

FORUM:	Human Rights Council
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Introduction

It is widely accepted to state that the crisis which started with the Palestinian parties remains one of the most challenging humanitarian issues of the 21st century. About a quarter of the displaced people in the Middle East are Palestinians who, over the past few decades, have become a burden on host countries and have put pressure on global humanitarian organizations as well as extended instability to other regions. The constant combat and the everyday acts of aggression, occupation, disputed borders, and political stalemate have put many Palestinians into June-and-July societies, most of which receive very restricted freedoms, including civil liberties to defend their human rights to health care, education, and work. While the international community is still struggling to address this issue, it is high time to consider the approaches that will respond to the refugees' necessities and eliminate the causes of migration. It is the intention of this report to focus on the status, find the challenges at hand, and recommend possible and practical ways that would help minimize the suffering among the Palestinian refugees while at the same time seeking a permanent fix to this problem.



The Israel-Palestine conflict

Background

After the termination of the British mandate in 1947, the United Nations partition plan provide for the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab State which was approved by the Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab leaders. The subsequent declaration of the State of Israel that followed it in 1948 resulted in



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the first Arab Israeli war, during which about 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes. To Palestinians, this event is remembered as the Nakba, which translated means ‘catastrophe’, and it was during this event that Palestinian refugees emerged.

In the following decades, the struggle has been manifested through several wars, revolts, and peace processes that deepen displacement and suffering. The Six Days War in 1967 saw Israel capture the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem – areas that remain contentious to this day. Through the creation of its settlements in these areas, coupled with military and administrative domination, Israel has



War's Devastating Impact on Palestinian Economy

fueled conflict and periodic violence between itself and the Palestinians.

Previous attempts at the settlement of the conflict such as the Oslo peace process in the 1990s have not yielded peaceful solution, and there has been regression to the circumstances that forced the Palestinians out of their homes. Currently, over 5 million Palestinians are registered as refugees, and most of them

live cramped in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria or amongst their compatriots in the Palestinian territories. These refugees are confined with limited mobility, have restricted access to necessities and services and lack rights to legal engagements in most of the host countries. The conflict persists, and there is no possibility of achieving a political settlement to provide the refugees with the means to return to their homes, which is why the refugee situation is one of the most severe in the world.

Problems Raised

Humanitarian Crisis and Living Conditions

The first, but perhaps the least hidden, is the severe humanitarian crisis affecting the Palestinian refugees. There are more than five million registered Palestinian refugees most of whom live in squalor in eighty-two camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian territory. These camps often have poor infrastructure, such as limited access to clean water, sanitation, health care and education. The living conditions in these camps are often inadequate; therefore, the health of the people in these camps is frequently compromised due to high incidences of malnutrition, chronic diseases, and mental illnesses. Also, the financial deficit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East (UNRWA) exacerbate these states, leaving refugees deprived of the minimum conditions required for their survival and having no access to humanitarian aid and services.

Strain on Host Countries

Palestinian refugees have placed considerable pressure on the receiving countries, most of which are grappling with poverty and other societal ills. In countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, the situation of Palestinian refugees living in those countries has put them in a very uncomfortable situation where they are forced to compete with other neighbors for scarce resources such as employment and housing as well as other basic services. Large refugee population has also been associated with social unrest and, in some instances, political insecurity. For example, in Lebanon, conflict over the Palestinian refugees had always been perceived as a major domestic conflict which further escalates the sectarian conflicts. The situation has become worsened with ongoing crisis in Syria as the Palestinian refugees in Syria have been affected and displaced again, exposing them to other forms of abuses and increasing the burden for the neighboring countries.



Palestine Refugees in Syria: A Recurring Tragedy

Denial of Rights and Statelessness

With reference to Palestinians' political rights, today, hundreds of thousands of refugees suffer from legal and political problems such as statelessness and a lack of recognized rights. In several host countries, Palestinians granted only a refugee status and do not receive full citizenship status, which entails restricted civil liberties, employment rights, and diminished access to public services. They offer them no legal rights or recognition; such people remain at the mercy of their employers and are vulnerable to unfair treatment or even abuse. Furthermore, fundamental rights have not been fully implemented; for instance, the right to return for the Palestinians, which is also a significant part of the refugee problem, have not got their solutions. Consequently, refugees and their descendants remain perennial migrants with no stable status. This statelessness results from the failure to find a political resolution to the Palestinian Issue; it leads to generations of refugees who lost all their human rights.



