



NEWS LETTER

American Near East Refugee Aid

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1976

TENSION IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The term "occupied territories" in the Middle East refers to the areas which came under the military occupation of Israel in the June war of 1967. These areas include the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights have relatively small Egyptian and Syrian populations. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank live 1.1 million Palestinians.

Military occupation means that while the Occupied Territories are not a part of Israel, all activities in those territories are under the supervision of the military forces of the Israeli government.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 were established to reaffirm the human rights of people during times of war and military occupation. The human rights of the Palestinian refugees and others in the Occupied Territories have been a subject of concern for many international organizations. Several of these organizations have sent delegations to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in particular, to ascertain the status of human rights of the people living under occupation. After reviewing the evidence and the reports of these delegations, organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Health Organization, the World Council of Churches, the World Federalists, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, UNESCO, the U.N. General Assembly, and the U.N. Security Council have all passed resolutions which express "deep concern" over Israeli violations of the Geneva Conventions in their treatment of the population under occupation.

According to announcements made in October and November, 1975, by the Government of Israel, two major events—which are in conflict with the Geneva Conventions of 1949—are scheduled to take place within the Occupied Territories in 1976:

SETTLEMENTS

The Israeli government is planning to establish some 10-15 new Israeli-populated settlements in the Occupied Territories in 1976. There are already 50 such settlements in these areas. The people in the Occupied Territories object to the existence and location of these settlements on their land as well as to the manner in which land was confiscated for the settlements.

At the outset, the settlements were justified by the Israeli government for "security reasons" and the settlements were largely paramilitary in character. However, most have now gradually been converted into civilian towns for Israelis only.

Since the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have been discussed as forming the basis of a new Palestinian state (thus alleviating the plight of the Palestinian refugees), the location of these settlements is particularly disturbing. They are arranged to form a chain encircling the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Golan Heights. In addition, the Palestinian portion of Jerusalem is gradually being isolated from the Palestinian West Bank by the building of Israeli housing units surrounding the city.

Whether or not the Israeli government will return the land on which there are settlements as part of a negotiated peace is unclear; for example, the city of Yamit, slightly west of the Gaza Strip, is planned for an Israeli population of 250,000, making it the third largest Israeli city after Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Israeli government has also announced that municipal elections, presided over by the Israeli military authorities, will be held in all West Bank towns in April, 1976. The elections are part of a new civil administration plan designed by the Israeli government to give more responsibility to local West Bank officials.

Since Israeli interests in the Occupied Territories are different from those of the people who live there, conflict in local affairs is almost inevitable. In the past, when such conflict has arisen and when mayors and city councils have not cooperated with the Israeli military authorities, these officials have been dismissed and, in some cases, deported from their country though not charged with any wrongdoing. (An estimated 1500 elected officials and community leaders have been deported from the Occupied Territories since 1967.)

Most Palestinians in the West Bank believe that effective local leadership is impossible to achieve under conditions of military occupation. The Israeli civil administration plan is expected to result either in the election of leaders who would cooperate with the military authorities (thereby compromising local interests) or who would not cooperate (and thereby risk dismissal and/or deportation). Neither alternative advances democratic government responsive to the needs of the people of the Occupied Territories.

The combination of the proposed new Israeli settlements and the civil administration plan for the Occupied Territories is a violation of the human rights of the people living in those territories and has significantly increased the level of tension in the area. As this Newsletter is being written, there are reports of strikes and demonstrations by Palestinians in the West Bank protesting these latest Israeli violations of the Geneva Conventions.

The following are reports on what has happened to human rights in the past when the Israeli Government has established new settlements in the Occupied Territories:

"The Palestinian peasants refused to sell...Akraba—a small Palestinian village of 4,000 inhabitants—situated 10 kilometres southeast of Nablus in the occupied West Bank of Jordan On April 28, an Israeli Piper plane overflew Akraba spraying a chemical defoliant over the villagers' wheat fields. In one night, all the wheat sown the previous December (200 hectares or 494 acres) had changed its color: the green turned brown, burnt by chemical products The Israelis do not deny these facts. They admit having sprayed the fields with chemicals, but only to 'teach a lesson to these villagers' who were stubbornly continuing to work lands to which the army had forbidden them access One can't help wondering why, in the midst of these arid hills, cultivated fields were chosen as training grounds (for the Israeli military). The answer is no mystery: the idea is to prepare for the arrival of the Israeli settlers. In any case, Akraba is not the only village of the Occupied West Bank where pressure is exerted on the villagers to sell their lands ..." (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, July 3, 1972 and also reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 21, 1972)

"While thousands of Israeli children were busy planting trees in towns and villages all over the country ..., huge bulldozers were uprooting thousands of blossoming fruit trees in some areas of the region known as the 'Rafa Gap' The Arab owners of these orchards have been expelled from their lands and their houses have been destroyed so that (Israeli) colonies can be established in their place. After the destruction of the trees, the mosque and the school are to be rased to the ground." (*Le Monde*, Paris, article by Israeli journalist, Amnon Kapeliouk, May 15, 1975)

