of the 20th century, when the Zionist state was established.

The Zionist movement before the British Mandate

Zionism as a political movement started in Europe in the late 1880s, largely in response to the persecution of Jews. The First Zionist Congress, held in Basel in 1897, is broadly seen as marking the beginning of a movement that led to the establishment of a Zionist State in Palestine. The leader of the Congress at the time, Theodor Herzl, wrote in his diary following the conference: “If I were to sum up the Basle Congress in one word — which I shall not do openly — it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I were to say this to-day, I would be met by universal laughter. In five years, perhaps, and certainly in fifty, every one will see it.”¹ A fixation on Palestine as the place for Zionist colonisation developed gradually, leading to a consensus on it by the early 1900s. This ideological fixation was accompanied by complementary governance tools to enable this colonisation. The Jewish Colonial Trust, the Colonisation Committee, the Jewish National Fund, the Palestine Office and the Palestine Land Development Committee were all founded between 1898 and 1908 by the Zionist Organisation. Diplomatic overtures were initially made to the Ottoman Empire, the German Empire, and the British Government, to secure political support for Zionist goals but were unsuccessful during this period. During this time, Zionism started to be seen by the native population in Palestine as part of a European colonialist drive, raising alarm about the acquisition of early Zionists of land, assets, and power in Palestine. As early as 1911, the political establishment of the Ottoman Empire (which ruled Palestine at the time) took the intention of the Zionist movement to create a state in Palestine seriously but, at that point, there was not an expectation that this would lead to mass displacement of the native population.

The British role

British Governments before 1917 had no interest in supporting Zionist colonialism in Palestine because it interfered with plans for continued British influence in the Middle East.

¹ Israel was founded fifty-one years after the Zionist Congress in Basel, one year longer than Herzl's long but certain estimate.

Before World War I, the British favoured the continued dominance of the Ottoman Empire, which would secure unfettered British access to the Suez Canal and the overland route to India. The Ottoman Empire joining the Central Powers in World War I (against the British) led to the British backing Arab autonomy instead, to fulfil the same objectives. This led to the Anglo-Arab agreements in 1915, in which the British promised Arab independence in return for an Arab Revolt against the Turks, which indeed commenced in 1916. By this point, the British and the French had signed an agreement that stipulated the internationalisation of most of Palestine. The following British Government, which came into power in 1917, viewed this arrangement unfavourably, as it would not have fulfilled all its Imperialist interests, primarily maintaining control over the Suez Canal. The British thus came to support the Zionist Organisation and its aim of colonising Palestine. The establishment of a Zionist settler community in Palestine, which would come to exist directly because of British support, fulfilled several objectives. It would abort the initial aims of an internationalised Palestine, and the anticipated hostility of the native population would be used to justify continued British presence in Palestine, allowing it to maintain its influence over the Suez Canal.

British support for the Zionist movement was codified through the infamous Balfour Declaration in 1917, which supported “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”. This was followed by a renegotiation of the British-French plans for dividing control and influence over different parts of the soon-to-fall Ottoman Empire after the war, culminating in the Sykes-Picot agreement (named for the two diplomats who signed the initial memorandum). This agreement initially stipulated that the British and French would share control over Palestine, but the French later ceded their part of Palestine to the British, facilitating the establishment of the British Mandate of Palestine. While the Balfour Declaration made the British position clear, the Sykes-Picot Agreement gave Britain the ability to turn the vision of the Declaration into reality. Both these documents reneged on promises made by the British Government to support Arab independence in the Anglo-Arab agreements of 1915.

Under British rule, Arab resistance to Zionist aspirations was initially ignored and then violently suppressed. Initial British plans in the 1920s for the future of Palestine involved equal shares of power between Jewish settlers (who made up 10-20% of the population) and Arab natives (making up 80-90%). The British then moved away from parity between the two populations to promote the superiority of the Jewish minority in Palestine, which fuelled Arab uprisings in 1929 and 1936. These uprisings were ruthlessly repressed, Palestinian leaders were exiled, and Arab paramilitary forces were disbanded. Meanwhile, Zionist paramilitary forces were armed by the British and participated in the repression of the Palestinian population.

Although the Arab revolt was suppressed, it still pressured the British into publishing its White Paper of 1939, in which it committed to establishing an Arab/Jewish binational state in Palestine. At the time, such a state would have had an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. The British also decided to impose restrictions on Jewish migration to Palestine. This move ended the alliance between the British and Zionist militias, marked by an armed Zionist insurgency against the British. The British responded to Zionist violence with a far less intense response to that launched against the Arab uprising, imprisoning some militia

fighters and undertaking a disarmament campaign, without fundamentally challenging the Zionist leadership or Zionist proto-state institutions. Eventually, in 1947, after withdrawing from India and sustaining significant violence from Zionist militias, the British announced their plan to withdraw from Palestine and hand its administration over to the United Nations.

The Zionist movement during the British Mandate

The Zionist movement explicitly expressed its settler colonial intentions and its willingness to expel the native population before it had the means to enact that vision. One of the most liberal thinkers of political Zionism, Leo Motzkin, remarked in 1917: "Our thought is that the colonization of Palestine has to go in two directions: Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and the resettlement of Arabs of Eretz Israel in areas outside the country. The transfer of so many Arabs may seem at first unacceptable economically, but is nonetheless practical. It does not require too much money to resettle a Palestinian village on another land."

Over the following three decades, the Zionist movement aimed to establish increasing control in Palestine in several ways. Some Zionist leaders, as mentioned above, prioritised acquiring land and assets in Palestine, but by 1947, the Zionist movement had only purchased about six percent of the area of Mandate Palestine. Such purchases were often associated with population transfer; Zionist leader Moshe Sharett explained one land purchase thus: "There is a tribe that resides west of the Jordan river and the purchase will include paying the tribe to move east of the river; by this we will reduce the number of Arabs." There were also efforts to establish military preparedness and several Zionist militias were established. Establishing militias often took place with the support of British officers, who trained Zionist militias and involved them in the suppression of Arab uprisings. The Zionist movement established proto-state institutions, which were not challenged by the British authorities. These institutions generally separated themselves from the native population, boycotting Arab produce and labour, and only employing Jewish labour in Zionist colonies. Indeed, by the mid-thirties, a British Royal Commission described the Zionist settler movement in Palestine as "a state within a state".

On a political level, Zionist leaders outwardly accepted British plans for partition in 1937, while maintaining their intention for Jewish sovereignty over as much of Palestine as possible as quickly as possible. This incrementalist approach was partly adopted to maintain favour with the British, who armed and trained Zionist militias, including during the Arab revolt of 1936. The 1939 restrictions on Jewish immigration, however, along with the British White Paper outlining plans for a binational state, ended the British-Zionist alliance on an official level. By 1942, the Zionist demand to rule over all of Palestine was articulated publicly. Two of the three Zionist militias, the Haganah and Irgun, suspended operations during the Second World War to assist the Allies. The third, Lehi (which counted Yitzhak Shamir, later Prime Minister of Israel, as one of its leaders) continued military operations against the British throughout the war.

The truce ended when it became clear that the Allies were on course to win the war, launching a far-reaching violent campaign against the British. The most infamous incident of violence was the bombing of the King David Hotel, which contained the central offices of the British Mandate government in Palestine. The alliance of the Zionist movement with Britain

was replaced by one with the United States, which had become a world power of its own, had its own strategic interests in the Middle East, and generally supported the Zionist movement.

The Palestinian population before and during the British Mandate

Jewish immigration to Palestine before the late 1890s was not generally considered a threat by the native population, with immigrants generally seen as refugees or individuals motivated by religious sentiment. Following the First Zionist Congress in 1897, early Zionist colonists moved to segregate themselves, boycotting Arab produce and labour, leading to anger and resentment from the local population. Considerable local resistance followed the Balfour Declaration in 1917, with the local population recognising a threat of expulsion if Zionist aspirations were to be realised; British and other Imperial powers insisted on the recognition of the right to self-determination of native populations, which initially quelled the fears of Palestinian Arabs to some extent. On a political level, however, there was continuous mobilisation against Zionism. Each of the seven Palestinian Arab Congresses, from 1919 to 1928, held in various Palestinian cities, stressed the local population's rejection of Zionism. Despite these Congress meetings never being recognised by British Mandate officials, the opposition of the native populations to the Zionist movement's goals was recorded as early as 1919 in the American King-Crane Commission. It noted, "there was no one thing upon which the population of Palestine was more agreed than upon [opposition to the entire Zionist program]". This opposition was also articulated by unanimous resolutions from the General Syrian Congress, which included elected representatives from Palestine.

The position of the native population did little to quell the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, leading to armed confrontations in 1920 between natives and Zionist colonists in northern Palestine and Jerusalem. These isolated clashes developed into an Arab uprising in 1921, followed by similar uprisings in 1929, 1933, and 1936, and a widespread rebellion in 1939. These movements included various tactics, including protests, civil disobedience, and armed resistance. In 1936, Palestinians held a general strike involving the entire population that lasted 174 days. There were also more subtle forms of resistance, such as the refusal to sell land to Zionist colonists, which played a role in slowing the pace of Zionist advances in acquiring land in Palestine; by 1920, Zionist colonists had acquired just under 4% of land in Palestine, and only 10% is estimated to have been sold to them directly by Palestinians. As outlined above, the British responded to the local population's opposition to the colonisation of Palestine by suppressing the population's political expression and exiling much of the Palestinian Arab political leadership.

The Nakba (the catastrophe)

By the time of the British withdrawal from Palestine, two-thirds of the population was Arab, while one-third were Jewish. However, the land distribution was much more unequal, since Jewish immigrants mostly moved into towns and cities, despite Zionist leaders' push for them to settle in the countryside. Jewish immigrants only owned about 6% of the land. The Arab population had been suppressed during two uprisings in 10 years, a significant part of its political leadership was exiled, and its paramilitary forces were disbanded. The Jewish population, despite the escalation of Zionist violence against the British leading up to the withdrawal, did not suffer the same level of repression. Zionist political leaders were

generally imprisoned rather than exiled, the disarmament campaigns were much less severe, and non-militant populations were not subject to the indiscriminate repression faced by the Arab population. In addition, the Zionist movement had been allowed by the British to establish proto-state institutions during the period of the British Mandate.

The political question was left to the United Nations (UN), which delegated responsibility for proposing solutions for the Palestine question to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). Whether through partition or a binational state, the expectation was that UNSCOP would make a recommendation for Arabs and Jews to share Palestine in some form. Consequently, the Palestinian population and its remaining leadership, refusing the idea of sharing their land with Zionist settlers, boycotted UNSCOP's proceedings entirely. Zionist leaders, meanwhile, engaged fully with UNSCOP. Alongside a charm offensive, they argued the backwardness of Arabs, denied the political rights of Palestinian people, and facilitated testimonies that presented Zionist points of view only, including by Jews in Europe who were in reality divided on Zionism. Zionist leaders ensured they were prepared for meetings with UNSCOP by bugging their meeting rooms and installing spies in place of the cleaning staff at the UNSCOP delegation's hotel while they were on their mission to Palestine.

