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Palestinian Land Day Israel steals land for Jewish State

Providing a Voice

Background

For Palestinians, their land is their identity and this has been taken away from them in ever-increasing amounts since the United Nations decided to partition historic Palestine in 1947. Then, the total area of historic Palestine was around 6.5 million acres, with only a mere 370,000 acres under Jewish control. The Palestinians, who formed the majority population, owned some 2.25 million acres under various titles while the rest came under the Islamic trust (*waqf*) and what we would call today "state land".

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

The UN Partition, which divided the land into 56 percent for the Jewish State, 43 percent for the Arab State with Jerusalem designated as an international zone, never eventuated. Instead, the forcible dispossession of Palestinians from their land began even before Israel was declared a state in 1948. Jewish Zionist leaders knew that Israel's existence could only be assured by ridding it of the indigenous Palestinian population. Zionist militia groups used physical and psychological terror tactics to force Palestinians to flee their homes in towns and villages and then took control of 5 million acres of land. Some 400 Palestinian villages and towns were ethnically cleansed, but the Palestinians never thought for a moment that they would become "permanent" refugees. To obliterate any evidence of these villages, the *Jewish National Fund* (JNF) planted hundreds of thousands of non-native trees in their place. In effect, the new State of Israel took a further 22 percent of Palestinian land, and to this day, has denied the indigenous Palestinians their right of return

Israel's illegal land grabs are continuing. Since the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians have been the victims of a new wave of land expropriations and have witnessed the demolition of their homes and the razing of their farmlands to make way for illegal Israeli settlements, military posts, the Wall and Israeli-only freeways.

The Palestinians who remained living in what had become Israel also feel the effects of Israel's illegal land policies that favour Jewish citizens. For six decades, Israel has refused to allow any new towns or villages to accommodate the growth rate of Palestinians. A 1961 law, which states that the JNF exists "for the purpose of settling Jews on such land and properties", blatantly discriminates on the basis of ethnicity.

Redeeming the land

The process of confiscation and transfer - known as "redeeming the land" - is a Zionist project so that the land becomes the inalienable property of "the Jewish people" worldwide which then includes them in Israel's "national" constituency even if they do not live in Israel.

LAND DAY – what happened on 30 March 1976

A mass strike was called by the *Palestinian National Committee for the Protection of Lands in Israel* on 30 March 1976 after Israeli authorities announced that they would be confiscating thousands of acres of Palestinian properties in the Galilee area and making them closed military zones. This plan was known as the "Judaisation" of the Galilee.

Palestinians were instructed to protest peacefully by remaining at home, but the Israeli authorities resorted to provocation and ordered the army and police to enter striking Palestinian villages. When the villagers resisted with stones, they were fired on, which resulted in six deaths and the wounding of hundreds of others. Many were arrested and curfews were imposed on a number of villages and towns.

Each year, **Land Day (Yawm al Ard)** is commemorated by Palestinians and their supporters around the world to bring attention to Israel's illegal expansionism, the major cause of instability in the Middle East region and the most contentious issue that threatens world peace.

Israel's land appropriation system

In order to retain possession of all the Palestinian land that it has illegally acquired, Israel set up a convoluted system of laws and administration that regulates the now more than 90% of land known as "Israel lands". These complex arrangements have made it almost impossible to legislate equality from within the Israeli legal system.

- **The Absentee Property Law** – adopted in March 1950 – classified as an "absentee" anyone who left his or her place of residence to take refuge and also includes as "present absentees" those Palestinians resident in Israel who are not physically living on their property, thus entitling the government to confiscate the land.

- **Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property** – controls the land and then transfers it to the Israel Development Authority.

- **Israel Development Authority** is a legal entity created by the Transfer of Property Law in July 1950 which can declare confiscated property "state land" and can dispose of it in the interests of the State giving priority to the Jewish National Fund which settles Jewish immigrants in Israel.

- **Jewish National Fund & Jewish Agencies** (branches of the World Zionist Organisation) are quasigovernmental agencies that purchase and develop land in Palestine for the Jewish people. Their charters do not allow them to sell the land because land in Israel cannot be bought, but they are permitted to lease land to Jews only for a period of 49 years. Public land was transferred to the Israel Land Administration in 1960, but the JNF still administers "forested" state land and also holds 14% of urban land in Israel.

- **Israel Land Administration** is a government agency established under Israel's Basic Law – Israel Lands (1960) and is responsible for managing 93% of the land of Israel in the public domain.

Israel's breaches and obligations

Israel has violated the Hague Regulations (1907), the UN Charter (1945) and the Geneva Conventions IV (1949) which refer to the basic principle that it is illegal to acquire territory by force and that the occupying state shall be regarded only as an administrator and cannot annex land that is in whole or in part occupied.

The Bedouin village of Al Arakib

The most blatant example of ethnic cleansing in Israel today is against the Bedouins from the village of Al Arakib, which has been destroyed 21 times.

Not only have their homes been bulldozed, but recently, Israel's State's Attorney Office wants to sue the residents for \$1 million shekels for the demolition of their own homes. Women, children and the elderly have been attacked with rubber bullets, percussion grenades, teargas, batons and bulldozers to stop them from protesting the destruction of their homes.

In September 2011, the Israeli cabinet approved plans for a large-scale 'transfer' of 30,000 Palestinian Bedouin in the Naqab (Negev) desert in Israel from their ancestral lands and a further plan schedules the eviction of 27,000 Bedouin from their lands in the West Bank.

Australian TV report

Early in 2011, Dateline compared the veteran Bedouin rights activist Nuri El Okbi to the Australian aboriginal rights advocate Eddie Mabo who had won a landmark court case eliminating the historical fiction of Terra Nullius (land belonging to nobody), a concept that underpins Israeli land confiscations.

In an interview with an official from the Israel Land Administration, Dateline showed how the Bedouins are regarded by the Zionist movement as "invaders", despite the land deeds El Okbi produced proving his right to the land and aerial photos from 1947 clearly depicting his family's home and fields. The official said: "Every year, [the Bedouins] invade and we remove them. They invade and we remove them. We're not going to let this land be invaded."

Stop the JNF Campaign

This global campaign aims to end the role of the JNF in its ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian people from their land, the theft of their land and property, the funding of the illegal settlements, and the destruction of the natural environment.

For too long the JNF and its affiliate organisations have enjoyed charitable status in over 50 countries which have enabled them to raise funds for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, its military occupation and Israel's apartheid policies. It is time that this status is revoked and all ties broken with the JNF.

Rouhana, Nadim, N - "Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State", Yale University, 1997

Max Blumenthal, "On Land Day, the Jewish National Fund's racist legacy is exposed", 30 March 2011

Amira Hass, "Israel to forcibly evict Bedouins from West Bank, Haaretz, 14 September 2011