

**The Palestine Liberation Organization**

***Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon***

***The Refugee Affairs Department***

**1998**

The Palestinian migration to Lebanon started between 1947 and 1948 as one of the results of the Zionist-Arab conflict, the establishment of the State of Israel and the dispersion of the majority of the Palestinian people (80,000 to 100,000) to various parts of the world, especially the neighboring Arab countries. These included Lebanon, which, at that time hosted around 120,000 refugees; the number later rose, due to natural growth, to 359,000 Palestinian refugees, according to the public figures of UNRWA for 1997.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live under very difficult political, economic and social conditions, with ramifications and negative impacts that affect their daily life. Moreover, these conditions urge the refugees to look elsewhere for citizenship. There are also indicators that point towards certain trends in conduct and practices that should not be encouraged.

Many factors play a part in the lives of Palestinian refugees that make their lives burdensome, mainly lack of security, the increasing rate of unemployment, the soaring rise in the cost of living and the decrease in the level of services, in particular educational and health services. In addition, there are psychological pressures and the constant uncertainty of their future and fate, especially in light of the legal and political situation in Lebanon, which deprives them of many public and political rights; they are also deprived of the minimum social and economic rights.

Since the Nakba fifty years ago, Palestinians have experienced terrible political conditions; the main indicators are the following:

A- The consecutive tragic political developments and events, in addition to the wars that accompanied those events, and their impact on the refugees. Following the exodus of Palestinians from Palestine to the refugee camps, there were serious attempts to exploit the difficult political and economic conditions and the frustrated psychological conditions of the refugees to impose projects of resettlement and eviction and to grant them other types of citizenship. The United States, in coordination with parties in the UNRWA, was one of the main and active countries in this endeavor.

B- When the armed struggle escalated in Lebanon, Israel resorted to random shelling of all refugee camps with various weapons, thus inflicting partial or complete damage to camps while several thousands of civilians, including women and children, were killed.

C- Following the departure of the PLO and Palestinian factions from Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, according to the Philip Habeeb Agreement, there were attempts to control the camps and sustain the suffering of the refugees due to the continuation of house demolitions and arrests.

### **The Palestinian Term of Reference / The relationship with the Republic of Lebanon**

The first official Palestinian term of reference was formulated following the decision by the Arab League to declare the establishment of the PLO in 1964. In the same year, the PLO opened an office in Beirut to care for the Palestinians there and to follow up their cases with the competent parties in Lebanon. However, the office could not perform its duties because of the emergency laws. The Palestinian apparatus was banned from any political, media, or trade union or any popular activities in the camps. The office was turned into a diplomatic commission that exercised its role as stipulated in the protocols of embassies.

In 1969, and following the armed clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian guerillas who erected military bases in the south, the martyr Kamal Junblat called for recognizing the Palestinian resistance and supporting it through allowing it to use killing against the Israeli occupation in Lebanese territories. Disagreements increased between the several parties in the Lebanese authorities, which led to the intervention of the late president Gamal Abdul Naser who handled the situation by holding what was known as the "Cairo Agreement" between the Lebanese authorities and the PLO. The agreement granted the Palestinians the right to form the "Higher Political Committee" as a term of reference for Palestinian affairs in Lebanon, along with a popular committee and an "armed struggle" headquarters, or Palestinian police, in each camp. Thus, in 1948, and for the first time, a

Palestinian party that was recognized by the Lebanese government established an administration for refugee affairs.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in a destructive war that forced the Palestinians to accept the so-called "Philip Habeeb" Agreement, named after the US mediator who sought to halt the Israeli aggression in exchange for organizing the departure of the PLO leadership, fighters and apparatuses from Lebanon. In one of its articles, the Philip Habeeb Agreement stipulated the formation of a committee to become the term of reference to discuss the remaining Palestinian presence in Lebanon. Later, the committee was neutralized by the Lebanese party, which arrested some of its members.

After the end of the war against the camps, the PLO worked to reactivate its role in Lebanon, thus constituting the "Palestinian National Action Leadership" consisting of all PLO factions. This leadership became the Palestinian reference in Lebanon at all levels and in all political, economic, military and other fields. Basic departments were activated to provide urgent services to the camps. The Refugee Affairs Department was responsible for the infrastructure, such as digging water wells and extending water pipe lines, installing electric generators and renovating the distribution networks while the Palestinian Red Crescent provided health services; the Martyrs' Families Institution paid salaries and took care of martyrs' families.