As part of their engagement with UNSCOP, Zionist leaders presented to the delegation their idea of the borders of a future Jewish state. The UN delegation viewed these demands as excessive and eventually recommended partition with a smaller share for a Jewish state than demanded; 56% of Palestinian land was to be allocated to a Jewish state (which would have contained almost as many Palestinians [438,000] as Jews [499,000]), 42% of the land to a Palestinian state (containing almost exclusively Palestinians [818,000] with a few Jews [10,000]), and the remaining 2% to an internationally-governed Jerusalem. In November 1947, the UN adopted Resolution 181 to endorse the partition plan². Following this recommendation, Palestinians and other Arabs maintained their opposition to the partition plan, asserting the lack of legitimacy of Zionist claims to the land. Publicly, Zionist leaders accepted the partition plan, while privately continuing to plan for a larger state than the one recommended by UNSCOP. David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel and the first signatory to Israel's declaration of independence, wrote "I don't regard a state in part of Palestine as the final aim of Zionism, but as a mean toward that aim." The first President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, stated: "partition might be only a temporary arrangement for the next twenty to twenty-five years." The aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 would eventually lead to borders set by the armistice line more or less matching the maps proposed by Zionist leaders to UNSCOP.

In response to the UN resolution, the Arab Palestinian population staged significant protests. Zionist militias attacked Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods. The attacks were severe enough to lead to 75,000 Palestinians fleeing their homes. The Arab Salvation Army, consisting of around 6,000 Arab (mostly Palestinian) volunteers, and the Holy War Army, an irregular force of 5-10,000, were formed to resist Zionist militias. The combined forces of Zionist militias (Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi) initially consisted of around 30,000 fighters. Initial

² UN Resolution 181 was predominantly supported by European and American states, and Australasia. No Asian countries spoke in favour of the Resolution, while only one African country did, the Union of South Africa, itself ruled by a settler colonial movement at the time.

tensions developed into isolated battles, retaliatory attacks, and violent intimidation tactics in December 1947 and January 1948, to an all-out offensive by February 1948. Zionist militias had by this point commenced cleansing operations, emptying five villages entirely. The Zionist militias' "Plan Dalet" was then adopted in March 1948, with the explicit aim of expelling Palestinians to maximise the conquest of land. The first operations under Plan Dalet were undertaken in urban centres in March, leading to the expulsion of 250,000 Palestinians from Tiberias, Haifa, Safad, Bisan, Jaffa, and Akka. Zionist militias also committed around 33 massacres, most infamously in Deir Yassin where around 110 villagers were killed. These massacres instilled fear in the Palestinian population, often causing residents of nearby villages to flee. These operations collectively led to the ethnic cleansing of 800,000 Palestinians from around 530 villages and communities and came to be known by Palestinians as the Nakba, "the Catastrophe".

The Zionist movement declared the independence of the State of Israel in mid-May 1948, coinciding with the withdrawal of British forces from Palestine. Despite the British maintaining their presence until that time, they did not intervene in Zionist ethnic cleansing operations. The armies of neighbouring Arab countries (Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq) only intervened after the British withdrawal and the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel, by which time 300,000 Palestinians had already been ethnically cleansed from their communities. Despite their declaration of war, Arab armies generally restricted their operations to areas of Palestine which had been allocated to an Arab state under the UN Partition Plan. Arab countries were keen to avoid an all-out war, being barely out of colonial rule, and aimed to use the war to cement their strategic influence in the region, while minimising losses.

The fragmentation of the Palestinian people: 1948 – 1967

Palestinian citizens of Israel

The 800,000 Palestinians who were ethnically cleansed during the Nakba made up 80% of Palestinians living in the area which became the State of Israel in 1948. This still left a sizeable Palestinian population in Israel. They faced a range of discriminatory and violent actions. Ethnic cleansing operations continued into the 1950s. The most notable examples are expulsions and massacres that took place in Iqrith (1951), Al-Tireh (1953), Abu Ghosh (1953), Kafr Qasem (1956), Acre (1965), and the Naqab (throughout the 1950s). In addition, from the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 until 1966, almost all Palestinian citizens of Israel lived under martial law. This was put in place for 90% of the Palestinian Arab population and was not instituted for any of the Jewish inhabitants. This meant that for the first 18 years of Israel's existence, 90% of Palestinians in Israel would be prosecuted in military, not civil, tribunals for all offences (with no recourse to appeal). That same population was only allowed to visit other parts of the country with a relevant (and often time-limited) security pass and were generally barred from visiting the homes from which they were expelled. Palestinians in Israel were not afforded freedom of expression, assembly, or association, and were barred from publishing newspapers or establishing political parties. Even after being technically given those rights, after 1966, many Arab publications or political organisations were banned. Until at least 1965, there were very few Arabs employed in any government departments, and no Arabs worked in the government office responsible for Arab affairs.

Several foundational laws codified and ensured the continuing dispossession of Palestinians of their lands and even existence in Israel. The Citizenship Law in 1952 required Palestinians to have documents to prove Palestinian citizenship (often confiscated by the Israeli army) or Inhabitants Registration (the administration of which was deliberately neglected in Palestinian towns by Israeli authorities). This led to many Palestinians living as stateless persons in Israel, while Palestinians who were ethnically cleansed were almost entirely ineligible for citizenship (or to return to their homes) because they were not residents of Israel in 1952 as the law stipulated. Meanwhile, the same Citizenship Law granted citizenship to all Jewish people who immigrated under the “Law of Return” of 1950, which in turn allowed any Jewish person from anywhere in the world to migrate to Israel. The Absentee’s Property Law (1950) gave the Israeli state the right to take over any property belonging to Palestinians who were expelled or had left, while the Land Acquisition Law (1953) allowed the State to seize around 1.2 million dunams of land from the Palestinian population. The seized property was and continues to be used to subsidise the costs of settlers arriving in Israel, who were generally settled by the State. Such actions are also taken exclusively for the benefit of Jewish settlers by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a quasi-state organisation that controls 13% of land in Israel.

The West Bank

The Armistice Agreement, signed in 1949 at the end of the Arab-Israeli War, gave Jordan control over the West Bank (Figure 1). This was the area of Palestine left between Jordan and Israel and was under Jordan’s control at the end of the war. Jordan’s expansionist ambitions led to its annexation of the West Bank in 1950. Two decades of suppression by British and Zionist forces and the recent establishment of the State of Israel over most of Palestine left a weakened Palestinian national movement at the time, which was not able to resist the Jordanian move despite some grassroots opposition at the time. This annexation led to further suppression of Palestinian national identity and efforts to mobilise for it. In addition, despite the annexation, Jordanian authorities neglected West Bank residents compared to East Bank residents (the area that makes up Jordan today), leading to significant socioeconomic inequalities that also translated into significant health impacts. This will be detailed further in later sections.

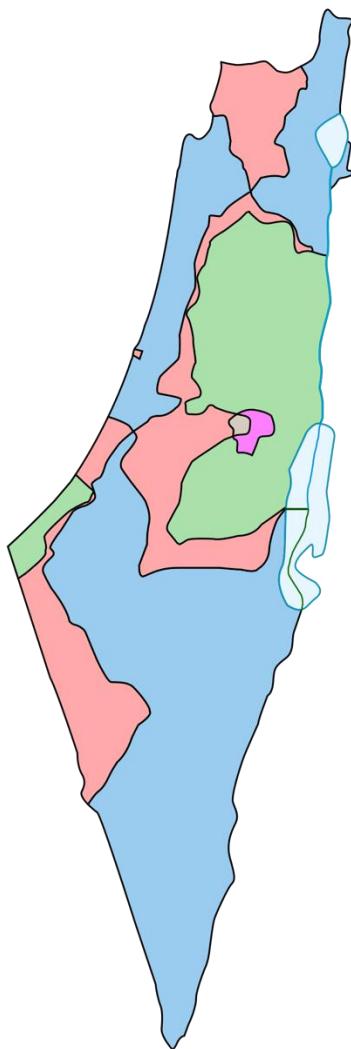


Figure 1: Map of the British Mandate of Palestine, illustrating the United Nations Partition Plan borders (planned Jewish state in blue, Corpus separatum made up of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites in grey and purple, the planned Arab state in the remainder). The West Bank is the green area to the right; the Gaza Strip is the green area to the left.

The Gaza Strip

Following the Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1949, the Gaza Strip (the area of Palestine left between Egypt and Israel) came under Egypt's rule (Figure 1). In contrast to Jordan, Egypt did not annex the Gaza Strip, insisting on its status as an indivisible part of a future Palestinian state. Similar to the situation in the West Bank, however, there was significant neglect of the Gaza Strip by the Egyptian authorities. This was particularly exacerbated by the simultaneous loss of agricultural land to Israel, the closure of its port, and the tripling of the small area's population through the influx of refugees. In addition, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip between October 1956 and March 1957 following the Tripartite Aggression (of Israel, France, and the United Kingdom against Egypt following its nationalisation of the previously foreign-controlled Suez Canal).

Refugees

By the end of the Nakba, the forcibly exiled 800,000 Palestinians became refugees in the areas neighbouring the newly-established State of Israel. They were denied the right to

return to their homes after the war despite UN Resolution 194 affirming their right of return. They sought shelter in a variety of settings in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, with friends or relatives, and in religious buildings, schools, abandoned buildings, as well as temporary tented camps near the border with Israel. Governments then leased land in which to settle refugees, in which tents were provided initially by Non-Governmental Organisations followed by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA was established in 1949 by the UN General Assembly and mandated to serve Palestinian refugees. In 1950, it was given authority to build and provide services in the land designated for Palestinian refugee camps. By 1951, UNRWA had started building more permanent structures such as huts to replace tents, something many refugees had already started doing themselves. UNRWA fully assumed this responsibility by 1955 and almost all tents were replaced by concrete huts by 1959. The services UNRWA is mandated to provide include basic education and primary healthcare, which are provided to all registered Palestinian refugees who seek UNRWA's services. Additional services which target those most in need include hospital services, and cash and food assistance. These services are mainly provided in and around recognised refugee camps but are accessible to all registered refugees according to UNRWA criteria.

The camps came to house around one-third of the total population of UNRWA-registered refugees. The reestablishment of community links in the camps, which had been systematically removed in the years leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel, allowed for political mobilisation and organisation among Palestinians. This led to the development of a new leadership of the Palestinian national movement and the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964. There are several important structural, political, and economic factors that lead to significant health concerns in Palestinian refugee camps, which will be detailed in later sections.

[The colonisation of the rest of Palestine: 1967 – present](#)

[The Naksa \(the setback\)](#)

Israel's attack to decimate the Egyptian air force on 5 June 1967 started the six-day war between Israel on the one hand and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on the other. Although claiming to have attacked in self-defence, Israeli minister Mordechai Bentov years later admitted the expansionist intentions behind the attack: "This entire story about the danger of extermination was invented and exaggerated after the fact to justify the annexation of new Arab territories." Indeed, after the war, Israel would come to control the remaining uncolonised areas of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) as well as the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt and the Golan Heights in Syria. The war would result in the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians (some of whom were already refugees) from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to neighbouring Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, as well as around 100,000 Syrians from the Golan Heights. Seven more Palestinian refugee camps were established in Jordan and Syria.

The Naksa also caused a significant realignment of Palestinians' political alliances. Prior to 1967, the Palestinian national movement had been largely dependent on sponsorship by Arab states, with the PLO even sometimes being seen as controlled by the Arab League. Although independent Palestinian political factions were being established already, the stunning defeat of Arab states in the Naksa led to significant disillusionment of Palestinians

with Arab states leading their liberation movement. This catalysed further growth of the Palestinian liberation movement, with the establishment and growth of several political factions, and significant militarisation, especially in the refugee camps.

