



# **Negotiation Simulation Policy Papers: Towards a Brighter Future in Palestine**

## **Final Status Issues and Gaza - “Day After” (Refugees, Jerusalem, Settlements and Border and Water)**

This policy paper series was developed by members of the PPC Women’s Peace and Reconciliation Working Group as part of “The Missing Peace: Empowering Women as TSS Advocates” project; an EU-funded initiative implemented by the Palestinian Peace Coalition.

## **We Inherit the Struggle, but Write Toward a Brighter Future**

These papers are not merely political statements - they are sincere attempts at inquiry and understanding.

We are a group of Palestinian women who participated in a structured learning and capacity-building program organized by the Palestinian Peace Coalition (PPC), with the support of the European Union. As part of a broader reconciliation initiative titled “The Missing Peace: Empowering Women as Two-State Solution Advocates,” we engaged in intensive reading, research, dialogue, and technical workshops to deepen our understanding of final status issues and enhance our voice as policy advocates.

This publication presents our own reflections and policy analyses on five critical topics: Jerusalem, Refugees, Water, Settlements and Borders, and Gaza’s “Day After.” These are the outcome of collective dialogue and interaction with various data and sources, through which we sought to re-read the reality around us with a critical and peace-oriented lens, aiming for a more informed and constructive positioning that supports reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

This publication is both a reflection of our learning process and a contribution to the broader peacebuilding effort. We hope these papers can serve as tools for dialogue, awareness raising, and advocacy - and that they showcase the power of women’s voices in shaping a future rooted in justice, equality, and peaceful coexistence.

Warm Regards,

PPC Women’s Peace and Reconciliation Group 2025

## PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

*"UN Resolution 194 constitutes the legal foundation for the Right of Return, holding international legitimacy as a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly. It has been reaffirmed over 135 times in subsequent resolutions. Yet, it remains unimplemented due to Israel's refusal and the absence of international will to enforce it."*

By: Ms. Bilsan Qarabsa, Ms. Nisreen Habit, Ms. Rasha Obeid and Ms. Nagham Jabali

### Introduction

The Palestinian refugee issue is one of the oldest and most complex political and humanitarian crises in modern history. It stands as a stark testament to the ongoing Palestinian tragedy since the Nakba of 1948 - a moment of forced separation between a people and their land, anchoring one of the longest-standing refugee conditions in the world. For over seven decades, millions of Palestinians have lived in refugee camps inside and outside of Palestine, denied their right of return and stripped of basic legal and human rights.

This catastrophe resulted from a deliberate, systematic plan executed by Zionist armed groups during the establishment of the State of Israel, which led to the forced displacement of over 957,000 Palestinians from their towns and villages during the 1948 war. More than 400<sup>1</sup> Palestinian population centers were destroyed, with displacement occurring under military threat, massacres, or coercive conditions that triggered mass flight toward neighboring Arab countries.

Today, the number of Palestinian refugees is estimated at over 7 million, with around 5.9 million officially registered with UNRWA. These refugees reside in camps across the West Bank, Gaza, and the "frontline states" (Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), in addition to thousands more in the diaspora across the globe.

### The Roots of the Issue: The Nakba and Ethnic Cleansing

The Nakba of 1948 represents a foundational and tragic moment for the Palestinian refugee issue. The displacement of Palestinians was not merely a byproduct of war, but part of a deliberate strategy of ethnic cleansing aimed at depopulating as much land as possible of its indigenous inhabitants in order to consolidate the new Jewish state. This strategy was supported by the ideological foundations of the Zionist movement and executed in practice by armed groups such as the *Haganah*, *Irgun*, and *Lehi*, which committed dozens of massacres to terrorize civilians and force mass flight.

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<sup>1</sup> Walid Khalidi's, *All That Remains*.

In later years, prominent Israeli figures - most notably historian Benny Morris - acknowledged that the displacement was systematic and involved the destruction of over 369<sup>2</sup> Palestinian villages to prevent the return of their original residents. As a result, the Palestinian people were fragmented, turned into a nation of refugees both within and beyond their homeland.

