

Background

Witness to the sustained expression of Christian anti-semitism in nine-teenth century Europe, main founder and theoretician of the Zionist movement, Dr. Theodor Herzl became convinced that the only solution for the Jewish people was to found a Jewish state in Palestine. The main problem faced was how to establish statehood in Palestine whose indigenous Palestinian Arab population (Muslim and Christian) constituted 90% of the population. Indigenous and non-indigenous Jews, as well as others, constituted the remaining 10%. Obviously, this implied demographic transformation if Palestine was to become a Jewish state.

The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution (181) on November 29, 1947 recommending partition of Palestine. That recommendation was never implemented. The Zionist leadership in Palestine declared the state of Israel on May 15, 1948. The post-World War II Palestinian resistance to Zionist designs on Palestine was joined by Arab armies after the declaration of the state, and war ensued. The Arabs lost, and the declared state of Israel ended up with 78% of Palestine.

Approximately 85% (750,000-800,000) of the Palestinian population in that conquered area became refugees ending up for the most part in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. In the 1967 war, Israel conquered the remaining 22% of Palestine, i.e., Gaza, the West Bank

and East Jerusalem. An additional 300,000 Palestinians became refugees but were referred to as displaced persons.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 194, known popularly as the “right of return” resolution. The resolution called for repatriation of Palestinians with full restitution in what became Israel in 1948, or for those not wanting to return to accept voluntary resettlement elsewhere with compensation. Israel’s membership in the United Nations was made contingent on Israel declaring its intent to respect UNGA 194 and all other relevant UN resolutions. On June 14, 1967, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 237 calling on Israel “to facilitate the return of those inhabitants who have fled the areas since the outbreak of hostilities [June 1967 war] ...”. To date, neither of the 1948 or 1967 resolutions has actually been accepted by Israel.

The Palestinian Refugees want a normal life and expect to be treated legally and morally like all other refugees. They make up two-thirds of the Palestinian population. There can be no durable peace without addressing the refugee issue. Resolving the refugee issue based on existing resolutions and international law in no way means Israel/Palestine will become a Palestinian state. Rather it means that both peoples would share that land on the basis of equality and mutual respect for religious and cultural traditions.

Educational Programs for Church, Civic, Student & Social Action Organizations

The Core Issue of the Palestine/Israel Conflict...

A Just Solution For Palestinian Refugees



Palestinian Refugee Child in Shatila Camp, Beirut, Lebanon (Photo by John W. Roberts)

Provided by Local Members of a Fact-Finding Delegation to Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon & Syria

U.S. Fact-Finding Delegation to Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon and Syria

An American fact-finding delegation went to Lebanon and Syria last May and June of 2004 to meet with Palestinian Refugees in various camps in those countries. Since returning, delegates have shared their experiences and knowledge with others in a number of venues, including the Boston Social Forum, churches, civic, student and social action organizations. The audiences have been receptive to programs by the delegates, which are aimed at sorting out what has been a complex and confusing issue for most people. As a result, the delegates who live in the Boston area have decided to offer several different programs of varying length from which church, civic, student and social action organizations can choose.



Biographies of Boston Area Delegates

Ken Barney is a member of the Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights and the Boston-area International Solidarity Movement support group. For several years, he has been involved intensively with Palestine solidarity work. He went on a fact-finding trip to Israel/Palestine a year ago.

Dr. Elaine C. Hagopian (Group Leader) is Professor Emerita of Sociology, Simmons College, Boston. She has led several groups to the Middle East, especially to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel/Palestine. She has a long history of relating to, and studying the plight of Palestinian Refugees

Janice Hayden became involved in a Palestinian/Israeli dialogue group and committed to working towards a just peace after learning of the injustice done to Palestinians. She is a member of the Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights and Visions of Peace with Justice in Israel/Palestine. She imports and sells Palestinian embroidery, ceramics, olive wood and mother of pearl objects in her Folk Art Mavens shop.

Naseem Khuri is the executive coordinator for the American Diaspora Alliance for Israeli/Palestinian Peace, a grassroots effort dedicated to mobilizing like-minded organizations in the US to urge U.S. decision-makers to promote a just and sustainable peace in Israel/Palestine.

Rania Matar was raised in Lebanon. She studied architecture at Cornell University and later became a citizen of the United States. During her regular visits to Lebanon, she

frequented the refugee camps, documenting refugee life through black and white photos. More recently, she began photographing refugees in the camps in Syria. Her photos have been exhibited in several venues.

John Roberts is a former Presbyterian minister who served in the inner cities of New York, Cleveland and Chicago. He was Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts for 32 years. He was President of the Board of the Massachusetts Immigrants and Refugee Advocacy Coalition for 10 years. He traveled to Israel/Palestine with a civil rights delegation in 2001 and remains active with groups seeking justice for Palestinian refugees.

Kathy Roberts is a retired teacher of young children. She co-founded a multicultural childcare center in 1971. She first became involved in refugee issues of undocumented families fleeing El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s. She has been involved with Boston area groups supporting the right of Palestinians to establish a state and to exercise their inalienable right to return.

Cornelia Sullivan is a retired nurse. She is a member of Pax Christi Boston, and serves on its State Chapter's Board of Directors. In 1993, Cornelia felt privileged to be a member of "Mir Sada - Peace Now" on an international pilgrimage to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She had earlier in her life been to Lebanon and Syria and was anxious to update her understanding of the Palestinian Refugees in those countries as well as the situation in the Middle East.

How to Schedule a Program

To schedule a program, please send your request to Elaine Hagopian at echagop@aol.com or call her at 781-648-1245. If that line is busy, you should call 339-368-0183. Otherwise leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible.

There are no fees attached to the programs. However, the program sponsor may need to provide audio-visual equipment.

Donations for Refugee aid are gratefully received but not required.

Single Session Programs: Focusing on Refugees as Core Issue

- Power Point presentation with narrative on Palestinian life in refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria with observations by members of the delegation.
- Video of Palestinian Refugees by Filmmaker Mai Masri with contextual presentation. Q/A period with members of the delegation to follow the video.
- Lecture and Q/A on the History of the Palestinian Refugee problem: legal and moral issues. Additional observations and reflections by members of the delegation.
- Comparing Palestinian Refugee life in Lebanon and Syria with a documentary photo exhibit and observations by members of the delegation.
- Palestinian Refugee Women and Gender Equality Issues.

Mini-Course Programs: Offering Historical/Political Overviews

(2 - 3 sessions)

- History of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict combined with any of the single session programs.
- History of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict followed by a second program analyzing the failed peace plans combined with any one single session program.
- U.S. policy on Palestine from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush combined with any of the single session and/or mini-course programs.



Resource Materials

The delegation can provide program sponsors with a customized list of resources suitable for their needs. A very useful website is: www.palestineremembered.com. A select annotated bibliography can be found at www.tari.org.