Military occupation

Settlement-building on occupied land

The period immediately following the 1967 war demonstrated clearly that the Israeli political establishment carried the aspirations of early Zionist leaders to colonise the entirety of Palestine and even beyond. Construction of Jewish-only settlements in the Syrian Golan Heights began as early as July 1967, in the Palestinian West Bank in September 1967, and in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula in May 1969. Settlement-building was supported by official Israeli policy by September 1967 and a common method for state support for settlements was and remains the confiscation of Palestinians' land under the pretence of military orders, which is then transferred for settlement-building.

As with other manifestations of colonialism, the aims of settlement-building are about politics and control of resources. Politically, Palestinians whether in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or in exile in surrounding countries continued to have legitimate claims to the land colonised by Israel. Occupying the areas with the biggest Palestinian populations gave Israel dominance over those areas and the ability to disrupt Palestinian organising. Physically, land is confiscated for settlement-building, nature reserves, and firing ranges, cutting connections between Palestinian towns and villages. Legally, military laws applying to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (but not to Israeli settlers) severely restrict political and even social and cultural organising. This is seen in the repression of civil society organisations working on health, human rights, and social issues (see Health and Human Rights and the Health Work Committee sections). The second set of aims focused on expansionist policies to exploit the land and the resources of that land. For example, access to the major water aquifer in the West Bank is fully controlled by Israel and natural springs are often taken over by settlements for recreation. On the other hand, Palestinian applications for water projects to fulfil basic needs are often delayed for years or rejected. These policies considered together paint a clear picture of the expansionist policies of a settler colonial regime.

These expansionist goals are important to consider in the historical context of Israeli government policy. East Jerusalem was de facto annexed to Israel only 18 days after the end of the six-day war. The Israeli government also endorsed the "Allon Plan", drawn up by the then Minister of Labor, which proposed the annexation of the majority of the West Bank and the entirety of the Gaza Strip into Israel. Although it originally proposed establishing a Druze state in the Golan Heights, even that area was annexed into Israel in 1981. The parts with continued Palestinian presence were planned to be semi-autonomous but completely surrounded by Israel. A map demonstrating the areas into which Palestinians are restricted today bears a striking similarity to the map of the Allon Plan from 54 years ago (Figure 2). The only territory Israel has occupied from which it has subsequently withdrawn is the Sinai Peninsula, which it withdrew from in 1982. However, even then, Sinai was under a strict condition of demilitarisation. It took 30 years for Egyptian troops to enter the area, and only ever under mutual agreement with Israel. Although Israel also withdrew from the Gaza Strip

in 2005, it continues to exercise significant control over it, amounting to continued military occupation, as will be described later.

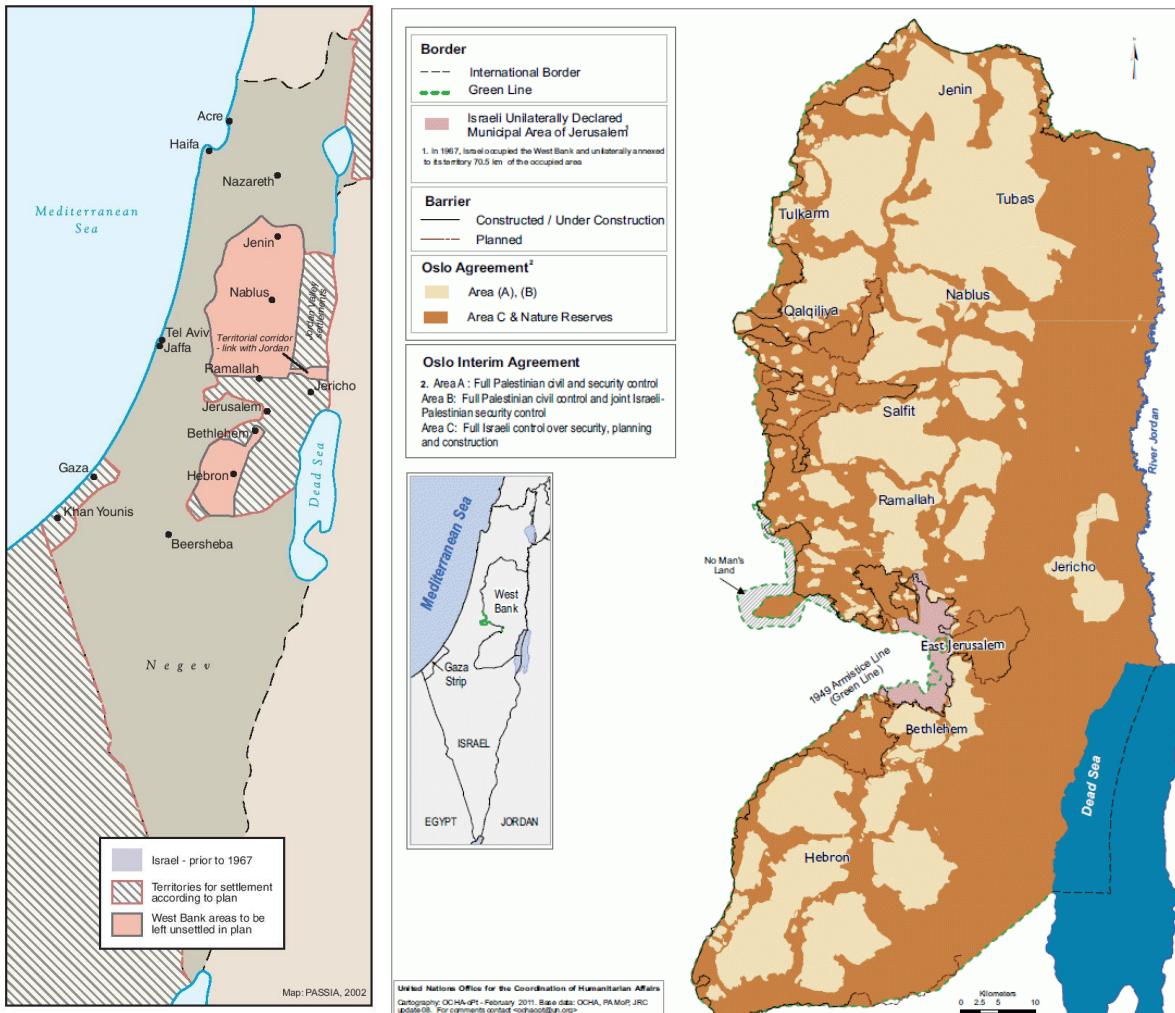


Figure 2: Left: The Alon Plan of 1967 – pink areas were originally proposed to be ‘returned’ to Jordan (PASSIA 2002).

Right: A map of the West Bank today – light areas are Areas A and B (partial Palestinian self-administration, explained below) (OCHA 2011).

Settlement-building on occupied land is illegal and is recognised as such by all major relevant bodies. This is under rules prohibiting transfer of the occupier’s population into occupied territory and applies to the establishment, consolidation, or expansion of settlements, as well as the confiscation of land for settlements. International law also prohibits the transfer of the native population within or out of occupied land. Israel violates this through forced expulsions of Palestinians, in the form of forcible transfer within occupied Palestinian territories and even deportations.

Martial law

Similar to Palestinian citizens of Israel from 1948 to 1966, those who came under Israel’s rule after the 1967 war were also subjected to Israeli military law. This included Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Syrians in the Golan Heights, and Egyptians in the Sinai Peninsula. Palestinians in the West Bank remain under this law until today (it applied in the

Gaza Strip until 2005, the Golan Heights until its annexation in 1981, and Sinai throughout Israel's occupation of it). The law has never applied to Jewish Israelis living in settlements, in the West Bank or anywhere else. In practice, this means that the Israeli military exerts control over all aspects of Palestinians' lives. Hundreds of Israeli military checkpoints control the freedom of movement of Palestinians between West Bank towns and villages. Entry of goods and products into the Palestinian market is under the complete discretion of Israeli military authorities. Israel even controls the population registry, which is responsible for issuing Palestinian identity documents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For over 25 years, raising the Palestinian flag was banned and could land a Palestinian in jail. The application of martial law only to Palestinians means that an Israeli settler and a Palestinian, living minutes apart, co-conspiring in a crime would end up in different court systems, the Jewish Israeli in a civilian court and the Palestinian in a military court.

Land confiscation

Land confiscation is commonly used in Israel's occupation to serve multiple goals. It is important for the expansionist policies in which Israel aims to control the land and resources. It is also used to fragment the Palestinian population. Land confiscation is exercised under military law, with the reason for the confiscation of public and private Palestinian land often stated as for military purposes. However, such land is often later turned into settlements. As noted above, this violates international law.

These land confiscations often take place accompanied by significant Israeli military violence. This has been the case in Beita most recently, from which land has been seized, initially by rogue settlers and then by the Israeli military. The Israeli army has shot dead 10 residents, including Beita's water engineer while he was restoring supply to the besieged village, and injured 1,000. Similar violence has faced popular protests that have taken place in other areas, such as Jerusalem, Bil'in, Ni'lin, and Nabi Saleh.

Public infrastructure

The disparity in public infrastructure provision is particularly stark due to the total control of Israeli authorities over the entry of materials and resources into Palestinian areas, including annexed areas and the Gaza Strip. Access to water is almost completely controlled by Israel, with a highly unjust distribution. Israelis on average consume almost four times as much water per capita (300 litres per person per day) as Palestinians (88 litres per person per day). While Israelis get running water round-the-clock, Palestinians rely on private water tanks on the roofs of their buildings which are filled every few days when the water runs, notwithstanding severe shortages especially in the summer and in Area C (explained below).

A similar system exists for electricity; Israel supplies almost all of the West Bank's electricity, which is sold at a high price to Palestinian distribution companies, with frequent threats of power cuts due to delays in payments. Although there is a power plant in the Gaza Strip, it is currently unable to even meet a third of the demand due to Israel's blockade severely limiting fuel supply.

In the West Bank, since the 1990s, Israel has established a large network of what the Israeli military calls "sterile roads". These roads are dedicated to serving Israeli settlements which West Bank Palestinians cannot use. There are many additional roads that Palestinians are

rarely granted security permits to use, for example if the roads are the only way to get to their place of residence or work.

In telecommunications, while Israeli companies rolled out 4G in 2014, 3G was only allowed in the West Bank in 2018. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip remain reliant on 2G networks until today.

Settler violence

There are frequent acts of violence committed by Israeli settlers on Palestinians, including harassment and intimidation, damage to property, and attacks on people, in addition to the systemic violence detailed above. Harassment and intimidation take place through threatening vandalism of Palestinian shops and houses, and against children going to school and people driving around the West Bank; a common action taken by international solidarity activists is to accompany children walking to school to shield them from settler attacks. Damage to property includes damaging cars, contaminating water sources, setting houses on fire, and damaging trees; thousands of olive trees are cut down or burned by settlers every year. Attacks on people include stoning, beating, car-ramming, and shooting. Although these have received increased attention recently, they have been part of Palestinians' lived reality ever since they encountered the Zionist movement. The settlement enterprise is inherently violent towards Palestinians, including by limiting access to land and resources and causing significant dispossession of public and private land from Palestinians. In addition, the gun ownership rate is 6.7 guns per 100 people among Israelis, with settlers in the West Bank being one of the 'civilian' groups eligible for a gun license, meaning a much higher gun ownership rate among them.

