

Israeli Apartheid - The Legacy of the Ongoing Nakba at 75

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Seventy-five years have passed since the Palestinian people were ethnically cleansed and forcibly expelled from their homes, lands, and property in their ancestral land during the 1948 Nakba (meaning ‘catastrophe’ in Arabic). Palestinian society was decimated during the Nakba, 531 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and more than 70 massacres were carried out against innocent civilians, killing more than 15 thousand Palestinians [between 1947 and 1949](#). The [legacy of the Nakba](#) events is that about two-thirds of the Palestinian people became refugees in and around 1948 and a quarter of those who remained within historic Palestine geography were internally displaced and denied their right to return to their villages, towns, and cities of origin ever since.

Since 1948, Israel established a regime of racial domination and oppression over the Palestinian people primarily in the domains of nationality and land. In the immediate aftermath of the Nakba, Israel adopted a series of laws, policies, and practices, which sealed the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian people, systematically denying the return of Palestinian refugees and other Palestinians who were abroad at the time of the war. At the same time, Israel imposed a system of institutionalized racial discrimination over Palestinians who remained on the land, many of whom had been internally displaced. Such Israeli laws have constituted the legal architecture of the Israeli apartheid that continue to be imposed on the Palestinian people today.

The 1950 so-called ‘Absentee Property’ Law became the main legal instrument of dispossession. Israel used it to confiscate the property of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, who were deemed ‘absentees’ despite the State denying their return. Seventy-five years later, this ‘Absentee Property’ Law continues to advance Israel’s Judaization of parts of the West Bank including the city of Jerusalem and to [alter its Palestinian character](#), demographic composition and identity.

In turn, the 1950 Law of Return and the 1952 Citizenship Law cemented Israel’s institutionalized racial discrimination in law. Establishing domination, both in law and in practice, Israel granted every Jew the exclusive right to enter the State as an immigrant and to obtain citizenship. At the same time, Palestinian refugees have been categorically denied their right to return, to their homes, lands, and property from which they were illegally dispossessed.

Such Israeli laws compose the legal foundation of Israeli apartheid, perpetuating its systematic racial domination and oppression over all Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, and refugees and exiles. Seven and a half decades on, Israel has strategically fragmented the Palestinian people into at least four separate geographic, legal, political, and administrative domains as a tool to impose and maintain apartheid. Israel’s strategic fragmentation of the Palestinian people ensures that they cannot meet, group, live together, or exercise any collective rights, particularly their right to [self-determination](#) and permanent sovereignty over their [natural resources](#). Strategic fragmentation is further entrenched through [the illegal closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip](#), the [Annexation Wall](#), and Israel’s permit regime consisting of

[checkpoints](#) and other physical barriers, severely impacting the freedom of movement of Palestinians.

As we commemorate 75 years since the Nakba, the Israeli government continues its *de jure* and *de facto annexation* of the West Bank, which represents the continuation of Israel's land grab, pillage, and displacement of Palestinians through the maintenance of its apartheid. As reaffirmed by successive United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Israel's continued annexation plans are a testament to Israel's 21st-century apartheid, leaving in its wake the demise of the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The crimes of the Nakba, including the ethnic cleansing and expulsion of Palestinian refugees, extensive destruction of Palestinian property, mass killing, and the prolonged denial of Palestinian refugees' right to return, have never been prosecuted or remedied. Just five years ago, the Israeli occupying forces, implementing its [shoot-to-kill policy](#), mass killed some 60 unarmed Palestinian protesters in the Gaza Strip on the eve of the 70th Nakba commemoration. The injustices of the Nakba and the ongoing denial of the right of return led to the Great Return March civil demonstrations every Friday in Gaza for two years, which Israel repressed with lethal force, with impunity.

This year, as Palestinians commemorate the 75th Nakba, Israel's most right-wing and racist government intensifies its oppression of the Palestinian people, including daily [raids](#) and extrajudicial killings in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. On 9 May, Israel carried out a 5-day horrific [unprovoked military assault](#) on the 16-year besieged Gaza Strip targeting residential buildings resulting in the killing of 33 Palestinian civilians, some of them in their sleep, including six children and four women. In addition, 147 others were wounded, including 48 children and 26 women.

On Nakba Day, we call on States, the UN, international organisations and civil society organisations from around the world to take effective legal and political measures to bring perpetrators of suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the [Situation in Palestine](#). The [ICC Prosecutor Mr Karim Khan](#) must expedite his investigation and start issuing arrest warrants, and deliver justice to Palestinian victims of mass atrocity crimes.

At this critical juncture in the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, support is also needed for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) until a durable solution to the Palestinian refugee question, based on the full realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable human rights.

Finally, we call on all stakeholders to recognize and join the human rights movement crystalising consensus that the situation on the ground is that of Apartheid imposed on the Palestinian people. There are many possible paths to a just future, but none should be based on permanent occupation, [settler colonialism](#), and the domination and oppression by one group of

people over another. Apartheid has no place in our world and Israel's apartheid must be dismantled now.

ENDS

See how the Nakba has transformed Palestine since 1948 with this map by Visualizing Palestine marking the Nakba at 75: https://today.visualizingpalestine.org/?blm_aid=8507392

1. Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Mankind (Al-Haq)
2. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association (Addameer)
3. Al Dameer Association for Human Rights
4. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Al Mezan)
5. Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ)
6. Arab Center for Agricultural Development
7. Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS)- France
8. Association of Women Committees for Social Work (AWCSW)
9. Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
10. Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights "Hurriyat"
11. Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ)
12. Defender Center for Human Rights (Libya)
13. Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCI-Palestine)
14. Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
15. Djiboutian League of Human Rights (LDDH)
16. European Legal Support Center (ELSC)
17. European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR)
18. Forum Tunisien pour les droits Économiques et sociaux (FTDES)
19. Groningen for Palestine (GfP)
20. Human Rights & Democracy Media Center “SHAMS”
21. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
22. International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT)
23. Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI)
24. La ligue Algérienne pour La Défense des droits de l’homme
25. Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Limeddh- Mexico
26. Mwatana for Human Rights (Yemen)
27. OPEN ASIA|Armanshahr Foundation
28. Palestine Solidarity Campaign – South Africa (Gauteng)
29. Palestine Solidarity Campaign – South Africa (Cape Town)
30. Palestine Solidarity Campaign – UK
31. Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSO)
32. Platform of French NGOs for Palestine
33. Riposte Internationale

34. South African BDS Coalition
35. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
36. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy – MIFTAH
37. The Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO)
38. The Rights Forum