### **Resolution 194: A Legal Anchor of the Undeniable Right**

On December 11, 1948 - just months after the Nakba - the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 194, which in its eleventh paragraph affirmed that *“the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;”*<sup>3</sup>

This resolution became the cornerstone - both legally and symbolically - for the Palestinian demand for the Right of Return. Far from being a mere political recommendation, it gradually evolved into a pillar of customary international law, owing to its repeated reaffirmation in over 135 subsequent UN resolutions. It is considered one of the most enduring and widely supported UN resolutions in history.

Resolution 194 affirms that:

- Return is an individual and collective right that does not expire over time.
- Refugees are entitled to compensation for lost property and suffering.
- The responsibility to resolve the issue lies with the international community, not solely with the aggressor.

Yet, despite this, the resolution remains unimplemented due to Israel’s ongoing refusal and the international community’s failure to enforce it.

### **UNRWA: A Humanitarian Lifeline amid Political and Diplomatic Paralysis**

In 1949, the United Nations established UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) as a temporary body to provide humanitarian and developmental assistance to Palestinian refugees in the areas where

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<sup>2</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), "Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator," A/RES/194(III), December 11, 1948

they had taken refuge. UNRWA's mandate was defined to cover five regions: the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

Over time, UNRWA evolved from an emergency relief agency into an essential pillar of life for the refugees, providing education, healthcare, relief, and human development services to camp residents. Today, the agency operates more than 700 schools, 140 health centers, and offers economic empowerment programs through microfinance projects, in addition to social protection and psychosocial support initiatives.

Despite the limitations of its political mandate, the very existence of UNRWA stands as living proof of the ongoing nature of the Palestinian refugee issue. For refugees, it serves as an international witness to the crime that was committed against them.

### **Targeting UNRWA: A Symbolic Attempt to Erase the Right of Return**

In recent years, efforts to dismantle UNRWA have intensified as part of a broader agenda to liquidate the Palestinian refugee issue. In 2018, the Trump administration cut all funding to UNRWA as part of its “Deal of the Century,” which sought to eliminate the right of return altogether and proposed the permanent resettlement of refugees in host countries in exchange for limited compensation.

Following this move, official Israeli calls grew louder to abolish the agency entirely and integrate its services into the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in a bid to strip Palestinian refugees of their unique status and reclassify them as ordinary refugees, thus erasing their legal and political identity.

Nevertheless, UNRWA continues to operate, sustained by substantial international and Arab support, alongside a broad Palestinian consensus that insists on the agency’s continued existence as an inseparable part of the struggle for the right of return.

### **Legal Protection Gap: Article 1/D of the Refugee Convention**

One of the most prominent legal challenges facing Palestinian refugees is their exclusion from the 1951 Refugee Convention under Article 1/D, which stipulates that individuals receiving assistance from other UN agencies do not fall under the mandate of the UNHCR.

Originally intended to safeguard the distinct nature of the Palestinian case, this exclusion has, in practice, created a legal loophole that weakens rather than protects Palestinian refugees. UNRWA, while providing humanitarian services, does not hold a legal protection mandate and cannot intervene in cases of forced displacement, deportation, or violations of refugee rights before international courts.

As a result, Palestinian refugees are the only refugee population worldwide not granted full international protection. This leaves them exceptionally vulnerable to legal and social risks, especially during times of crisis and war - such as the recent examples in Syria and Lebanon.

### **Palestinian Refugees in Neighboring Arab States: Between Temporary Shelter and Deferred Rights**

The surrounding Arab countries - Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria - became the primary destinations for the majority of Palestinians forcibly displaced from their towns and villages in 1948. These states hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees and established dozens of camps, many of which still exist today, more than seventy years later.

While Arab hosting was often grounded in principles of solidarity and pan-Arab commitment, it has generally lacked clear legal frameworks guaranteeing Palestinian refugees their civil, political, and social rights. As a result, refugees remain in a state of legal fragility, with their rights fluctuating based on domestic political conditions, relationships with Palestinian factions, and state policy.