In 1990, the Ta'ef Agreement ended the war in Lebanon, at which point a new stage of peaceful coexistence and stability began. A ministerial committee including Minister Muhsen Dalloul and Brigadier Farhat was formed to open a dialogue with the Palestinians on the basis of recognizing, for the first time since 1948, the civil and social rights of Palestinians in Lebanon, excluding granting them citizenship or employing them in public offices.

In 1990, the Lebanese government formed a ministerial committee to discuss the civil rights of Palestinians in Lebanon; after several months, the Lebanese government decided to freeze these discussions for political reasons.

Despite this, Lebanon clearly stated in a report submitted to the UN Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen on March 6-12, 1995, that Palestinian refugees residing in its territories suffer deteriorating social, housing and health conditions.

### **Refugee Camps:**

In 1948, the Lebanese authorities received Palestinians forced to leave their land and properties, provided them with basic services and distributed them in camps inside the Lebanese borders. The Red Cross provided the Palestinian refugees with tents, food and first aid services.

In 1949, the United Nations issued Resolution 302 and formed what is called the United Nations Relief and Working Agency (UNRWA) to care for the refugees and offer them necessary services in the fields of relief, health, education, social affairs and work, until the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194. This resolution demands that Israel allow the return of refugees to the places they were forced to leave or to pay compensation to those who do not desire to return.

At present, there are 12 refugee camps in Lebanon, distributed as follows;

The north: Bared River – Baddawi.

Beirut: Barajneh Tower – Shatella – St. Elias – Dibya – Sabra.

Sidon: Ein Hilwe – Al-Mayye Mayye.

Tire: Rashidiyye – Al-Bas – Northern Tower.

It should be noted that there were other camps which were totally destroyed and never rebuilt, such as Nabatiyye Camp, destroyed by Israeli bombardment in 1974; Tal Zatar and Basha Bridge were also two other camps that were destroyed during the civil war in 1976. These were in addition to other concentrations erected outside the camps near the agricultural regions where work was available.

## **The demographic situation and refugees rights**

According to UNRWA records, there are 359,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon; 53.6% of them live inside the camps while the rest live in poor areas around the camps; there are 12 camps recognized by UNRWA in agreement with the Lebanese government.

In terms of accurate figures of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the cases of those who immigrated and those who obtained Lebanese citizenship (estimates on these groups are between 70,000 and 100,000 refugees while others say the number is higher) must be taken into consideration.

Although refugees have spent fifty years in Lebanon and despite the fact that two (sometimes three) of generations were born in Lebanon, they are still being treated harshly. The consecutive Lebanese governments worked to deprive them of their basic civil rights. For example, the government issued 40,073 work permits for foreigners in 1994, of which only 35 were issued to Palestinians; the number is even less than those issued to non-Arab visitors.

## **The economic condition:**

Camps are residential concentrations close to Lebanese neighborhoods, very similar to "impoverished areas" that surround cities, with no firms, factories or agricultural regions. Therefore, economically, the residents of these camps depend on their labor force in the following areas:

- Small commercial shops: convenience stores, vegetables stores, butchers, sandwich shops, clothes stores, stores for electrical appliances, etc.
- Professions: barbers, auto mechanics, electricians, clinics, engineering contractors, construction and agriculture laborers, UNRWA employees, employees in private Lebanese institutions in the field of education at all levels and journalism.
- Work outside Lebanon: there are many job opportunities in the oil-producing countries such as Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Libya.

Actually, complaints by Palestinians regarding the bad economic conditions did not arise until the nineties for the following reasons:

First: The second Gulf War (Kuwait- Iraq) which resulted in the expulsion of Palestinian workers including those coming from Lebanon by Kuwait and other Gulf countries. This caused an increase in unemployment in the camps and the cessation of an important source of income from those who worked in the Gulf.

Second: The halt of Palestinian support from PLO sources to the camps due to the financial situation, with the exception of employee salaries in some of its departments and aid to families of martyrs wherever they lived. The PLO was the authority that cared for the various daily and humanitarian issues of Palestinians in camps.