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Impact on Peace and Security

One of the most complex challenges to peace and security in the Middle East is the unresolved Palestinian refugee crisis. Continuous and relentless displacement, without a just and durable solution, has perpetuated tensions between Israel and the Palestinian territories, as well as between Israel and neighboring Arab states. The refugee problem is an integral component of the general Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and its persistence has fueled resentment, radicalization, and violence. Frustration and despair among refugees, especially young people, could be channeled into supporting extremist factions, contributing to further destabilization of the region. The failure of the international community in solving the crisis of the refugees will undermine all efforts toward a comprehensive agreement for peace and keep relocating people, leading to further conflict.



Spain urges convening of international peace conference on Israel-Palestine conflict

Erosion of Cultural and National Identity

This erosion has been established further through the long-term displacement of the Palestinian refugees. Having lived away from home for many decades, most of the Palestinians have had limited opportunities to maintain strong connection to their cultural and national identity. Compounding this erosion is the relative challenge of integration and assimilation that people face in host countries, where Palestinian refugees are often marginalized and cannot fully get involved in the social life and political communities in which they reside. As much as the loss experienced in cultural identity and attachment to homeland, the erosion sustains alienation and disillusionment, making resolution processes and actions to address the refugee crisis become complicated.

International Actions

UN General Assembly Resolutions and the Right of Return

There have been several United Nations General Assembly resolutions passed on the issue of Palestinian refugees, most notably UN Resolution 194. This resolution explicitly endorsed the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and property or goals that have always been part of an international



consensus; only for those not wishing to exercise this right, could compensation be offered. Although historically it is a crucial one, the enactment of Resolution 194 has been deeply disputed by Israel that claims security and demographic reasons for resisting to adhere in full all aspects related to the right of return. While the resolution is still central to Palestinian demands in international diplomacy, its potential effect has been restricted by a lack of enforcement mechanisms and the stalemate politically across the region.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency)

UNRWA was set up in 1949 as the agency responsible for supporting Palestinian refugees across



UNRWA chief warns Palestinian refugee agency facing a funding crisis

the Middle East. World Vision provides education, health care and emergency relief with a focus on the most vulnerable children: in Syria, Lebanon & Jordan; West Bank and Gaza.

UNRWA The large-scale provision of humanitarian aid is fulfilled in a vital role to meet immediate needs of millions displaced persons, but it has faced its own problems such as underfunding and varying political pressure from all sides. However, in the

face of adversity, UNRWA remains an important lifeline for Palestinian refugees, but its prospects are limited without a durable political solution to address the root causes of this problem of statelessness.

International Aid and Development Programs

Various international organizations, such, as UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donor countries have been actively providing development assistance to Palestinian refugees apart from UNRWA. Initiatives backed by the European Union, the United States and other nations have concentrated on enhancing living conditions in refugee camps supporting education and healthcare services and fostering growth. While these endeavors have made a difference in easing some of the challenges faced by refugees, they have also faced criticism for prioritizing relief over addressing the root causes of the refugee crisis. Additionally, the politicization of aid, within a backdrop of shifting backing and regional conflicts has often hindered the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Key Players

Israel

Israel is central to the Palestinian refugee issue, as it is the state established in 1948 on territory that many Palestinians were displaced from. Israel maintains that the right of return for Palestinian refugees is incompatible with the continued existence of Israel as a Jewish state, arguing that allowing the return of millions of refugees would alter the country's demographic balance. Israel instead advocates for the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in their current host countries or within a future Palestinian state. The Israeli government also views the refugee issue as a final status matter to be resolved through direct negotiations as part of a broader peace agreement.

Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

The Palestinian Authority and the PLO represent the interests of the Palestinian people, including refugees. Both entities strongly advocate for the right of return, considering it a fundamental right of all Palestinian refugees. The PA and PLO argue that any lasting peace agreement must include a just solution for the refugee crisis, which could involve allowing refugees to return to their original homes or receive compensation. The refugee issue is one of the core issues in their negotiations with Israel, and the PA/PLO has consistently sought international support for their position.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations, particularly through agencies like UNRWA, plays a crucial role in providing humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. The UN has also been a key platform for diplomatic efforts, including passing resolutions that call for the right of return and other rights for Palestinian refugees. The UN's involvement has been instrumental in keeping the refugee issue on the international agenda, although its efforts are often limited by the political divisions among member states and the lack of enforcement power for its resolutions.