### **Lebanon: Protracted Displacement under Severe Restrictions**

Lebanon presents one of the most legally and socially restrictive environments for Palestinian refugees. As of early 2025, nearly 500,000 Palestine refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. However, due to emigration and unreported deaths, the actual number residing in the country is estimated at approximately 222,000, including 195,000 Palestine refugees from Lebanon and 27,000 from Syria. Around 45% of these refugees live in the 12 official camps, including Ain Al-Hilweh, Burj Al-Barajneh, Shatila, and Nahr al-Bared.<sup>4</sup>

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are denied numerous fundamental rights, including:

- A ban on property ownership since 2001.
- Prohibition from practicing over 70 professions, including medicine, engineering, and law.
- Exclusion from national social security and healthcare systems.
- No official documentation guaranteeing long-term residency.

These restrictions are enforced despite the fact that many refugees have lived in Lebanon for four generations and have established strong social and economic ties. Lebanon's

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<sup>4</sup> UNRWA Lebanon Field Office, February 2025 Update

ongoing economic collapse, compounded by the Beirut port explosion in 2020, has further worsened the living conditions in the camps, which suffer from deteriorating infrastructure and dwindling support from UNRWA.

A new layer of complexity emerged after the war in Syria, as nearly 27,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria fled to Lebanon. Deprived of legal residency or formal protection, many now live in a state of “double displacement”—stateless and marginalized in two host countries simultaneously.

### **Jordan: Citizenship Granted, Political Rights Limited**

Jordan hosts the largest population of Palestinian refugees, with nearly 2 million registered refugees, many of whom have been granted Jordanian citizenship. This citizenship has afforded them access to education, healthcare, and employment. However, the complex and often sensitive dynamics surrounding Jordanian and Palestinian national identity have influenced state policies - especially for Palestinians originally from Gaza.

While refugees from the West Bank generally enjoy full civil rights, those who arrived from Gaza after the 1967 war remain in a legally ambiguous status. Lacking Jordanian citizenship, they are considered “temporary residents,” with limited access to civil rights. They face significant obstacles in higher education, property ownership, and employment.<sup>5</sup>

Jordan’s refugee camps - such as Al-Baqa'a, Al-Wehdat, and Al-Hussein - remain powerful symbols of an enduring tragedy. Tens of thousands continue to live in overcrowded conditions with limited services, despite the state’s efforts to integrate some of these areas into broader municipal systems.

### **Syria: From Integration and Stability to Secondary Displacement**

Compared to other Arab host countries, the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria was relatively favorable for decades. They were allowed to work, receive education, own property, and were treated similarly to Syrian citizens in terms of social rights - though without being granted citizenship.

However, the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011 dramatically reversed this stability. Palestinian camps - most notably the Yarmouk camp in Damascus - became battle zones. They suffered heavy shelling and widespread destruction, resulting in the displacement

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<sup>5</sup> Oren Yiftachel and Maya Segal, "Palestinian Refugees in Jordan: Citizenship, Identity and Exclusion," *Middle Eastern Studies* 58, no. 4 (2022): 538–556.

of over 120,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria.<sup>6</sup> Around 30,000 fled to Lebanon, while others sought refuge in Turkey, Egypt, and various European countries.

Due to the lack of international recognition of their specific legal status, Palestinian refugees from Syria found themselves trapped in a legal and humanitarian limbo. They were excluded from the protections granted to either Syrian or Palestinian refugees, creating a unique and dire reality known as “secondary displacement” or “double exile.”

### **Legal Gaps and De Facto Discrimination**

Many Arab countries continue to regulate the status of Palestinian refugees through unpublished administrative decisions or ministerial directives rather than through official, codified legislation that clearly defines their rights and obligations.

This ambiguity leaves the legal standing of Palestinian refugees vulnerable to political fluctuations. In times of tense relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or certain factions, host countries have at times imposed restrictions, suspended specific services, or even threatened deportation.

