

Return of 1967 Refugees to the Occupied Territories

The Oslo Accords provide that a committee would be established to "decide by agreement on the modalities of admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967..."²²³ It was agreed that, in addition to representatives of Israel and the PA, representatives of Jordan and Egypt would also be members of the committee.

On 7 March 1995, the quadra-partite Committee for 1967 Refugee Matters met, with representatives of Israel, the PA, Jordan, and Egypt participating. The PA, Jordan, and Egypt took a joint position, demanding that Israel allow one million refugees and their families to return.²²⁴ According to the PA, this number includes Palestinians who were living outside the Occupied Territories at the time of the Six-Day War; Palestinians who left the Occupied Territories during or immediately after the war; Palestinians whose residency in the Occupied Territories had been revoked by Israel; and Palestinians whom Israel deported. Furthermore, the three parties demanded that Israel allow the spouses and children of those Palestinians to enter the Occupied Territories.²²⁵ Israel only agreed to consider the return of Palestinians who had been compelled to leave the Occupied Territories as a direct result of the war, whose number it estimated at 200,000 - 400,000 persons.²²⁶

The joint summary issued by the committee stated that it had been decided to continue the negotiations and "to find a quick solution to this problem in order to vitalize the peace process."²²⁷

The committee met several more times but reached no conclusion on who would be allowed to return to the

223. Art. XXVII of the Interim Agreement; art. XVI of the Cairo Agreement.

224. *Ha'aretz*, 5 March 1995, 7 March 1995.

225. The information was provided by Nabil Sh'ath, the PA's minister for cooperation, in an interview with "The Voice of Palestine."

226. As stated in newspaper reports according to "officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." See *Ha'aretz*, 7 March 1995.

227. *Ha'aretz*, 8 March 1995.

Occupied Territories. It last met in February 1996 in Cairo.²²⁸

The return of Palestinians who left the Occupied Territories in 1967 and their family members could solve many family-unification problems in that many relatives for whom residents of the Occupied Territories want family unification are 1967 refugees or their descendents.

Criticism

Despite the undertaking stipulated in the Interim Agreement "to promote and upgrade family unification" in order "to reflect the spirit of the peace process," the Oslo Agreements have not led to any meaningful improvement in family unification in the Occupied Territories.

Israel continues to have sole decision-making power over unification and separation of every family in the Occupied Territories. Israel unilaterally determined that family unification will continue to be based on a limited annual quota set prior to the Interim Agreement, even though the quota clearly fails to meet the needs of the population. The PA strongly opposed this position. As a result, family unification in the West Bank was frozen for more than two years. The ones who suffered were the Palestinians, who were left with no means to attain family unification.

The dispute with the PA led Israel to neglect thousands of requests that had accumulated over the years and had not been handled because the quota had been met in those years. Since Israel continued to have the sole power to approve requests for family unification, it should have handled these requests within the quotas for 1996 and 1997.

228. According to Brig. Gen. Oren Shahor, Coordinator of Government Operations in the Occupied Territories, as reported in *Ha'aretz* on 27 November 1996, the committee's activity stopped as a result of the suicide attacks in February-March 1996. Shahor added that the parties agreed to renew the discussion in the first half of December 1996. The committee has not renewed discussions and has not reached any agreement on the return of the 1967 refugees.