On top of this, settlers are rarely held accountable for such acts of violence. 91% of investigations based on complaints by Palestinians about Israeli settler violence are closed without indictments. As these take place in the West Bank, the investigations fall under the responsibility of the Israeli military.

The Gaza Strip

The population

An important consideration about the Gaza Strip is that the majority of its population of 2 million people are registered refugees (1.3 million), around half of whom live in refugee camps. All these people live in a small strip of land with a population density of 5,046 people/km², a rate that is surpassed only by five countries or territories globally. The population of the Gaza Strip is cut off from the area's natural resources – land to the north, east, and south (colonised and declared part of Israel in 1948), and the sea to the west (in which Israel imposes a no-fishing zone and bans the operation of a port). Since the blockade, it was estimated in 2010 that Gaza lost around 30% of arable land due to the imposition of a "buffer zone" near the borders with Israel and with Egypt.

Israeli withdrawal

A frequent proclamation among Zionists is that Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005 but that even this did not appease Palestinians. Israel did indeed withdraw the troops stationed in the Gaza Strip and emptied the 21 settlements it had built in the Gaza Strip of their 8,000 settlers. The Israeli government did this, by its own admission, to ensure that it

maintained a Jewish demographic majority in each of the areas it controlled. Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explained this at the time as follows:

"More and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution, because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one. From a struggle against 'occupation,' in their parlance, to a struggle for one-man-one-vote. That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle – and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us, it would mean the end of the Jewish state... the parameters of a unilateral solution are: To maximize the number of Jews; to minimize the number of Palestinians; not to withdraw to the 1967 border and not to divide Jerusalem... we may have to espouse unilateral separation."

After the approval of the plan, the senior advisor to the Israeli Prime Minister remarked:

"The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process, and when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda."

This background makes clear the lack of goodwill with which the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is described. The claim that Israel's withdrawal was a positive move also overlooks the fact that Israel continues to, under the legal definition, exercise military occupation of the Gaza Strip, in that it has continued to exert "effective control" over it. This includes total control over land borders, air space, territorial water, and the population registry, in addition to extensive surveillance and frequent military incursions, sometimes just to raze farmland close to the border of the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip also continues to use Israeli currency. Thus, the flow of goods and key resources into and out of the Gaza Strip remains under the complete control of Israel and effectively means that it remains under military occupation, even if there are no soldiers permanently stationed inside the Gaza Strip.

The siege on Gaza

This effective control was exercised even before the launch of the suffocating siege on the Gaza Strip in 2007, which was established under the excuse of Hamas taking over political control of the Gaza Strip at the time. The siege has been described by Israeli politicians as "an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won't die". Cables published by WikiLeaks state that "Israeli officials have confirmed on multiple occasions that they intend to keep the Gazan economy on the brink of collapse without quite pushing it over the edge." The blockade has even been described as a "deepening humanitarian crisis" by the UN Security Council (following a rare abstention by the USA), which called for the lifting of the blockade. The blockade affects food imports and exports and the entry of medical supplies, construction materials, and clothes among other essential and non-essential goods. It prevents an adequate supply of fuel, causing severe electricity shortages of 10 hours per day, and prevents the repair of water treatment plants, leading 97% of Gaza's water to be undrinkable.

Frequent assaults

14 years since the imposition of the blockade, Israel has launched several large-scale assaults on this small strip of land. On 27 December 2008, Israel launched a devastating aerial assault and ground invasion, in which it killed 1,417 Palestinians and destroyed vital infrastructure including medical facilities, schools, and government buildings. Of the \$4.5 billion pledged for the reconstruction of Gaza after the assault, less than a quarter of this amount was disbursed, and Israel continued to block vital supplies from entering. In November 2012, Israel carried out another aerial assault in which it killed 158 Palestinians. In July 2014, Israel launched the most intense assault since the Second Intifada. In 50 days of attack, again involving both aerial assault and a ground invasion, 2,205 Palestinians were killed and, yet again, vital infrastructure was destroyed. Israel's attacks included the targeting of schools, shelters, journalists, hospitals, homes, and the use of human shields. In 2018 and 2019, Palestinians in Gaza launched a series of protests dubbed "the Great March of Return", demanding a return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and an end to the siege on Gaza. 266 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands were injured by Israeli soldiers in these unarmed protests, including medical personnel. There were confirmed reports of Israeli soldiers being instructed to "shoot to maim" with 124 Palestinians losing their limbs and thousands of others suffering life-changing injuries due to live fire from Israeli snipers. Most recently in May 2021, Israeli aerial assaults on Gaza killed 256 Palestinians. They also targeted a building housing local and international media, residential buildings, the main road leading to al-Shifa hospital, the only laboratory with COVID-19 testing capability, and an MSF clinic.

Jerusalem

While the Western part of Jerusalem has been under Israeli control since 1948, the Eastern part fell under Israeli military occupation following the 1967 war. Israel announced its annexation almost immediately, on 28 June 1967, just 18 days after the end of the war. Despite international condemnation, Israel followed through with this policy while continuing to assert internationally that the move did not constitute annexation. This ambiguity has allowed Israel to maintain permanent residency status for almost all Palestinian residents of Jerusalem without granting them citizenship. Israel has used this status to quietly deport thousands of Palestinians from the city over the years, based on a policy of revoking Jerusalem residence status from anyone who does not prove that their "centre of life" is in Jerusalem. A more recent policy is used by Israeli authorities to revoke residency for "breach of allegiance".

Palestinians who maintain their residency in Jerusalem are then discriminated against and pushed out of the city through a variety of means. Palestinians pay high tax rates on their properties, while Jewish settlers are offered a 5-year exemption on their arrival in Jerusalem and reduced taxes thereafter, to incentivise them to settle in Jerusalem. Israeli planning laws are also discriminatory, zoning only 13% of East Jerusalem for construction and approving only 7% of Palestinian planning applications. As a result, an estimated 30-50% of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem are built without permits. Settler organisations collude with the municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Interior for the demolition of many houses, with hundreds of Palestinian homes demolished in Jerusalem every year, causing the forced displacement of thousands of Palestinians. There is even discrimination in issuing demolition orders for violations; 78.4% of violations in Jerusalem take place in the

predominantly-Jewish West Jerusalem, but only 27% of them are subject to demolition orders, compared to 84% of violations in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem also face the threat of settler organisations taking over their homes. The most recent notable cases are the Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Batn al-Hawa in Silwan. Settler organisations have filed cases in Israeli courts laying claims to the homes of hundreds of Palestinians. Both cases are based on bogus claims of land ownership and many of these cases have historically been based on falsified and forged documents. Moreover, many of the residents of Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah were given the homes they live in today after they were forcibly expelled by Zionist militias from their homes in West Jerusalem, meaning they are refugees who have been denied the right to return to their homes.

These various demonstrations of intimidation, de-development, forcible expulsion, and transfer of the Palestinian population of Jerusalem should be considered in the context of the Israeli “Jerusalem 2020 Master Plan” policy which aims to maintain a 70 to 30 ratio of Jewish Israelis to Palestinians in the city of Jerusalem. This and other expansionist plans, as well as the clear discrimination in policies and their application against Palestinians, are clear about Israel’s intent to Judaise Jerusalem, depopulating it of its Palestinian residents and maintaining Jewish superiority in the city. The Health and Human Rights section will cover other determinants of health and health services for Palestinians in Jerusalem.

Refugees

Although UN resolution 194 makes it clear that Palestinian refugees who fled their homes in the Nakba have the right to return to the homes from which they were expelled, this right has not been realised to this day. There are currently 5.7 million registered with UNRWA, around 1.5 million of whom live in 58 refugee camps in Palestine (in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only), Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Most refugees are stateless and hold no citizenship. This increases their vulnerability and deprives them of basic rights. Until recently, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, whether in the camps or not, were not allowed to partake in certain professions, and are often used as political pawns in the complex Lebanese political ecosystem. The situation in Syria and Jordan is relatively better, but Palestinians are still denied political rights in both countries and even by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Oslo Accords

The PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995 (officially the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements”). These set the terms for limited Palestinian self-administration in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, on an interim basis, until the signing of a final status agreement, which was meant to take place by 1999 following “Permanent Status Negotiations”. These were intended to cover “Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and other issues of common interest” – in short, all the major issues.

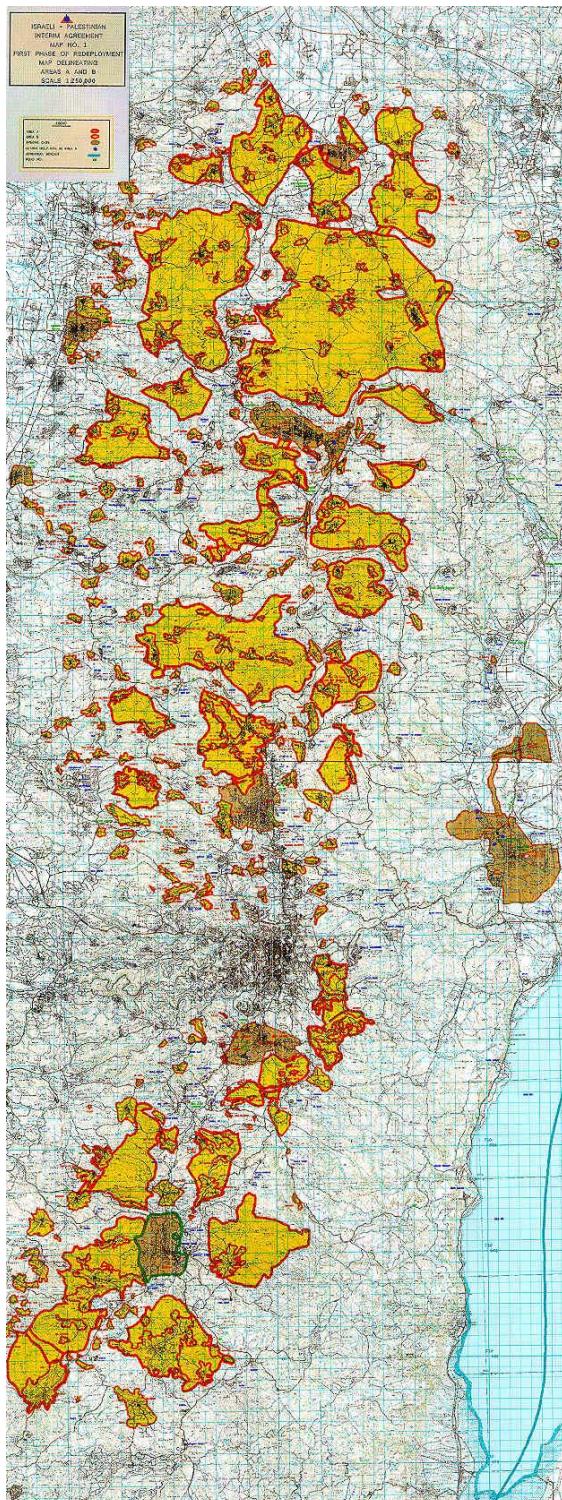


Figure 3: A map of the West Bank as divided by the Oslo Accords; Area A is dark-shaded, Area B is yellow-shaded; the remaining area in white is Area C.