While some Palestinian refugees in the Gulf states enjoy relatively stable living conditions and economic opportunities, the majority lack any formal recognition of their refugee status. Instead, they are treated as foreign laborers, devoid of legal protections tied to their national identity.

### **Migration to the Diaspora: A Search for Dignity**

As a result of persistent exclusion and systemic discrimination, thousands of Palestinian refugees have chosen to migrate to non-Arab countries - such as those in Europe, the Americas, and Australia - in search of greater stability and a life of dignity. Estimates suggest that more than 1.3 million Palestinian refugees currently reside in these regions, with a significant portion having arrived over the past decade, driven by the crises in Syria and Lebanon.

Despite the difficulties associated with obtaining asylum in some of these countries, the younger generation of Palestinian refugees increasingly prefers to live in environments where human rights are respected and where economic opportunities exist, rather than remain in overcrowded camps that lack basic standards of living.

However, migration to the West is not a solution - it does not negate the right of return. Rather, it reflects the failure to ensure that refugees can live with dignity and full freedom

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<sup>6</sup> UNRWA, *Where We Work: Syria*, accessed April 2025, [www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria/yarmouk-unofficial-camp](http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria/yarmouk-unofficial-camp)



in nearby Arab countries. It underscores the urgent need to address the root causes of displacement rather than treating migration as a final escape route.

### **International Void: Absent Protections and Stark Bias**

Despite the decades that have passed since the Palestinian refugee catastrophe, international institutions remain unable to provide genuine legal protection for this population. The "Conciliation Commission," established by UN Resolution 194 to facilitate return and compensation, was effectively frozen in the 1960s. Meanwhile, the UNHCR does not intervene due to the exclusionary clause in Article 1D of the 1951 Refugee Convention, as previously discussed.

As a result, UNRWA remains the sole UN agency administering Palestinian refugee affairs, but it lacks a protection mandate. It cannot intervene in cases of forced displacement, civil rights violations in host countries, or discrimination based on identity.

Though human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International periodically publish reports on the issue, the international community has consistently failed to take practical action to safeguard Palestinian refugees. Their plight is often treated as a chronic humanitarian problem, rather than what it truly is: a deeply political and legal issue requiring urgent resolution.

### **The Arab Role: Between Political Support and Practical Retreat**

Over the decades, Arab states have taken varying positions on the Palestinian refugee issue: some have offered near-complete embrace, others have treated refugees with clear discrimination, while a few have chosen to marginalize their presence or evade responsibilities altogether.

In recent years, with the acceleration of normalization with Israel - especially following the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 - there has been a noticeable decline in official Arab discourse on the refugee issue. The concept of "return" is no longer mentioned as a central demand. It is increasingly replaced by notions such as "resettlement," "integration," or "humanitarian solutions," reflecting a dangerous convergence with the far-right Israeli narrative.

Some Arab countries have begun imposing greater restrictions on refugees, refusing to host new waves of displacement, or seeking to dismantle refugee camps - viewing them not as manifestations of an unresolved political issue, but rather as social and security burdens.

## **Towards a Just and Comprehensive Solution: Return as a Non-Negotiable Right**

In light of ongoing political complexities and the erosion of international legal frameworks, the principle of the right of return remains at the core of any just resolution to the Palestinian refugee issue. No settlement can be considered legitimate or acceptable if it ignores this right or attempts to substitute it with resettlement or compensation alone. Return is not merely a humanitarian demand - it is a firmly established legal right, anchored in UN resolutions, foremost among them Resolution 194, and reaffirmed in the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law.

Despite Israel's persistent rejection, this right does not expire with time, nor is it subject to political negotiation or compromise. Any realistic approach to resolving the refugee issue must begin with full recognition of this principle and its integration into a phased, implementable process that preserves both dignity and rights, while taking into account political and demographic considerations - without compromising the essence of the right itself.

