

# Palestine / Israel: THE BASIC FACTS



## Introduction: the situation today

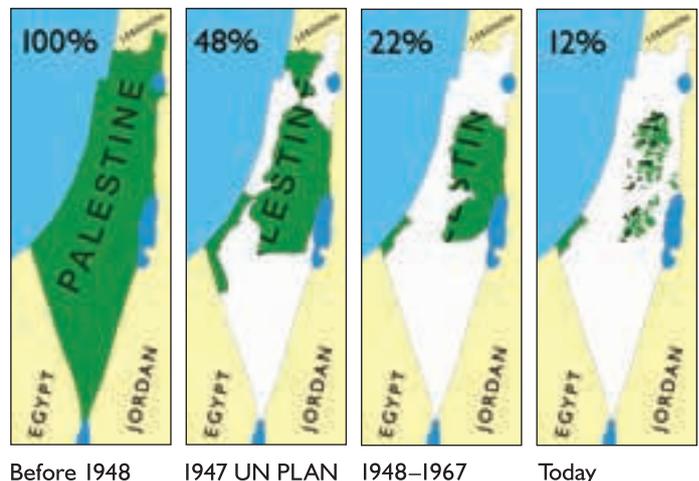
Since its foundation in 1948 the state of Israel has established a body of laws, policies, and practices that have systematically oppressed Palestinians. Because Israel's activities have also fragmented the Palestinian population, this oppression operates in different ways.

- There are over seven million Palestinians living in exile, many in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The majority are those who were forced out during the creation of Israel in 1948, known to Palestinians as the **Nakba** or 'catastrophe' (see below), and their descendants. Under international law these refugees have a right to return to the lands from which they were expelled. However, Israel has continuously denied them this right.
- Some Palestinians remained in what is now Israel. Today, 1.7 million live as second class citizens, comprising more than 20% of Israel's population. They are subject to over 65 laws that discriminate against them because they are Palestinian.
- A third group of Palestinians (many also refugees) today live either under brutal military occupation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.
- In the West Bank, 2.1 million Palestinians are governed under a discriminatory, unjust system of military law, face home demolitions, and severe restrictions on their freedom of movement.
- In East Jerusalem 327,000 Palestinians live as permanent residents, inferior to Jewish Israeli citizens.

- In Gaza, 1.9 million Palestinians live under a brutal siege, and have been subject to three aerial bombardments in the last twelve years. Due to the conditions imposed by the siege, the UN estimated that the area would be completely uninhabitable by 2020.

While Palestinians endure discriminatory treatment and the systematic denial of their human rights, Jewish Israelis enjoy full rights under the law within a system of institutionalised ethnic privilege. This leaflet provides basic information about the history and current situation in Palestine, and what you can do about it.

## Partition, occupation and annexation of Palestine



## Timeline: how did we get here?

While the history of Palestine/Israel is often presented as 'complex', the basic dynamics of the situation are not in fact hard to understand. It is helpful to have some understanding of the historical events which led up to the blatantly unjust status quo. As this timeline explains, the consistent pattern has been one of **Zionist movement** colonisation followed by **Israeli state violence** and **forced displacement of Palestinians**, all conducted with the active **support of western states** like the UK.

**1897** Modern **political Zionism**, the nationalist movement to establish a Jewish state, emerges in Europe. The First Zionist Congress, held in Switzerland, settles on the idea of colonising Palestine, then part of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire.

**1917** Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issues the '**Balfour Declaration**' promising the UK government's support for the creation of a 'national home' for Jewish people in Palestine, despite its inhabitants being 90% Palestinian Arab.

**1918-48** As part of its global empire, Britain rules Palestine until 1948 during the so-called 'mandate period' and

crushes all Palestinian revolts. Jewish immigration to Palestine grows.

**1948** Post-WWII, Britain leaves, handing responsibility to the newly-created United Nations which plans to create a Jewish state of Israel on 55% of historic Palestine, although just a third of the population at that time is Jewish.