"A modern Jewish city is springing up on the sands of northeastern Sinai, ... could not begin without displacing hundreds if not thousands of Bedouin Arabs (most of whom are Egyptian citizens) Maj. Gen. Ariel Sharon ... ordered his troops to eject the reluctant ..., and move them to resettlement sites Under the shadow of the cranes and scaffoldings of the urban construction site here, remnants of the former population have been trying to stay put in a cluster of mud and stucco houses. One of (these), Hassan, said he would not accept any substitute for his house and land Hassan estimated the number of Arabs in the area at 6,000, with more drifting in the Arabs are being used as hired hands on the same land they once worked for themselves" (*The Washington Post*, September 14, 1975)

"Since 1967, thousands of Arab residents have lost their family homes to Israeli-directed redevelopment Property developers in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem are continuing pressure to evict and 'relocate' Arab inhabitants of the old walled city and to 'modernize' it. Evicted Arab families see box-like constructions of new Israeli housing rising from the debris of their demolished homes When Mr. Saifi refused to sell (his home in Jerusalem), bulldozers demolishing nearby houses pushed high mounds of rubble around his house, making access nearly impossible. The foundations were undermined by digging on two sides. Israeli police, at this writing, were pounding frequently on the door and warning Mr. Saifi's elderly mother, the only person still living there, to leave because the house was unsafe Mr. Muhammad al-Maghrebi refused any compensation for his house ... and is holding on Another house ..., belongs to three families named Shaheen and houses 20 people. Demolition on three sides has already undermined the foundations, but some of the Shaheens are staying until they are forced out" (*The Christian Science Monitor*, March 5, 1975)

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CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

The following are reports on the views of the people in the West Bank on the Israeli plan for civil administration and on past treatment of community leaders:

CONVENTIONS OF 1949

processes in World War II, the Geneva Convention established to protect persons during military occupation. Both the United States and the United Kingdom are signatories of these Conventions.

The Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949, is relevant to the treatment of civilians in the territories under the control of the Israeli Forces of Israel. The following provisions of the Geneva Convention are particularly applicable and are discussed in this Newsletter:

Persons who are in occupied territories and who are deprived in any case in any manner of the benefits of the Geneva Convention by any change introduced into the occupation of a territory by the institutions or government of the territory, nor by any agreement entered into by the authorities of the occupied territory and the Occupying Power, shall not be treated by the latter of the territory as if they were of the occupied territory."

Geneva Convention

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Geneva Convention

The Occupying Power may not alter the status of public officials or judges in the occupied territory or in any way apply sanctions or measures of coercion or other measures against them, should they abstain from exercising their functions for reasons of conscience."

Geneva Convention

Provisions concerning the people in the Occupied Territories of the Middle East have been passed by inter-alia the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross; nearly all the resolutions of the United Nations honor the Geneva Convention of August 12,

"... a new campaign to persuade Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank to accept limited self-rule with Israel still in overall control, has been launched by Mr. Shimon Peres, the Defence Minister. Two earlier attempts since the October war of 1973 met with a stony response and were abandoned The Israeli plan so far as known hardly amounts to self-rule. The Arabs would have local control over agriculture, education, municipal administration and other internal affairs (though still under an Israeli minister), but not over defence or the police. Nor would they have any jurisdiction over the Jewish settlements in their midst ...; and the policy of settlement would continue in the West Bank This remains the basis of Israel's policy, though it was rejected in 1968, and has never been taken seriously by any responsible Arabs It is difficult to see where Mr. Peres will find the educated leaders willing to administer his plan for limited self-rule, especially since political activity has been banned for eight years. Many men regarded as leaders have been deported, such as Dr. Hanna Nasir of Birzeit College, though not found guilty of any terrorist activity." (*Times*, London, October 22, 1975, as reported in *Swasia*)

"An officer climbed into the vehicle, read a paper he held in his hands, and then we knew—the Israeli occupying authorities had ordered our expulsion from our homeland, because we 'constituted a danger to Israeli security'. It was so funny, that in spite of the 'secure borders' and the ultra-modern war machinery of 'invincible Israel' we, a doctor, a mayor, a trade-unionist, two lawyers and three teachers, were a threat to Israeli security, though none of us had carried a pistol in his life. No court, no trial, not even a charge brought against any of us." (*Middle East International*, July, 1974, article by Walid Kamhawi, M.D.)