### **Proposed Solutions: Gradual Return and Fair Compensation**

In light of the current political deadlock, numerous initiatives have emerged proposing practical mechanisms for the implementation of the right of return in a phased and realistic manner. Among the most notable are:

#### **1. Organized Gradual Return**

This approach calls for implementing return in stages, beginning with the most vulnerable refugee groups (such as those in Lebanon and Syria), accompanied by the development of suitable infrastructure to accommodate returnees in specific Palestinian areas that can be rehabilitated. This includes restoring depopulated villages or constructing new towns within the borders of a future Palestinian state. The process would be overseen by an independent international body to ensure transparency and regular reporting to all relevant stakeholders.

#### **2. Humanitarian Family Reunification**

Legal pathways would be opened to allow for the reunification of fragmented families inside Palestinian territories, serving as an initial humanitarian measure that does not negate the core principle of the right of return itself.

#### **3. Fair Compensation**

Refugees who either do not wish to return or are unable to due to geographic or political barriers should be offered fair material and moral compensation. This includes:

- Compensation for lost property
- Compensation for decades of hardship in exile
- Support for integration into new host societies without compromising national identity

#### **4. International Implementation Mechanism**

A dedicated international fund for return and compensation should be established, financed by donor states and administered under UN supervision. This fund would be allocated to support return programs, housing, and compensation efforts, with strict measures in place to ensure full transparency and accountability.

#### **Rejection of Partial Solutions and Political Bargaining**

Palestinians firmly reject all attempts to marginalize or dissolve the refugee issue through forced resettlement in host countries, the dismantling of UNRWA, the redefinition of "refugee" status, or political trade-offs - such as exchanging the right of return for a diminished, semi-sovereign state.

All attempts to impose fragmented or partial solutions have failed. From the Oslo Accords - which postponed addressing the refugee issue - to the "Deal of the Century," which went further in undermining the refugee file as a final status issue, and finally to various Arab normalization efforts with Israel that proceeded without linking peace to a just resolution for Palestinian refugees.

#### **The Role of the International Community: From Denunciation to Action**

The international community bears historical and moral responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees - whether through the original partition plan, its prolonged silence in the face of violations, or its failure to enforce UN Resolution 194.

Nevertheless, there remains a meaningful opportunity for the international community to support a just and lasting solution, through the following actions:

- Renewing legal and political commitments to implementing Resolution 194 in all international forums.
- Strengthening UNRWA's mandate and ensuring its sustainable funding, resisting political pressure to dismantle the agency.
- Applying diplomatic pressure on Israel to halt displacement practices and to acknowledge its historical responsibility.

- Politically empowering refugees by involving them in shaping any future resolution and ensuring their representation in final status negotiations.

## **The Role of Palestinian Women: Memory, Resistance, and Narrative**

In the face of ongoing efforts to erase national memory, Palestinian women leaders and activists - especially those from refugee backgrounds - serve as the first line of defense for the Right of Return. Despite the challenges of exile, displacement, and daily survival, this generation continues to carry the narrative, affirm their connection to the land, and uphold a unified national identity.

### **1. Collective Memory**

Palestinian women are actively engaged in preserving and reviving collective memory through:

- Archival initiatives to document oral histories of the Nakba.
- Mapping and recording destroyed villages.
- Writing personal narratives and memoirs.
- Establishing museums and cultural centers dedicated to preserving identity.

### **2. Digital and Media Activism**

Modern media has become a powerful tool in conveying the refugee experience to global audiences. Women- and youth-led efforts have produced visual and written content that highlights lived realities and challenges Israeli narratives. Campaigns like *"I Am From There," "Nakba Is Ongoing,"* and *"A Refugee Is Not Just a Number"* exemplify how social media is used to revive collective memory and build international solidarity.

### **3. Political Engagement**

Many young Palestinians view the refugee issue not just as a humanitarian crisis but as a political and national cause. They reject reducing it to food aid or social services and insist on their political agency. Across the globe, youth and women continue to demand inclusion in national policy discussions and assert that the future of a Palestinian state cannot be built without the return of its exiled population.

### **4. Women-Led Palestinian-International Alliances**

Palestinian women and women organizations/groups are also forging partnerships with international human rights groups, solidarity movements, and student unions. These

alliances aim to defend refugee rights, expose settlement expansion as a threat to Palestinian statehood, and advocate globally for the Right of Return.