UN agencies issue joint statement calling on donors to resume UNRWA funding

United States



The United States has historically been a key player in the Middle East peace process and a major donor to UNRWA. The U.S. generally supports Israel's position that the refugee issue should be resolved through negotiations and opposes the full implementation of the right of return. While the U.S. has provided significant humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees, its policies have increasingly aligned with Israel's, particularly under recent administrations, which have cut funding to UNRWA and recognized Israeli sovereignty over disputed territories. The U.S. continues to push for a negotiated settlement, but its stance on the refugee issue remains a point of contention with many in the international community.

Arab League

The Arab League, which represents Arab states across the Middle East and North Africa, has long supported the Palestinian cause, including the right of return for refugees. The League has repeatedly



13,000 people killed, 1.7M displaced in Gaza since Oct.7

condemned Israeli policies that it sees as infringing on Palestinian rights and has called for a comprehensive solution that includes the establishment of a Palestinian state and a just resolution for refugees. The Arab League's position has been consistent in supporting the refugees' right to return or receive compensation, and it views the refugee issue as inseparable from the broader struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

Possible Solutions

Comprehensive Peace Agreement

A negotiated peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian leadership could incorporate provisions specifically for resolving the refugee issue. This may involve a combination of options such as allowing a limited number of refugees to return to Israel, the creation of a Palestinian state that can absorb some refugees, and financial compensation for others. This solution would require significant international support and concessions from both sides.

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Strengthening UNRWA and International Aid

Increasing funding and resources for UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations could improve living conditions for Palestinian refugees. This would involve enhancing access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in refugee camps and host countries, while also addressing the long-term sustainability of these programs.

But for such initiatives to reach their optimum level of implementation, the UNRWA needs to work hand in hand with the host governments and the local communities. This collaboration could go a long way in addressing the needs of the refugees in respect to the available programs so that the resources



The Palestinian refugee crisis

available could effectively and efficiently be used on the neediest of the needy. Besides, it is possible to identify the constructive approach in which refugees will be engaged in decision-making, which in turn will increase the likelihood of culturally appropriate and effective solutions. The success of these efforts would, however, hinge on proper and long-term budget support from the donor

country. Lastly, a positive change in the quality of living standards of the refugees may help in the search for a solution to the Palestinian issue, hence reducing some socio-economic aspects of conflict in the region.

International Diplomatic Pressure

The international community could apply more concerted diplomatic pressure on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to prioritize the refugee issue in peace negotiations. This could include leveraging international law, United Nations resolutions, and economic incentives to push for a solution that respects the rights of refugees and addresses their needs.

Such diplomatic efforts would require a unified approach, where major powers and regional actors present a consistent and coordinated stance. This unity is crucial to prevent either side from exploiting divisions within the international community to avoid making concessions. Moreover, integrating the



refugee issue into a broader framework of human rights could strengthen the moral and legal imperatives for resolving the crisis. Building global public support for these efforts through awareness campaigns and advocacy could also create additional pressure on the negotiating parties. Ultimately, the success of these diplomatic initiatives would depend on their ability to balance the interests of both parties while also upholding international standards of justice and fairness.

International Compensation Fund

Establishing an international compensation fund could provide financial restitution to Palestinian refugees who choose not to return to their original homes. This fund would be managed by an international body and could be financed through contributions from countries involved in the conflict, as well as from global donors, helping to address historical grievances and support economic stability.

To ensure the effectiveness and fairness of the compensation process, clear criteria would need to be established for eligibility and the distribution of funds. This would involve detailed documentation and verification procedures to assess each case. Moreover, transparency in the fund's management would be essential to maintain trust among the refugees and the international community. In addition to financial compensation, the fund could also support initiatives aimed at improving the refugees' living conditions and promoting their integration into host societies. Ultimately, while financial restitution cannot fully resolve the loss and displacement experienced, it could play a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation and fostering long-term peace.

Glossary

Nakba

The 1948 mass displacement of Palestinians during the creation of Israel, known as the “catastrophe” in Arabic.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency)

A UN agency providing aid, education, and health services to Palestinian refugees.

Right of Return

The claimed right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they were displaced from in 1948 and 1967.

Statelessness

The condition of not being recognized as a citizen by any country, affecting many Palestinian refugees.



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Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)

Areas including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, captured by Israel in 1967 and considered occupied under international law.

Two-State Solution

A proposed resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, envisioning independent Israeli and Palestinian states.

Intifada

Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation, notably the First (1987-1993) and Second (2000-2005) Intifadas.

Settlement

Israeli communities built in the occupied Palestinian territories, considered illegal under international law by most countries.

Refugee Camps

Temporary settlements that house displaced Palestinians, often managed by UNRWA.



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