Third: The Lebanese laws and decisions escalated the already difficult Palestinian economic conditions; the worst laws are the following three decisions or laws:

a- The Palestinian Labor Law which deals with Palestinian refugees in the same manner it deals with foreigners, meaning that they have no right to work unless they get a "work permit", in addition, to the impossible conditions for obtaining such a permit. The number of work permits granted to Palestinians did not exceed 337 in 1993 while in 1994 work permits for Palestinians did not exceed 350. Moreover, Palestinians cannot work in any given field; there are certain professions that only Lebanese citizens are allowed, thus excluding Palestinians. These jobs (according to the decision) are as follows:

Administrative and banking jobs, especially the positions of manager, deputy manager, head of the personnel department, treasurer, accountant, secretary, salesman, money changer, jewelry, laboratories, pharmacist, electrician, sanitation equipment, glass, maintenance, usher, security guard, teaching in elementary, preparatory and secondary stages, expect for teaching

foreign languages if necessary, engineering, barber, driver, waiter and generally all jobs that Lebanese are available to fill.

The trade works, including money changing, accountancy, trade representations, commissioning, engineering works, contracts, construction, shoe industry, clothes industry, furniture industry, sweets shops, publications and distribution, barber, car mechanics and in general all works that constitute a competition to Lebanese.

This is in addition to the decision to ban the entry of construction materials into camps such as cement and wood boards, nails, water taps, bulbs and electrical extensions. This also means the prohibition of any renovation or maintenance of existing homes from the inside and outside.

## **Conclusions:**

1. The fourth of May, which was considered the due date for the end of the interim phase of the political settlement according to the Oslo Accords, has gone by as any other day. Many obligations of this stage are still unimplemented due to the Israeli delay in implementation. Palestinian threats to proclaim the state on that date have no practical ramifications except an imposition of facts on the ground according to the available possibilities. This once again confirms the doubts about the Israeli governments' lack of seriousness in accomplishing true achievements for the peace process.
2. The special international conference for implementing the provisions of the Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories was convened in a superficial manner. No serious discussions took place in this respect due to the political pressures on the member states of the UN General Assembly. Meanwhile, the Israeli government is continuing its total disregard of provisions of this Convention through confiscating Palestinian lands, constructing settlements and bringing settlers to the Palestinian territories. No doubt, these practices in addition to the policy of ethnic cleansing, particularly in Jerusalem, have confirmed the same doubts over the actual position of the Israeli government towards the peace process.
3. Statements by the new Israeli prime minister following his election included red lines, which totally contradict with the essence of the peace process. In general, Israel is still not ready to achieve genuine peace. The priority in Israeli policy, in general, depends on the philosophy of aggression, superiority and expansion at the expense of Palestinian rights.
4. The Palestinian internal situation has witnessed a notable development following the high level dialogues that took place in Cairo between Fatah and both the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine. At the time, that progress was considered a positive development in regards to Fatah's willingness to cooperate more closely with the various Palestinian factions within the framework of the PLO. Also, it is considered as an implication the increasing practical unity among these factions known for their hard-line positions. However, dramatic developments are not expected in the relationship whether in regards to final status negotiations, their management or goals or even in regards to the necessary internal reforms on the ground under the Palestinian National Authority.
5. In light of the increase of internal and external criticism to the performance of the Palestinian National Authority, President Arafat approved the formation of a committee for administrative reforms and to develop the performance these institutions. It is still premature to predict whether the committee will carry out real initiatives or be satisfied with the prevailing trends.
6. Despite positive developments in terms of the President's approval of some laws issued by the Palestinian Legislative Council and important decisions like appointing an attorney general for the Palestinian territories, a chief judge and a president for the Supreme Court, some measures and basic obligations have remained without implementation. There is no indication of any willingness to conduct obligations for local council elections. In addition, the legal period, which follows the presidential and legislative elections has ended without any sign or legal measure to indicate its extension or a specification of any date for them to be carried out. Also, the economic monopolies of a commercial nature continue to exist despite an increase in popular criticism of them. On the contrary, no real efforts are exerted in respect to encouraging sound internal investment through providing job opportunities to confront the increasing rate of unemployment.
7. The government continues with its work and newly created ministries are working hard in establishing and developing their institutional abilities to meet the requirements for which they were created. Other ministries exert many efforts in developing their abilities and providing a better level of performance, efficiency and supervision, particularly those ministries in which misconduct was uncovered by executive and legislative monitoring apparatuses. The Ministry of Finance succeeded in presenting the government budget for approval by the Palestinian Legislative Council only after a delay of more than seven months.
8. Despite their serious attempts to comprehend the dangers and the practices carried out by members of the security apparatuses, there are two main criticisms directed towards