### **A Vision for the Future: From Exile to Dignified Return**

As a group of engaged and inquisitive Palestinian women activists, we believe that the refugee issue cannot be resolved without a comprehensive national project - one that reorders Palestinian priorities and places the refugee at the heart of shaping the future of the state.

We strongly believe that:

- The return of refugees is not only a personal right - it is a reclaiming of national identity.
- Renouncing this right would amount to completing the Nakba.
- A sovereign Palestinian state cannot be established without a just resolution to the refugee question.

After more than seven decades, it has become painfully clear to us as young Palestinian advocates that the refugee issue is not merely a humanitarian tragedy, but one of the most blatant cases of historical injustice in modern times. It remains the most enduring symbol of the Nakba, and a glaring testament to the international system's failure to uphold justice - despite dozens of UN resolutions and hundreds of diplomatic efforts that have gone nowhere.

Yet despite all this injustice, the Right of Return has not been erased. Memory endures. Palestinians have not succumbed to imposed realities. Refugee camps are still alive despite poverty. Keys are still hanging on the walls. And the new generation continues to write *"We will return"* across the walls of exile.

The return of Palestinian refugees is not a threat to anyone - it is a rectification of a historical wrong, a justice long denied and deeply awaited. Without it, all political proposals will remain hollow, all solutions partial, and all peace efforts a mirage.

The Palestinian refugee is not asking for the impossible. They are demanding their right to return to their homeland, to live in dignity, and to participate in rebuilding their nation. If the world is truly serious about justice, then it must start here: with the camp, the key, and UN Resolution 194.

# JERUSALEM

## *History, Identity, and Demographic Policies*

*"Successive Israeli governments seek to impose new demographic and political realities in the occupied city through settlement expansion, ID revocations, home demolitions, and targeting of Palestinian institutions-making the prospect of a two-state solution increasingly complex with each passing day."*

By: Ms. Samar Abu Filat, Ms. Walaa Abu Snieneh and Ms. Amal Khattabeh

### **Introduction**

Jerusalem holds an exceptional place in the historical, religious, and political context of Palestine and the broader region. It is not merely a strategically located city but serves as a spiritual, cultural, and religious epicenter for millions - and above all, for the Palestinian people who view it as the beating heart of their national and religious identity, and as their eternal and irreplaceable capital.

Covering an area of approximately 125 square kilometers, Jerusalem is home to a uniquely diverse religious and demographic makeup. According to Israeli official 2024 data, the city's population is estimated at 974,000, with around 569,570 Jews (58.5%), 353,345 Muslims (36.3%), and 16,300 Christians, along with more than 10,000 residents identified as non-religious or other.<sup>7</sup>

These figures, however, do more than reflect the city's demographics - they also reveal the depth of change brought about by Israel's policies aimed at diminishing the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and entrenching an artificial Jewish majority, all in an attempt to solidify the notion of a "unified Jerusalem" as the capital of Israel.

### **Jerusalem in History: A City of Civilizations and Sacred Sites**

Jerusalem is recognized as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was founded by the Canaanites in the third millennium BCE and inhabited by the Jebusites, who named it "Jebus." Over the centuries, the city came under the rule of many civilizations: the Phoenicians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, and finally the British and then Israeli occupation.

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<sup>7</sup> Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), "Jerusalem Day 2024 Report." Note: These figures include areas of East Jerusalem, which is considered occupied territory under international law and not internationally recognized as part of Israel.

Throughout history, the city has borne many names - among them: Al-Quds Al-Sharif, Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina, and Bayt al-Maqdis. This rich and diverse history is reflected in the city's architectural, cultural, and religious landscape. It is home to landmarks and religious sites that represent the shared heritage of humanity and stand as testimony to a legacy of plurality and coexistence that once defined the city - before it became a focal point of religious and political conflict.