Although proponents of the Oslo Accords continue to promote them as a step on the road to a two-state solution, they did not achieve any practical steps towards such a solution, let alone help Palestinians get closer to liberation. Although the Oslo Accords were intended to lead to Israeli withdrawal from land intended for a Palestinian state, this was extremely limited in practice. The Oslo Accords stipulated that Israel would completely control 74% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Area C), eventually to be reduced to 60% (in practice, the

lowest this ever reached was around 70%). Area C contains all Israeli settlements as well as much of the land surrounding Palestinian cities and villages. The newly-established Palestinian Authority (PA) would control Palestinian cities, which made up 18% (Area A), and run civil affairs only in the remaining 22% (Area B), which contained Palestinian villages. Areas A and B are made up of 165 units of land with no contiguity, whereas Area C is one contiguous piece of land (Figure 3). The Oslo Accords did not stop Israel's expansionist policies. In 1993, Palestinians outnumbered Israeli settlers in Area C; by 2013, Israeli settlers outnumbered Palestinians. Israel continued to confiscate land, expand settlements, control natural resources, restrict movement and exert sovereignty over borders, the economy, and security. During the second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising which started in 2000, Israel re-occupied all the land it withdrew from during the 1990s.

The Oslo Accords have also harmed the Palestinian economy. The economic agreement annex to the Oslo Accords, the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, pegs the Palestinian economy to the Israeli one. This is through the imposition of Israeli customs and financial rules, including forcing the Palestinian economy to use Israeli currency and a value-added tax that closely tracks the Israeli one. Israeli authorities also collect tax revenue from Palestinians and then pay them to the PA subject to a 3% administrative fee. Israel frequently withholds this tax revenue as a means of exerting political pressure. A final example to illustrate the inadequacies of the Oslo Accords is the security coordination between Palestinian and Israeli security forces required under the agreement. This means, in effect, that PA security forces prevent resistance to the Israeli occupation, mark targets for Israeli forces, and clear the streets when their Israeli counterparts tell them they are conducting a raid in a Palestinian area.

This analysis is not only retrospective; the Oslo Accords, which were negotiated in secret, were condemned by many Palestinian figures at the time of their signing. A month after the signing of the Oslo Accords at the White House, Edward Said called them "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles" and quoted a common Israeli view that they were "the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism." He predicted that "the PLO will thus become Israel's enforcer, an unhappy prospect for most Palestinians." Moreover, the Oslo Accords were the latest in a series of attempts by Israel to enforce Palestinian self-administration within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. From the early days of the occupation in 1967, Israeli military leaders met with local Palestinian elite who it thought may be amenable to working as Israel's subservient administrators within Palestinian areas. The next attempt was in 1978, after the signing of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, when Israel established "Village Leagues" in the rural areas of the occupied Palestinian territories. This leadership was envisaged to be depoliticised to work with, rather than challenge, Israeli colonial authorities. The Village Leagues were boycotted by Palestinians and were abandoned by Israel due to their failure in 1984.

Establishing limited self-rule in the occupied Palestinian territories has mainly aimed to abort the Palestinian struggle. All attempts, including the Oslo Accords, have been about installing a Palestinian ruling class that was willing to exist only in relation and subservience to Israel. This would require this ruling elite to accept Zionist colonialism as fait accompli, reducing their work to administering Palestinians' daily lives, such as in infrastructure and public services. This would then lead to the fragmentation of the Palestinian struggle; the

struggle in the occupied Palestinian territories would be reduced to one about services and economic conditions, Palestinian citizens of Israel would be engaged in a struggle for equality as citizens, and refugees and the diaspora would essentially be left out of the entire struggle. In this way, the Palestine issue would cease to be about a people, half of whom were in exile, struggling for national liberation and return.

The worst fears for the Oslo Accords process have been realised. The PA has indeed become “Israel’s enforcer”. Palestinian activists freed by Israel are frequently re-arrested by the PA or vice-versa. The PA has installed an authoritarian one-party system, often ruled by Presidential Decree, with frequently postponed or cancelled elections. Protesters are brutally repressed, dissenters are imprisoned or assassinated, and the judiciary lacks independence. The PA is therefore compared to the Bantustan leadership in Apartheid South Africa or the role of “the Native Clerk” in colonies. Fatah, the party which controls the PA, also dominates the PLO and prevents its democratisation, which further suppresses organised opposition.

The failure of the Oslo Accords is a result of their contents as well as the process of the negotiations. The PLO was a relatively small and weak belligerent that was increasingly marginalised especially during the First Intifada in which grassroots organisers gained influence. The PLO also lacked the technical competence to carry out the negotiations, engaging in them without legal representation in English, which its negotiators did not speak. Researchers have been unable to uncover the exact methods through which Norwegian diplomats facilitated the negotiations. However, analysis of that period indicates that Norway, as a small country vying to increase its global influence, acted on Israel’s premises, siding with its red lines while downplaying the PLO’s, fearing that anything else would lead Israel to withdraw from the negotiations, which would end Norway’s role. Norway’s facilitation, therefore, reinforced rather than equalised the power disparity between Israel and the PLO. The PLO, desperate for relevance, quietly complied.

[Palestinian resistance to colonialism](#)

Despite these attempts by colonial authorities to suppress Palestinian identity and presence, Palestinians have repeatedly exercised their right to resist colonialism.

Previous sections outlined how Palestinians resisted the British Mandate and the rise of Zionism, and the growth and militarisation of the movement for Palestinian liberation in the refugee camps, especially in the 1960s. This movement led to the growth and establishment of several Palestinian political factions and significant development in Palestinian political thought. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 to represent all Palestinian people across the world. Its goals and those of the factions represented within it were for the liberation of Palestine. It was eventually recognised globally as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, despite Western and Israeli attempts to undermine it and embolden Palestinian leadership that was more amenable to accepting Zionism. For years, it fulfilled this role, especially as Israel banned all political activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the establishment of political parties and even displays of national symbols such as the Palestinian flag. The PLO, therefore, served as a rallying call for Palestinians anywhere. With its leadership and factions mainly in exile, its operations, including armed resistance, were mainly limited to cross-border clashes from countries

neighbouring colonised Palestine. On a diplomatic level, its recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people was an achievement in and of itself, as it constituted a recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people. Gaining recognition as an anti-colonial struggle and forming alliances with other such struggles and post-colonial states enabled global diplomatic wins, such as the adoption of UN Resolution 3379, declaring Zionism to be a form of racism (this was later revoked in 1991 under US pressure and Israel setting the revocation as a pre-condition to entering the Madrid Peace Conference).

Palestinians in the occupied territories recognised the importance of subverting colonial rule but were unable to mount armed resistance during the early days of Israeli occupation. In the 1970s and 1980s, they established volunteer networks and popular committees to challenge colonial rule. These generally worked at a grassroots level, leveraging their strength from being rooted in communities. They organised local support systems for mutual aid and the protection of the vulnerable on the neighbourhood level. They established alternative schooling in community spaces, especially during prolonged periods of school closures, which affirmed Palestinian history and identity. These were also supported by broader organisations advocating for social goals, such as promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, children, and youth. Services and advocacy organisations were also set up for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, prisoners, and the wounded. Agricultural committees supported farmers in protecting and developing their land, while resistance committees coordinated efforts to disrupt the Israeli economy by boycotting Israeli products and supporting local products instead. Coordinating mechanisms disrupted the Israeli economy and military through general strikes and protests. Health committees were set up with the express aims of subverting the services of colonial authorities and promoting a holistic view of health (see the Health and Human Rights section for more detail).

The activities and influence of the popular committees peaked in the First Intifada (uprising), which began in 1987 in response to Israeli soldiers killing four Palestinian workers in Gaza by ramming them with their car. In addition to grassroots organising, the First Intifada was marked by protests and a campaign of civil disobedience, such as through widespread general strikes. These were powerful tools to disrupt the Israeli economy and its tools of authority over Palestinians, as they included Palestinians boycotting Israeli administration facilities and refusing to pay taxes under the slogan “no taxation without representation”. In 1988, Palestinian police officers and tax collectors resigned en masse from their posts.

Israeli Minister of Defense at the time, Yitzhak Rabin, led a brutal crackdown against the uprising. More than 1,000 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands were injured, with Israeli forces using live bullets, rubber-coated bullets, tear gas, and beatings. Rabin instigated the “broken bones” policy, in which Israeli commanders instructed soldiers to break the bones of Palestinian protesters as a deterrent. Many protest leaders were deported, in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Israel demolished hundreds of homes, installed round-the-clock curfews, conducted mass arrests, and cut off water and electricity from entire Palestinian areas. Rabin was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

As mentioned above, the Oslo Accords led to significant suppression of the movement for Palestinian liberation. However, since no significant progress has been made on the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people as a result of these agreements, the calm they brought did not last long. In 2000, the Second Intifada erupted, fuelled by continuing Israeli transgressions and a failure of the peace process to improve the lives of Palestinians. There was more armed resistance to the Israeli occupation in the Second Intifada compared to the First Intifada, in addition to protests. Following significant fragmentation brought about by Israeli and PA policies, popular resistance was much less effective during the Second Intifada, giving much more prominence to armed resistance. Israel once again inflicted severe violence against Palestinians, on top of the systemic violence of the occupation. Over 3,000 Palestinians were killed in addition to tens of thousands wounded. Israeli forces re-invaded all of the Palestinian towns they had evacuated in the 1990s, often imposing strict round-the-clock curfews. The city of Nablus was under curfew for over 100 days in the summer of 2003, with only a few hours break in curfew once every several days. Shops and cars were destroyed by the invading Israeli tanks, often indiscriminately, and hundreds of Palestinian houses were demolished.

The Palestinian national leadership's suppression of Palestinian resistance, and global collusion in imperialism and colonialism, have left a significantly weakened movement for Palestinian liberation. For a long time, Palestinian mobilisation was overly reliant on gaining sympathy in global, predominantly Western, circles, therefore adopting discourse that downplayed the Palestinian struggle's previously unequivocal demand for liberation. This led to the increased prominence of individual, liberal rights-based discourse, and relegated collective political demands. The perceived need to appeal to Western audiences also led to incessant insistence by Palestinians on their sole reliance on peaceful protest, forgoing their right to armed resistance. Despite this, there have been some significant pockets of non-violent resistance against land grabs by the Israeli military and settlers, such as in the villages of Bil'in, Ni'lín, and Nabi Saleh. These have attracted international solidarity activists and have frequently been commended for their peaceful nature, despite dozens of Palestinians suffering significant injuries at the hands of the Israeli military, with no protection offered or demanded. Another breakthrough was the call by Palestinian civil society in 2005 for the Boycott of Israeli goods and services, Divestment from companies benefiting from Israeli oppression, and Sanctions against Israeli state institutions. This has resonated widely and received increasing attention as it is increasingly recognised that Israel's settler colonialism has developed an Apartheid regime. This leads activists and commentators to draw parallels with the movement to boycott Apartheid South Africa.

This is what made 2021 remarkable, as it marked a reversal in the discourse and parameters of the debate around the Palestinian struggle. Following decades of dilution of the demands for Palestinian liberation and self-determination, and an increase in neoliberal discourse even within Palestinian society, there has been a return of liberation discourse. This discourse recognises the shared history of the Palestinian people, who have all been subjected to settler colonialism and then fragmented into superficially different, but in reality deeply linked, struggles. This has been accompanied by a renewed recognition of the indispensable role of resistance in the Palestinian struggle and the interconnectedness of the Palestinian struggle with other struggles against colonialism and imperialism. Globally, alliances have been revitalised between the Palestinian and other struggles for liberation

and against colonialism and imperialism, such as with the movement for Black liberation, Colombian activists rising up against authoritarian rule and militarism, and climate justice activists.