**1948-9** What Israel calls its 'war of independence', Palestinians call the **Nakba** (catastrophe) as Israel's forces raze over 400 villages to the ground and drive more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. Israel now occupies 78% of historic Palestine and ignores (to this day) **UN resolution 194** demanding it allows the return of the Palestinians expelled or forced to flee in 1948. Palestinians remaining in the land that becomes Israel are placed under martial law, which remains until 1966.

**1967** During the 'Six Day War', Israel occupies the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip (the Occupied Palestinian Territories, OPTs), bringing all of historic Palestine under Israeli control. It ignores (to this day) **UN resolution 242** calling on it to withdraw. More than 1 million Palestinians are forced into exile.

**1987 Illegal Israeli settlements** in the OPT grow steadily, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The **First Intifada** (uprising) sees mass Palestinian protests brutally crushed.

**1993–5** The US brokers a series of agreements between Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. The ‘Oslo Accords’ are intended as a step towards Palestinian self-rule, with a staged withdrawal from the OPT by Israel. However, **illegal Israeli settlements** double in number during the ‘peace process’.

**2000** Israel’s increasingly brutal military rule and ongoing seizure of Palestinian land ignite a **second intifada**. Thousands are killed as Palestinian towns and refugee camps are invaded, shelled and bombed.

**2002** Israel starts construction of an **apartheid wall**, mostly built on Palestinian land. Its route annexes Jerusalem and major illegal settlements, belying Israel’s ‘security’ justification.

**2004** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) declares the wall illegal and orders its removal. Israel ignores the ICJ and instead extends its **matrix of control** including checkpoints, the ID system, a segregated road-network, house demolitions and administrative detention practices (imprisonment without charge or trial).

**2005** On the anniversary of the ICJ ruling, Palestinian civil society launches a call for **Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)** against Israel, modelled on the global movement that helped isolate apartheid South Africa. Despite daily settler and military violence, the non-violent Palestinian popular resistance movement in the West Bank grows.

**2006** Hamas wins elections declared by independent monitors as free and fair in the OPTs. Israel responds by abducting 35 Palestinian MPs and imposing a complete **blockade of Gaza**, subjecting it to major attacks, destroying the only power plant.

**2008–9** During ‘Operation Cast Lead’, Israel bombs Gaza for three weeks, destroys 25% of buildings and kills over 1,400 Palestinians including 300 children. Thirteen Israelis are killed. The Goldstone Report condemns Israel’s war crimes.

**2010** Israeli forces kill nine crew members on the *Mavi Marmara*, part of a flotilla of ships seeking to break the siege of Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid. International outrage spurs the growth of the BDS movement.

**2012** During ‘Operation Pillar of Defense’, Israel again bombs Gaza, killing 158 people.

**2014** In yet another episode of intense state violence, Israel’s 51-day assault on Gaza code-named ‘Operation Protective Edge’ kills more than 2,000 Palestinians.

**2018** Donald Trump moves the US embassy to Jerusalem – unilaterally recognising its illegal annexation by Israel – and ends US humanitarian support for Palestinian refugees expelled in 1948.

**2018-20** Israeli forces kill more than 260 Palestinians in Gaza during the Great Return March – a series of demonstrations in which Gazans march for their fundamental human rights.



Since 1948 Palestinians have been subject to **ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism and a discriminatory regime that amounts to apartheid**. **Ethnic cleansing** through forced removal from their lands and the denial of the legally enshrined right of return for those driven into exile; **settler colonialism** through the destruction and theft of Palestinian land for Jewish-only settlement, and **apartheid** through the establishment of a body of laws and policies that grants privileges to Jewish citizens of Israel that are denied to Palestinians.

## Hope for the future: what you can do

**W**estern governments allow Israel impunity despite decades of violating international law. But Palestinians continue their liberation struggle and grassroots support is growing around the world.

- **Join PSC:** Palestine Solidarity Campaign is the largest UK organisation working to support justice and human rights for Palestinians. Join us today.
- **Learn more:** you’ll find factsheets and other resources on our website [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).
- **Support the BDS movement:** heed the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel respects international law. More info at [bdsmovement.net](http://bdsmovement.net).