Historically, Jerusalem embodied tolerance and coexistence among the Abrahamic faiths. Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher sit side by side in the heart of the Old City - an extraordinary image of spiritual convergence rarely found elsewhere. This coexistence was not merely symbolic; it shaped the daily lives of the city's inhabitants for centuries.

### **The Old City: Heart and Soul of Jerusalem**

The Old City constitutes the most prominent and sensitive part of East Jerusalem. Though it covers just about one square kilometer, it houses an immense concentration of religious and historical landmarks, making it one of the most sacred and significant areas in the world.

The Old City is divided into four quarters: the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, and the Jewish Quarter. Within its walls lie some of the holiest sites to the three Abrahamic faiths, including Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Western Wall (also referred to as the Wailing Wall in Jewish tradition).

In 1981, UNESCO designated the Old City and its walls as a World Heritage Site. In 1982, it was also placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to Israeli policies that threaten its historical and legal status - especially through excavation activities, restrictions on restoration efforts, limits on Palestinian movement, and repeated settler incursions into the Al-Aqsa compound.

### **Geographic Location and Economic Role of Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is geographically situated at the heart of the West Bank, acting historically as a central artery connecting the northern and southern parts of Palestine. Before the Israeli occupation in 1967, the city maintained organic connections with surrounding Palestinian towns and served as a hub for administration, economy, culture, and education. It was home to educational institutions, media outlets, hospitals, and religious authorities, playing a pivotal role in both the political and spiritual life of Palestinians.

However, this role significantly diminished following the occupation, especially after the construction of the Separation Wall, which severed Jerusalem from its Palestinian hinterland and severely restricted freedom of movement for Palestinians entering or leaving the city. These measures triggered economic shrinkage, an exodus of key institutions, and rising poverty and unemployment rates among the Palestinian population. Despite these challenges, Jerusalem remains firmly rooted in the Palestinian national consciousness as the capital of the future Palestinian state.

### **Demographic Structure: Systematic Judaization Policies**

Since the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has pursued a demographic strategy aimed at reducing the number of Palestinian residents while increasing the Jewish population in the city. This policy is enforced through a complex system of legal, political, and economic measures. Statistics show that Palestinians comprised about 30% of the population of "unified" Jerusalem after 1967, and Israel has consistently aimed to keep this percentage below 28% by any means necessary.<sup>8</sup>

The tools used to implement this demographic engineering include:

- **Revocation of Residency Permits:** The Israeli Ministry of Interior routinely revokes the residency status of Palestinians if they have lived outside the city for a certain period, or fail to prove that Jerusalem is their “center of life.”
- **Family Unification Ban:** Palestinian residents of Jerusalem are denied the right to bring in spouses or children who are from the West Bank or Gaza.
- **Building Restrictions:** Palestinians face severe obstacles in obtaining building permits, pushing many to build without authorization and exposing them to the risk of home demolitions.
- **House Demolitions:** The Israeli municipality in Jerusalem regularly carries out demolitions, often under the pretext of unauthorized construction, leading to the displacement of thousands of families.
- **Excessive Taxes:** High municipal taxes such as the "Arnona" are used as an economic pressure tactic, further burdening Palestinian families already struggling with poverty.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>



Meanwhile, Israeli settlers benefit from extensive government support, including subsidies, advanced municipal services, and facilitated construction and infrastructure development in both East and West Jerusalem.

### **Settlement in East Jerusalem: A Tool of Annexation and Judaization**

Settlement activity in East Jerusalem represents one of the most serious threats facing Palestinians. It is a central tool used by successive Israeli governments to impose de facto sovereignty over the city, fragment it both geographically and demographically, and preempt the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Since 1967, Israel has established 15 major settlements in East Jerusalem. Prominent among these are Ma'ale Adumim, Gilo, Har Homa, Ramat Shlomo, Pisgat Ze'ev, French Hill, and Ramat Eshkol. These settlements have been strategically developed to encircle Palestinian neighborhoods and sever East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.<sup>9</sup>

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 210,000 Israeli settlers reside in East Jerusalem. Many of these settlers live in government-subsidized housing within settlements constructed and expanded since 1967, aiming to entrench a permanent Jewish presence and establish geopolitical facts on the ground that render the city's division increasingly unfeasible.<sup>10</sup>