Timeline of key events

1897	The first Zionist Congress, Basel – the beginning of the political Zionist movement that led to the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine
1914	World War I starts, during which the British would defeat the Ottoman Empire and start their rule of Palestine, “the British Mandate of Palestine”
1915	The Anglo-Arab agreements, in which the British promised Arab independence in return for an Arab revolt against the Ottomans
1917	The Balfour Declaration, promising the Zionist movement “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”
1917	The Sykes-Picot Agreement, determining the control and influence of the British and French over Palestine and surrounding areas
1919	The First Palestinian Arab Congress, asserting calls for Arab independence and rejecting Zionism
1929	The Buraq Uprising, with Palestinian Arabs rioting against British rule due to their support of the Zionist movement
1936	The Great Palestinian Revolt, demanding Arab independence and an end to Zionist immigration
1947	The British announce their plans to withdraw from Palestine and hand over its administration to the United Nations
1947	The adoption of UN Resolution 181, recommending the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state
1948	The Nakba, ‘the Catastrophe’, the ethnic cleansing of 800,000 Palestinians by Zionist militias and the establishment of the State of Israel
1948	Palestinian citizens of Israel are placed under martial law, consolidating their dispossession
1964	The establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization
1967	The Naksa, ‘the Setback’, leading to the occupation of the remainder of Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, and the start of settlement-building in all these areas
1967	The annexation of East Jerusalem
1975	The adoption of UN Resolution 3379, declaring Zionism as a form of racism
1981	The annexation of the Golan Heights
1987	The First Intifada breaks out
1993	The signing of the Oslo Accords and the introduction of the Palestinian Authority, responsible for self-administration in the occupied Palestinian territories
2000	The Second Intifada breaks out
2005	Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip
2007	The start of the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip
2008	A major aerial and ground assault on Gaza
2012	A major aerial assault on Gaza
2014	A major aerial and ground assault on Gaza
2018	The Great March of Return protests in Gaza
2021	The Unity Intifada breaks out

Key UN Resolutions

UN Agency	Resolution	Year	Decision
UNGA*	181	1947	Recommending the partition of Palestine into an Arab Palestinian state and a Jewish Palestinian state
UNGA	194	1948	Affirming the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes
UNSC*	242	1967	Calling for Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 territories
UNGA	2253	1967	Declaring Israel's changes to Jerusalem's status as invalid
UNGA	2546	1969	Condemning Israel's human rights violations in occupied territories
UNGA	2792	1971	Stresses the inalienable rights of Palestinian refugees and condemns Israeli measures against them
UNSC	338	1973	Calling for a ceasefire in the October War and negotiations for a "durable and just peace in the Middle East"
UNGA	3236	1974	Recognising the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the Palestinians' right to self-determination, national independence, and sovereignty
UNGA	3246	1974	Affirming the legitimacy of armed resistance of oppressed people
UNGA	3379	1975	Declaring Zionism as a form of racism
UNGA	33/71	1978	Calling for an arms embargo against Israel and expressing concern about Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons
UNGA	33/183-D	1979	Demands that Israel end all its collaboration with Apartheid South Africa
UNSC	478	1980	Condemns Israel's annexation of Jerusalem
UNSC	497	1981	Condemns Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights
UNSC	498	1981	Calls on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon

UNGA = United Nations General Assembly. UNSC = United Nations Security Council.

This is in addition to a large number of UN Resolutions, by the General Assembly as well as the Security Council, condemning several of Israel's violations over the years. These include settlement-building, assassinations, and bombings against Palestinian and Arab targets in several countries, deportation of hundreds of Palestinians including prominent figures, and its repeated non-compliance with previous Resolutions.

Health and Human Rights

Systemic violence

The Historical Background section of this report outlines a political system that inflicts systemic violence of a settler colonial regime on Palestinians. This violence inevitably extends to health, whether considering the social determinants of health or policies that undermine, neglect, and even attack Palestinians' health services.

Palestinian citizens of Israel

As described in the Historical Background section, several of Israel's founding laws discriminate against the Palestinians who were able to stay within Israel's 1948 borders during the Nakba. These include basic laws covering citizenship and land ownership as well as the imposition of martial law between 1948 and 1966 on Palestinians in Israel.

Several other laws limit the exercise of political, economic, and social rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel. For example, the Basic Law of The Knesset (1958), through an amendment in 1985, bans candidates who deny the legitimacy of the Jewish nature of the State of Israel, a position that is most likely to be taken by a Palestinian citizen. The "Nakba Law" (2011) gives the Israeli government the authority to reduce state funding to institutions that commemorate the Nakba (or Israel's "Independence Day") as a day of mourning. These laws severely restrict the political representation and freedom of speech of many Palestinians. The "National Planning and Building Law" (Limitation of Water, Electricity, and Telephone) (1965) prohibits national utility companies from providing services to areas that are not issued building permits by local authorities. Israel's policies to push Palestinians out of certain areas, such as the Naqab, lead to unrecognised villages which are never able to obtain permits or official recognition despite many existing since before the establishment of Israel, meaning that many are lacking basic services such as water and electricity. The "Ban on Family Unification" (Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law) (Temporary Order) bans the unification of families made up of a spouse from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) and a spouse who is an Israeli citizen, a situation that is almost exclusive to Palestinians. Israeli laws therefore even limit Palestinians' ability to lead a normal family life.

Similar patterns of discrimination are imposed in education. Educational benefits are offered to discharged soldiers through the Benefits for Discharged Soldiers amendment to the "Absorption of Discharged Soldiers Law" (2008). These benefits include full tuition for the first year of academic education, a year of free preparatory academic education, and student housing benefits, among other benefits, to soldiers who serve in "priority areas". Palestinian Arab citizens are exempt from serving in the army, while conscription is mandatory for Jewish citizens. Education in Palestinian areas is under-resourced, especially in Bedouin areas which completely lack any high schools. Overall, state funding for Jewish students is around three times as much as for Palestinian students, leading to fewer facilities, larger class sizes, and poor infrastructure.

The deliberate neglect extends to health services. One-third of Palestinian patients report an inability to purchase medication. For Palestinian communities, the average distance to a health facility is 22 kilometres, compared with 14 kilometres for Jewish communities. Even

when health facilities are available, they are faced with significant shortages of personnel and equipment. All this leads to much poorer health outcomes among Palestinian citizens of Israel compared to Jewish citizens. Muslims in Israel, who make up the vast majority of Palestinian citizens of Israel, have an infant mortality rate of 7.5 per thousand births, compared to 2.7 among Jews. The life expectancy of Palestinian citizens is 79 years, compared to 82.7 for Jewish citizens. Moreover, the gap in health outcomes has been widening.

The Occupied Palestinian Territories

The severe restrictions imposed by Israel's military occupation have clear ramifications on Palestinians' lives. Loss of land and restrictions on freedom of movement, as well as exploitative economic policies severely limit Palestinian economic development. Around 15% of Palestinians in the West Bank and 46% in the Gaza Strip are unemployed. 14% in the West Bank and 53% in the Gaza Strip live in poverty. Poor basic infrastructure, including an inequitable distribution of water, power outages, and the fragmentation of Palestinian land into poorly-connected Bantustans, also inflict a severe economic toll on Palestinians and have ramifications for the provision of basic services such as sanitation, health, and education. On top of this, Israel does not enforce or monitor environmental regulations stringently in West Bank settlements, from which industrial pollution, solid waste, and wastewater flow into Palestinian areas and lead to significant health harms. 97% of Gaza's water is undrinkable and nearly a quarter of Gaza's population lives in households that are not connected to the sewage network. The increasing encroachment by the Israeli military and settlers on Palestinian agricultural land, and other policies leading to the development of the agriculture sector increase Palestinians' reliance on Israeli products and threaten food security for Palestinians. The siege on Gaza, ongoing since 2007, compounds all of this violence. A United Nations report warned that Gaza may become unliveable by 2020. The Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian Territories reported in 2018 that "the state of unlive-ability is upon us."

It is also obvious to observe the poor development of the health sector, which was neglected and de-developed by Israel. The Palestinian Authority's health system is so under-equipped that 56% of the Ministry of Health's budget between 2013 and 2018 was spent on external referrals to Jordan, Egypt, and Israel (18.6%), and the Palestinian private sector (37.4%). On top of this, the Israeli military turns down 40% of medical permit applications from the Gaza Strip and 18% from the West Bank. Patients applying for permits are particularly vulnerable, with over 10% dying within six months of their application. Those denied permits are 1.5 times more likely to die in the years following the application refusal compared to those with approved permit applications. Moreover, companion permits are denied to 1 in 5 applicants, meaning patients (including children and other vulnerable patients) often access treatment alone. Israel also imposes access barriers within the West Bank, especially for Palestinians in Area C. Palestinian communities are frequently prevented from accessing health services, for example by the Israeli military blocking the entry of mobile health clinic teams from entering the targeted area. Israel prevents medicines, medical equipment, and fuel from entering Gaza, which leads to frequent stock-outs and power outages.

Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, these policies inflict a severe toll on Palestinians' health. In Area C, 16% of Palestinian children under five are stunted, as are 23% of children in Bedouin areas, and 19% of children who have faced forced displacement. The background rate of stunting for all children in oPt is 10%. Stunting is a particularly important marker as it is linked to lifelong physical health, cognitive and economic harms. Life expectancy in the occupied Palestinian territories is 74, compared to 83 in the rest of colonised Palestine, and the gap is growing. The maternal mortality rate in oPt is 27 compared to 3 in Israel. Similar patterns are reproduced whichever health indicators are considered. The comprehensive report by Medical Aid for Palestinians, linked below, provides in-depth research into many of the health determinants and outcomes in oPt.

East Jerusalem

The Historical Background section explained the legal frameworks which discriminate against Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Their status as permanent residents of Israel and not citizens, and the laws associated with this status, frequently leads to forcible transfer. Planning laws and their inequitable enforcement lead to house demolitions and other forms of expulsion and housing insecurity.

Jerusalem's Palestinian residents are also discriminated against economically, politically, socially, and culturally. As they are permanent residents, not citizens, Jerusalem Palestinians do not have political representation in the Israeli parliament. Economic de-development of the Palestinian economy in Jerusalem is even worse than that of the rest of the West Bank, leading to stark inequalities in the city; 77% of Palestinian households in Jerusalem live under the poverty line, compared to 25% of Israeli Jewish families. Palestinian households receive disproportionately low municipal services, including key infrastructure such as garbage disposal, water, and electricity. Even the Palestinian cultural scene faces a significant crackdown; recently, the heads of the three foremost Palestinian cultural centres in Jerusalem were detained and taken in for questioning, while the centres they run were ransacked and had documents and hardware confiscated. The effects of the separation barrier are particularly stark for Palestinians in Jerusalem; the wall has cut off around 90,000 Palestinians who live around Jerusalem from the city. This includes Palestinians living in dense areas such as Kufr Aqab and Shuafat refugee camp, to which neither the PA nor Israel extends basic infrastructure and services.