"Since 1967 scores of Arab political activists and notables who were suspected of fomenting civil disobedience, political subversion and the like have been expelled. Generally speaking, they were not involved in subversive activity, and if they helped terrorists, they would have been tried and subsequently imprisoned." (*Davar*, Israeli daily newspaper, February 4, 1976, as quoted in *Swasia*, March 5, 1976)

"The government plan to encourage self-rule in the area was outlined a few weeks ago by Defence Minister Shimon Peres The initial Arab reaction to the plan has been negative. Most mayors rejected it outright as what they called a thinly-veiled attempt to set up a quisling Arab government and perpetuate Israeli control of the area" (*The New York Times*, November 11, 1975)

"The last elected municipal council in Gaza had been dismissed by the Israeli occupation authorities in 1971 for 'non-cooperation' Public figures in the West Bank were ... unanimous in their repudiation ... of the attempts by the Israeli occupation authorities to set up a civil administration (*Al Fajr*, Israeli daily newspaper, on October 19, 26, 28, 1975, quoting the Mayors of Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Tubas, Kalkilya; ...) they all rejected attempts by the Israelis to create a collaborationist leadership from inside the occupied areas Opposition to this new Israeli policy ... gathered momentum and finally exploded in a series of strikes and demonstrations which shook the West Bank for nearly two weeks This was correctly perceived as an Israeli attempt to create a Palestinian leadership ready to come to terms with the dictates of Israeli policy," (*Middle East International*, February, 1976, article by Musa Budeiri, professor at Birzeit University, 1974-75)

BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY

Israeli policies have adversely affected ANERA-assisted projects in the Occupied Territories. Birzeit University near Ramallah on the West Bank is one of those institutions which has been most seriously affected.

Birzeit is one of only two institutions of higher education available to the people of the Occupied Territories. Birzeit is an internationally-respected college and credits from Birzeit have long been accepted by universities and colleges in the United States. From 1969 to 1975, ANERA granted a total of \$56,860 for the operation of the University and for scholarships for Palestinian refugees.

Formerly, Birzeit College offered a two-year program of liberal arts and sciences, but it has now expanded to a four-year program offering the B.A. and the B.S. degrees. 1976 is an important year as this spring 120 students will be the first to receive the bachelor's degree from Birzeit.

Due to the demand for higher education and the lack of facilities for students in the Occupied Territories, requirements to enter Birzeit University are very high. Only about 1/3 of the qualified applicants applying for admission can be accepted. The total college enrollment is 480 students who come from all economic classes. The 50 teachers at Birzeit University are generally bright, young, American-educated Palestinians whose families are in the West Bank.

Facilities at Birzeit are limited. Dormitories, science laboratories, and an enlarged library are among the top priorities for fund-raising efforts. (Educational facilities such as language laboratories, art classrooms, study facilities, etc., considered normal by other universities, are "luxuries" for Birzeit; 6 faculty members commonly share one 10' by 12' office.) New facilities are now planned for construction in the town of Birzeit.

Birzeit has been seriously affected by the policies of the Israeli military authorities. Taxes have been imposed on the University, which have depleted financial resources. Its President, Dr. Hanna Nasir, has been deported (see accompanying story). For weeks at a time, the University has been closed and teachers and students imprisoned for their support of principles such as those contained in the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Recruitment of teachers has been made especially difficult because once a Palestinian leaves the Occupied Territories to obtain a higher education (or for other reasons as well), it is extremely difficult for him to gain the necessary permission from the Israeli authorities to return.

Expansion of the University has also been frustrated. In 1975, with funds from local and foreign (including American) donors, construction of new facilities was to take place in Ramallah. The Israeli Occupying Forces vetoed the expansion for reasons which are unclear; student and faculty protest against the policies of the Occupying Forces and the proposed establishment of Israeli settlements near Ramallah are thought to have been important contributing factors.

Enclosed is my donation for educational programs at Birzeit University:

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Tension Increases

UPDATE ON DR. NASIR

David Wilson, writing for the *Boston Globe*, November 9, 1975, reported, "Some people say he is the single man most dangerous to the state of Israel He is not a terrorist bomb-thrower, a guerrilla commando, or an ambitious politician He is a soft-spoken, 39-year-old Indiana-educated physicist named Hanna Nasir . . . it would be a mistake to ignore Hanna Nasir. He has something to say, and he has a thoughtful and influential audience. And his wrongs, . . . are a blot on the history of Israel."

On November 21, 1974, Dr. Hanna Nasir, President of Birzeit University, was expelled from his home in Ramallah by the Occupying Forces of Israel. Dr. Nasir and four other prominent community leaders in the West Bank were "detained, blindfolded, and driven to the Lebanese border, where they were told to walk across it carrying white flags." (*The Christian Science Monitor*, November 22, 1974, page 8).

Dr. Nasir was considered to be the most distinguished educator in the Occupied Territories and comes from a respected Palestinian family living in the West Bank. He holds a Ph.D. in physics from Purdue University.

His deportation was a shock to many throughout the world. Dr. Nasir is a calm, reasonable man whose presence in the Occupied Territories was considered an asset. He was never charged with any wrong-doing nor was he ever taken before a court.

Since his deportation, many leading Americans, including officials at the State Department urged the Israeli Government to reconsider their action and to permit Dr. Nasir's return to his home, family, and to Birzeit University. Those requests have so far been denied. Dr. Nasir is now living in exile in Amman, Jordan.

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