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Prepared by SK/AFP

### Palestinian people power challenges Israeli Apartheid

## Providing a Voice

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The latest uprisings in Palestine have come on the back of the various revolutions against tyranny in the Middle East. This week's commemorations of Nakba - the catastrophe that saw the uprooting of Palestinian society to make way for Israel - was a chance for Palestinian refugees to force their issue on the agenda in the Arab world. No longer prepared to take their cue from so-called leaders who have failed them time and again, their message has come through loud and clear: "we are tired of waiting and we are no longer afraid."

At 7.1 million, the Palestinian refugees are the world's largest refugee population and the world's longest unresolved refugee crisis. For 63 years they have been denied the right to return to their homes by the Israeli state, which refuses them on the basis of their ethnicity. While Jews from around the world with various ethnic backgrounds and nationalities are welcomed into Israel, Palestinians who are the indigenous people of the land, many of whom still hold title to their homes and their farms, are forbidden from returning.

Samah Sabawi public advocate of Australians for Palestine said, "What we are seeing is a new form of power in the Middle East. It is not a military power. It is people power. It is inspirational watching this unfold: we hope that the voices of the oppressed will finally be heard".

She went on to say that Mahmoud Abbas and his government would be paying close attention. On the Nakba day of clashes with the Israeli army, Abbas commented that "the will of people is stronger than the power of the oppressive forces and the occupiers."

Ms Sabawi said "we will have to see how the PA intends to translate into strategy its assertion that the right of refugees to return is the most sacred pillar of Palestinian rights."

With these momentous changes taking place, Ms. Sabawi also said, "we hope Israel will soon have its own people power moment and Israelis will begin to come out *en masse* to challenge their government's oppressive policies."

Australia's own long-standing support of UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 - the internationally accepted basis for peacemaking in the Middle East - ought to see the current government give its backing to "a just settlement of the refugee problem" as agreed upon and also in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 194 which affirms the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return as enshrined in international humanitarian law.

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