The pattern of discrimination and systemic violence is, yet again, replicated in health services, with severe neglect of Palestinians' health. There are 1.8 public mother and child clinics per 100,000 population in Palestinian areas of Jerusalem, compared to 4.4 per 100,000 in Jewish areas of the city. Attacks on healthcare are also seen in Jerusalem. In 2021 alone, Israeli soldiers invaded Al-Maqassed Hospital and prevented Red Crescent ambulances from accessing the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound to treat injured protesters.

Refugees

5.7 million refugees are registered with UNRWA out of a total estimated 7.9 million refugees. Around 2.3 million refugees live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, exposing them to the same systemic violence and discrimination imposed on other Palestinians there. On top of this, the fact that, 74 years after refugee camps were first established, refugees have still not been granted the right of return, means that those living in refugee camps live in

environments that were never intended or expected to last this long. The population density in refugee camps is therefore extremely high and basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, water, and sewage systems, is inadequate as it was not designed to last this long or cater to as many people as it currently does.

Refugees also face legal discrimination wherever they are. In oPt, refugees have fewer political rights than non-refugee Palestinians. In Lebanon, there are laws restricting the work and education Palestinians can pursue. These were only relaxed in 2021 to allow Palestinian refugees to work in sectors such as health and engineering, but some limits remain. Palestinian refugees have been disproportionately affected by the war in Syria over the last 10 years, with over 100,000 displaced externally, mostly to Jordan or Lebanon, and around 280,000 displaced internally. The war's disproportionate impact on refugees has forced 90% of refugees in Syria to live in poverty and 40% to be in protracted displacement.

[Escalations of violence](#)

On top of the daily harms inflicted by the systemic violence of Israel's settler colonial regime, there are also frequent severe escalations of violence. The key escalations were outlined in the Historical Background section; in addition to the major wars before 1980, these were the First Intifada from 1987, the Second Intifada from 2000, the Great March of Return protests in 2018, and the assaults on Gaza in 2008/9, 2012, 2014 and 2021. Israeli forces have killed at least 4,300 Palestinians in Gaza during escalations of violence since 2008, and at least 4,000 Palestinians during the 1987 and 2000 Intifadas. There are also frequent escalations of violence in localised areas, the most notable examples of which are Jerusalem, Naqab, Beita, Ni'lin, Bil'in, and Nabi Saleh. Israeli forces have shot dead at least 10 Palestinians from Beita since protests there started in May 2021 and Israeli forces and settlers injured at least 1,500 in Jerusalem during the April-June 2021 protests.

Through this intense violence on top of the systemic violence, Israel has harmed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. In 2012, it was estimated that, since 1967, 40% of the male Palestinians and 20% of female Palestine had been at one point imprisoned by Israel. The death, injury, and disability caused by this violence are immeasurable but some indicators illustrate some of its impacts. Despite a young population overall, 2.1% of the Palestinian population in oPt have disabilities, around a fifth of whom are children. 32% of children with disabilities are illiterate and only half of the children with disabilities are enrolled in education. 54% of Palestinian boys and 47% of Palestinian girls (6-12 years old) are reported to have emotional and/or behavioural disorders. Over half of Gaza's children face post-traumatic stress disorder, although Palestinian scholars and activists often challenge this assessment, considering that the trauma is ongoing.

[Attacks on health services](#)

Israeli forces frequently flaunt international conventions and laws by attacking health services and personnel in Palestine. In 2018, the WHO recorded 369 health attacks in the Gaza Strip alone and 63 health attacks in the West Bank. Israel killed three health workers and injured over 500 during the Great March of Return protests in Gaza. A UN-commissioned inquiry concluded that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that these attacks on health workers were intentional. During each of the aerial assaults on the Gaza Strip, health services have been targeted. During the latest assault, Israel destroyed the

road leading to the main hospital, killed two of Gaza's most eminent doctors, destroyed the only COVID-19 testing laboratory, and bombed an MSF clinic. Despite constituting flagrant violations of numerous moral and legal standards, Israel has not been held accountable for any of these attacks.

Health as a tool of resistance

Health has been used as a tool of resistance to support the national resistance that Palestinians have undertaken over the years. This was particularly the case during the height of the Palestinian revolution in the 1970s and 1980s. Palestinians shared an understanding that colonial tools and authorities, including health services provided by Israel, would, at best, neglect Palestinians' health and wellbeing or, at worst, serve to entrench the subjugation of Palestinians. Palestinian resistance in the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, focused on undermining colonial authorities and building an alternative governance apparatus. A decentralised network of grassroots movements was formed to address different aspects of Israel's oppression of Palestinians. This started with a voluntary movement that supported the marginalised, vulnerable and poor, such as with food aid and fixing broken infrastructure. This developed into more professionalised committees. The most notable examples of these are the agricultural and health committees.

Four health committees were established between 1979 and 1989. They aimed to address the neglect and systemic violence of Israel's colonial systems and to challenge the traditional paradigm of paternalistic, over-medicalised services concentrated in urban centres. They promoted a holistic view of health that took the political, economic, and social contexts of patients into consideration, and therefore focused in particular on providing public health and primary healthcare services to marginalised communities. All but one of the health committees promoted volunteerism as the main source of human resources, with the aim of mobilising the volunteer base politically. This movement was linked to similar struggles around the world. The International People's Health Council, one of PHM's founding organisations, was co-founded by one of the health committees. Shatha Odeh, a member of PHM's Global Steering Council, imprisoned by Israel since July 2021, is the director of another one of the health committees.

Israel moved towards outlawing such forms of activism. In 1988, Israel banned all popular committees for "undermining the Israeli government apparatus and establishing an alternative apparatus in its place," which was the explicit aim of most of the activists involved. Volunteers and staff faced a crackdown on their activities, with frequent arrests and deportations of personnel, and attacks on their services and facilities. There has been a recent upsurge in the criminalisation of Palestinian civil society activism, which will be discussed in the next section which covers the crackdown on the Health Work Committee.

The Health Work Committee and Shatha Odeh

The Health Work Committee

The Health Work Committee (HWC) was established in 1985, around the same time as several other grassroots associations of Palestinian healthcare professionals who sought to frame health as an emancipatory tool for the Palestinian people. The founding aim of these organisations was to build an independent Palestinian health system as an alternative to the Israeli colonial authorities' chronic neglect of and underinvestment in the health system for Palestinians. They positioned themselves as part of a broader national liberation strategy, rejecting both colonial authorities and the traditional healthcare establishment, which they saw as contributing to the neoliberal model of healthcare. They translated this understanding into a focus on prioritising primary care, preventive medicine, and health promotion services, which were decentralised to reach the most underserved communities. There was a particular focus on extending services to marginalised populations, such as people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, women, and children, while involving stakeholders in the planning of these services.

The foundational intellectual and political understanding which led to the establishment of HWC remains important for its work today. For example, HWC provides medical services through mobile clinics in the H2 area in Hebron and Masafer Yatta, two severely neglected areas that are marginalised politically, economically, and socially. In Beit Sahour, the Elderly Club was established to provide medical and social services with the direct involvement of the local community, which has fostered a sense of ownership by those who use the service. Reproductive health services are grounded in a rights-based approach that ensures that service users are empowered with an understanding of the social, political, and legal context around the services provided.

These activities are underpinned by HWC's vision of "A Free Palestinian Society Enjoying its Health and Development Rights Based on Equity and Justice (Social Justice)." Its activities include providing key health services in neglected areas, such as general medicine clinics with a focus on a diabetes programme, a women's health programme, a well-baby programme, and medical laboratory services. It also provides broader social services to address the needs of the communities it serves, including rehabilitation services, youth development projects, a nursery, and a community centre. HWC, therefore, ensures that it addresses the urgent medical need of marginalised communities while building a movement for the improvement of these communities' health and wellbeing in a holistic way.

HWC has faced an escalating crackdown on its activities over the last two years. In retrospect, the repression of HWC's activities can be seen as the start of a wider crackdown on Palestinian civil society.

Timeline of violations against the Health Work Committee

2019: Israeli forces assaulted and [arrested](#) the financial and administrative director Walid Hanatsheh – Israeli soldiers broke down the door to his home, vandalised his home, assaulted him, and arrested him under accusations of participating in military operations and funding a banned organisation

2019, 2020, and twice in 2021: Israeli soldiers stormed HWC headquarters, vandalising the office and confiscating materials, hard drives, and documents on each of these occasions

January 2020: The Israeli occupation authorities designated HWC an “illegal organisation”, without making this information public or even sharing it with HWC

March 2021: HWC accountant Tayseer Abu Sharbak was arrested, under the charge of participating in an illegal organisation

April 2021: Juana Ruiz Sánchez, HWC project coordinator, was arrested

June 2021: Israeli forces shut HWC’s offices with a notice pinned to the door announcing its closure for “security reasons”

July 2021: Shatha Odeh, HWC general director, was arrested

October 2021: Six more Palestinian civil society organisations were banned. This was then found to be linked to the suppression of HWC

February 2022: Juana Ruiz Sánchez was released

May 2022: Shatha Odeh is sentenced by an Israeli military court to 16 months in prison, a 30,000 NIS fine (~US\$ 9,000), and a suspended sentence of 5 years, on the condition of not providing health services.

[The arrest of Shatha Odeh](#)

On 7 July 2021, 15-20 Israeli soldiers stormed HWC general director Shatha Odeh’s home at 2 AM. They initially questioned her family as to her whereabouts, claiming to want to speak to her in connection to a car accident involving a car belonging to HWC. After identifying her, Israeli soldiers claimed they would call for a member of her family to pick her up the next morning and pretended to be sympathetic to the fact she was an older woman and that they would “take care of her”. No warrant was issued and she was not called in for interrogation before Israeli forces stormed her house. During the first 19 days of her arrest, she was held without charge. On 26 July, 5 charges were filed against Shatha:

1. Holding a position in an illegal organisation;
2. Being present at an illegal public event on 15 May 2019 (a public memorial service of Palestinian politician Ribhi Mhanna, which was attended by many Palestinian public figures);
3. Being responsible for the transfer of illegitimate funds into the West Bank;
4. Obtaining funds through fraudulent means;
5. Forging documents.

These claims were also used in a report prepared by Israeli intelligence to suppress the work of the HWC. The report claimed that HWC’s work constituted providing services to the PFLP. Examples of this work included providing training and education to women and youth on social and economic conditions relating to health, under the pretext that some of the beneficiaries of these services were members of the PFLP. Such accusations resulted in the

designation of HWC as an illegal organisation in January 2020, although this decision was kept secret and only uncovered incidentally during the interrogation of HWC project coordinator Juana Ruiz Sánchez in Spring 2021. The report detailing these accusations was sent to EU officials, claiming that funding by EU governments to HWC was being channelled to terrorist organisations and resulted in the withdrawal and cessation of funding from several donors. Much of this report was based on the testimonies and interrogation of two former accountants of HWC, Said Abdat, and Amro Hamuda, who were fired by HWC for suspected financial malpractice. Their testimonies are unsubstantiated by any evidence, were selectively edited, and are suspected to have been obtained under duress and possible torture and ill-treatment³. The testimonies of Abdat and Hamuda were also extrapolated based on claims of “common knowledge” to designate six more Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organisations in October 2021⁴.