these apparatuses. The first is related to some practices exclusive to overall security policies. Here, we may infer the possibility of a transformation into a police state particularly in cases of interference by security apparatuses in issues related to freedom of expression, misuse of weapons or the authority of some members of the security apparatuses whether during official missions or outside their work. In general, the phenomenon of carrying, using and trading in weapons in addition to the tragic consequences in the number of cases where there is misuse of weapons should be controlled. There is also an urgent need for serious accountability.

9. Months and years are going by while we grow accustomed to an abnormal phenomenon, which is the absence of local council elections. No one is able to give a logical explanation for not carrying out this basic democratic step. Moreover, the demands to conduct these elections are continuously increasing. Heads and members of the appointed local councils are subjected to unending pressures as a result of the policy of appointment, which is unaccepted by the populace. One matter that should be drawn into the light in this respect is the policy taken by the Ministry of Local Government in giving the title "municipality" to dozens of local councils and small and medium-sized residential areas. This takes place without giving any real context to the meaning of "municipal" status except the symbolic significance. The situation will continue for a much longer time before unifying the "municipal" status of these locations particularly since there are no developmental budgets and projects for these "municipalities". Also, the level and value of internal revenues is extremely low due to the faulty taxation system, which is still being used in the Palestinian territories. The system is characterized by minimal fees paid by residents in exchange for services they receive or are supposed to receive and by mechanisms of fee collection and assurance.
10. Public Monitoring: The Palestinian Monitor Commission still keeps its annual reports. It has not been possible to publish and discuss these reports after the first report.
11. The Palestinian parliament is still working under difficult conditions on both the objective and subjective levels. A large portion of the Palestinian homeland is still under Israeli occupation and is subjected to its aggressive measures. Despite the continuous attempts by the council to assure its presence in legal, monitoring and political issues, the Council's credibility has been seriously shaken before the public after the Council gave its confidence to the ministry it previously accused of corruption. It was also shaken after the representatives continued their work after the end of their term without any serious demands by them for the need to conduct these elections.
12. President Arafat has carrying out an important step in developing the legal system after recently appointing an attorney general, a chief judge and a president to the High Court. However, although these measures are important, they are still far from the required goal to upgrade the status of the legal system to become an independent authority. One of the main reasons that would allow this is the approval of the legal system law and its implementation including the formation of a higher legal council, which is still on hold.
13. Even though several months have passed since the high-level national dialogue between Fatah and both the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine and the return of Mr. Abu Ali Mustafah to the homeland, second man in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, activation of PLO institutions has not been taken place. Although this fact should not be ignored, the importance of the dialogue between these parties should be given significance. On the contrary, it should develop qualitatively and quantitatively and expand to include a wider circle that does not include only the national stream but also the religious stream.
14. Labor and trade unions and the general federation of unions are still suffering from negativity in their role. This is not due to their shortcomings but to the overall conditions surrounding the situation of workers in light of the difficult challenges that face the Palestinian economy, the high rate of inflation and low salaries. Most of these issues are due to Israeli measures whether in regards to the occupation and its consequences on the ground or the conditions surrounding the employment of Palestinian workers in Israeli facilities.
15. The relationship between the executive authority and Palestinian non-governmental organizations is still shadowed by doubts, lack of confidence and exchange of accusations. This trend is not considered absolute, but it is the most apparent on the level of the media in light of issued statements and communiqués in this regard. The formation of a new ministry for NGO affairs resulted in varying responses between the skeptic who believes that this step was taken to bring about more government intervention in the work

of these organizations, and between those who feel that the creation of this ministry should be considered not only as an official recognition of the role of these organizations but as an expression of the intention to facilitate their work. At least these were the words of the new minister of NGO affairs in his repeated statements.