Shatha was sentenced on 12 May 2022 by Ofer military court to a prison sentence of 16 months, a fine of 30,000 NIS (~US\$ 9,000), and a suspended sentence of 5 years, on the condition of not providing any health services after she is released. This clearly points to Israel’s attempts to criminalise the provision of much-needed equitable health services that are rooted in a belief in justice and in centring communities. The sentence was handed down after Shatha spent 10 months in Damon Prison, from which she underwent several military court hearings. The first seven hearings were postponed for various avoidable reasons, such as the prosecution not handing over the investigation files to the defence team (at least 4 months after being ordered to do so) and initial delays in the filing of charges. Court proceedings take place in Hebrew, without adequate translation into Arabic for Shatha, despite Arabic having “a special status in the State”. Even the charges were not adequately translated when initially presented to her. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has been used to justify ill-treatment, such as the banning of family visits to Palestinian prisoners and court hearings taking place with the detainee only allowed to join via video conference.

One of the main avenues for advocacy recently within PHM’s war and conflict thematic circle has been Shatha Odeh’s case. PHM’s involvement in Shatha’s case has allowed it to resonate beyond the usual networks of Palestinian civil society organisers. PHM and its networks have broadened the reach of the campaign to free Shatha to health unions, advocacy organisations, activist groups, and international organisations. The petition has had a broad reach with organisational and individual signatories from across the globe while engaging with Viva Salud facilitated a briefing to European Union officials and Belgian workers’ unions. This has been particularly important considering the disempowerment of local Palestinian civil society networks – the HWC had already been closed when Shatha was

³ A [comprehensive report](#) by +972 magazine details the problems with these testimonies.

⁴ In October 2021, the Israeli Ministry of Defence designated six leading Palestinian civil society organisations as “terror organisations”. Such a designation puts in jeopardy the funds, facilities, services and any person who engages with or has engaged with a designated organisation. This includes present and past employees and contractors. The six organisations included in the October 2021 decision are: Addameer (prisoner support and human rights organisation), Al-Haq (human rights organisation), Defence for Children International (human rights organisation focusing on children), Bisan Center for Research and Development (research and advocacy organisation), the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees (feminist organisation dedicated to supporting the social, economic and political rights of women), and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (supports farmers especially in the most marginalised and at-risk areas).

arrested and the Palestinian NGOs Network (which Shatha chairs) is overstretched and many of its member organisations face regular repression by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

PHM responded by dedicating human resources, event time, and digital space to elevate the Palestinian voice in this case. This includes a taskforce that has planned and implemented a focused advocacy strategy, supported by regular evaluation both of the specific events surrounding the case and of the overarching political context. PHM and the taskforce have also supported Shatha's family and others working on her case by planning various engagements and advising on discourse and talking points.

Although larger health-related organisations have been reached, they have at most expressed that they are monitoring Shatha's situation without recognising the political nature of her arrest and the closure of HWC. For example, World Health Organization officials have privately stated that they are monitoring the situation but have not taken any active steps, which can include calling on Israel to release Shatha or desist from its closure of HWC. The International Committee of the Red Cross has only called for improvements in the conditions of Shatha's arrest, and MSF in Palestine and the Spain headquarters have not made any public statements on the case after being contacted.

The plan is to continue the existing campaigns, especially in trying to reach a broad audience across the globe. So far, tactics have included webinars targeting various audiences and social media storms such as one on 10 December, Human Rights Day, for which hundreds of activists sent in photos of solidarity with Shatha Odeh.

The Role of PHM

The People's Health Movement, through its founding document, the People's Health Charter, recognises that "inequality, poverty, exploitation, violence and injustice are at the root of ill-health and the deaths of poor and marginalised people". It also "demand[s] the end of occupation as one of the most destructive tools to human dignity." Colonialism, such as in Palestine, is an inherently violent and exploitative process that leads to inequality, poverty, and injustice, and of which military occupation is one of the manifestations. Allying with the Palestinian struggle against colonialism is therefore aligned with the core values of PHM.

This allyship has deep historical and practical roots. The People's Health Charter and PHM's work, in general, are deeply political. The education offered by the International People's Health University focuses on the role of activists in organising, planning, and sharing resources, recognising that health is the product of political systems and that therefore improving health requires acting on these political systems. Two of the founding member organisations of PHM (the International People's Health Council and the Asian Community Health Action Network) were active in supporting struggles for national liberation, including in Palestine. One of the co-founding organisations of the International People's Health Council (IPHC) was a Palestinian civil society organisation, the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, which was established with similar aims to the HWC. A key international meeting for the IPHC took place in Palestine in the early 1990s which included visits to the health centres run by civil society organisations for marginalised and remote communities which were neglected by the Israeli military and medical establishment.

A broader link of Palestine with global movements for health is the grip of imperialism on people in the global south. Features and effects of imperialism include militarisation, extractivism, and the suppression of people's economic and political rights, all to serve global north capitalist interests. Global north support for Zionist settler colonialism is one of the representations of imperialism in the Middle East, which naturally allies with imperialist interests in the rest of the global south. These alliances and systems have material impacts on people's lives all over the world; Israel is the sixth-largest exporter of arms globally and has supported extractive industries in Africa.

Remaining grounded in local struggles allows us to understand and remain conscious of the material impact on communities directly facing imperialist violence. In addition, although a truly global movement is necessary to tackle imperialism's global reach and effects, the political power of such a movement can only be derived from communities coming together, organising and articulating demands, then building local and global alliances. There are also different contexts, different histories, and different mechanisms in each of the local manifestations, which lead to different effects, requiring different responses. This ranges from preserving presence and culture to recovering plants with health properties to exercising resistance to repel colonial and imperial violence.

The unique way in which PHM works is based on PHM's understanding of this interplay between local and global movement-building and solidarity. PHM ties together deeply

rooted community work with global representation. Community work is considered central to the necessary political change to improve people's lives, reflecting a belief that it is local movements that can ultimately shift the power balance to change discourse and politics. This goes for Palestine as well as other social justice movements around the world, where local resistance to imperialism should drive international solidarity, not the other way round. For PHM, these grassroots movements span different countries, regions, and continents, and come from or are embedded within communities affected by the issues PHM campaigns on. This grounding of PHM activists facilitates genuine empowerment of these communities, especially when combined with capacity-building and campaigning at the grassroots. Different movements can then learn from and act in solidarity with each other at a regional or global level. This happens through direct partnerships between different constituents and affiliates of PHM, and through representation in the global corridors of power. A key example of this are the partnerships between social movements in the global south, such as between activists in Palestine and in the Philippines, where Palestinian activists travel to the Philippines for activists from both countries to share experiences with, learn from, and inspire each other. This exercise of solidarity allows movements to catalyse each other and encourages the mutual development of their respective movements.

Another way to express such solidarity is through healthcare workers being present from around the world to provide testimony. In Palestine, many healthcare workers, including PHM activists, have travelled to Shifa and other hospitals in the Gaza Strip, especially during escalations of violence. This has allowed them to provide testimony, which has ensured that the experiences of Palestinian healthcare workers are heard across the world. Finally, PHM activists also participate in their local networks' solidarity activities, such as global protests and boycotts. It is important that such partnerships are entered as equal partners and that solidarity remains focused on those who solidarity is for. In PHM, this is maintained through the mutual belief in the core principles of PHM and a common understanding of its frameworks for analysing power dynamics and their effects on health. On a global level, presence and lobbying in the corridors of power, such as World Health Assemblies and Conferences of the Parties, draw attention to the work of PHM and elevate grassroots movements.

The unsurprising weakness of global solidarity, especially with Palestine, is that expressions of solidarity peak around particularly violent flashpoints, for example the recent aggressions on the Gaza Strip in 2008/9, 2014, and 2021, which were better documented than previous escalations of violence and the systemic violence Israel inflicts. There are many reasons for this pattern. One of the avoidable reasons is treating Palestine as an exceptional situation that is to be addressed separately from other manifestations of contemporary power dynamics. While it is important to recognise that there are some exceptional circumstances and features of each struggle, including the Palestinian struggle, activists highlight that it is important to frame the Palestinian struggle as an example of contemporary manifestations of imperialism and colonialism, albeit a particularly sharp one. Such an understanding of the struggle can transcend expressions of sympathy during the worst times of violence, to focus on underlying power structures, which require relentless organising.

It is important to highlight that there has always been an understanding of and advocacy around the impact of global power dynamics on people's living and health conditions. The specific rhetoric around this has varied, however. For example, propaganda aiming to smear and suppress anti-imperialism activists led to anti-imperialist discourse being associated with communism and even terrorism. An understanding of the role of imperialism in shaping global power dynamics, and by extension people's lives and health, was therefore suppressed. Even activists and communities that continued that maintained this understanding often had to use alternative discourse. This current has been one of the drivers of the increasing use of a rights-based framework in health advocacy and broader political activism, as rights-based discourse was universally accepted. More recently, there has been a return to some degree of anti-imperialist discourse. This is primarily the result of populations suffering the consequences of imperialism shifting power to be able to set the discourse, in addition to the global movement for health justice educating health professionals and the public about the links between global systems of power and health. This necessarily goes beyond human rights discourse, which as a universalised idea has been increasingly co-opted by dominant neoliberal paradigms, and which can often be lacking when advocating for collective political demands of communities.

The thematic circle on war and conflict has been particularly catalysed by governments' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which have featured criminalisation of non-compliance with regulations, and militarised response in some cases. As seen in over-policing in general, this has often been used as a cover to suppress popular organising. States of emergency have been declared in many places. In Palestine, this was used by the Palestinian Authority to suppress demonstrations against its political repression. In the Philippines, such regulations were used to ban all protest. In the United Kingdom, the police violently suppressed a vigil and made several arrests of women who had gathered to mourn and protest the murder of a woman by a police officer, who had used his authority to lure her into his police car. This fits into a broader context of states suppressing civil society organisations, whether working on social, economic, and cultural issues which affect health, or directly providing health services. In Nicaragua, this included the outlawing of 45 civil society organisations in the space of one month in 2021, including at least 15 medical or community health organisations. The head of one of the CSOs was deported to Costa Rica. A similar pattern of curtailing civil society space has been observed in the Philippines, with elections coming up, curtailing the space CSOs provide for communities to organise.

The importance of organisations such as PHM is therefore obvious. Global problems, including imperialism and colonialism, need global solutions, especially since oppressive systems around the world empower each other. This makes it important for those fighting against such systems to form alliances for a movement for global justice. PHM's clear principles, combined with its broad and deep reach, make it well-situated to be a leader in such a movement.

Recommendations

Health justice activists are perfectly situated to recognise, educate and act on the interconnectedness of different struggles against imperialism. In particular, PHM activists recognise the value of working at different levels to promote the liberation of all people. Some suggestions for actions that PHM activists can take are as follows:

PHM members must ensure that their work, activism, and study are deeply rooted in the needs of the communities around them;

PHM members must commit to educating themselves and those around them about the role of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in challenging health injustice;

PHM members, Chapters, and PHM Global must centre the voices of the oppressed; they must use their available resources and platforms to empower the marginalised and oppressed to develop and use their own language to describe their struggle and articulate their demands;

PHM members, Chapters, and PHM Global must heed global calls for solidarity from oppressed people; this includes committing to and promoting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement;

PHM Chapters and PHM Global should partner with other organisations dedicated to the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, to make clear the link between health and other social justice issues in the context of imperialism and colonialism;

PHM Global should continue to link different members and chapters from around the world for effective collaboration, particularly to promote South-South solidarity and organising;

PHM Global should continue to lend its voice to the oppressed, marginalised, and silenced.

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Recommended further resources

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