### **Settlement Outposts inside Palestinian Neighborhoods**

In addition to large settlement blocs, settler organizations - such as Ateret Cohanim and Elad - have pursued a policy of planting settler outposts within the heart of historic Palestinian neighborhoods like Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Ras al-Amud, and the Old City. These outposts are established through property seizures based on dubious legal claims or manipulated purchases.<sup>11</sup>

This type of settlement leads to daily clashes, repeated settler violence against Palestinian residents, and gradual transformation of the social and cultural fabric of these neighborhoods. It also constitutes a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.

### **Israeli Policies toward Islamic and Christian Waqf Properties**

Islamic and Christian Waqf properties in Jerusalem are fundamental components of the city's identity and civilizational heritage. They have historically played a vital role in financing religious, educational, and health institutions, as well as in preserving the city's Arab, Islamic, and Christian character. However, since the beginning of the occupation,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/jerusalem>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/wb\\_thematic\\_9\\_0.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/wb_thematic_9_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jerusalemstory.com/ar/node/1101>

Israel has sought to assert control over these properties and strip them of their influence, as part of a long-term plan to Judaize - or "Israelize" - the city.

Key manifestations of Israeli control include:

- **The Absentee Property Law of 1950:** This law has been used to confiscate hundreds of Waqf-owned properties that belonged to Jerusalemites forcibly displaced in 1948.<sup>12</sup>
- **Restructuring of the judicial system:** Palestinian residents are compelled to resort to Israeli courts to challenge confiscation orders or to prove Waqf ownership, yet rulings overwhelmingly favor settler organizations over local communities.<sup>13</sup>
- **Prevention of restoration and development:** The Israeli municipality imposes severe restrictions on the renovation of mosques, churches, and Waqf-run schools, leading to gradual deterioration and structural decline.<sup>14</sup>
- **Control over the Mughrabi Gate:** One of the entrances to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, now used by settlers to conduct incursions under the protection of Israeli police.

These policies aim to diminish the religious and historical role of the Waqf institutions and transform their sites into assets for settlement, tourism, and heritage projects that serve the Israeli narrative and undermine Palestinian presence in the city.

### **The Legal Status of Jerusalem under International Law**

From the perspective of international law, East Jerusalem - including the Old City and its surrounding neighborhoods - is considered occupied territory subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949),<sup>15</sup> which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its civilian population into occupied territory or making demographic and geographic changes therein.

Key international resolutions concerning Jerusalem include:

- **UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947):** Called for the internationalization of Jerusalem, placing it under a special international regime.

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<sup>12</sup> Ben-Hillel, Yotam. "The Absentee Property Law and its Implementation in East Jerusalem: A Legal Guide and Analysis." Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Separate and Unequal: Israel's Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." December 2010.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO. "Report on the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls".

<sup>15</sup> International Court of Justice. "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." Advisory Opinion, 2004

- **UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967):** Demanded Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied during the June 1967 war, including East Jerusalem.
- **UN Security Council Resolutions 252 (1968) and 267 (1969):** Declared all measures taken by Israel to alter the status of Jerusalem as null and void.
- **UN Security Council Resolution 478 (1980):** Rejected Israel's declaration of Jerusalem as its capital, deemed it null and void, and called on member states to withdraw their embassies from the city.<sup>16</sup>
- **Subsequent General Assembly resolutions,** particularly those passed after the 2017 U.S. declaration recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, reaffirmed the city's legal status as occupied territory.

### **The Palestinian Position: Full Sovereignty over East Jerusalem**

The official Palestinian stance affirms that East Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Palestinian state and an inseparable part of the territories occupied in 1967. The Palestinian leadership maintains that all unilateral Israeli actions - settlement building, demolitions, and identity revocations - do not alter the legal status of the city and do not establish or legitimize any Israeli claims to it.

The Palestinian position emphasizes the following:

- Custodianship of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem lies with Jordan, based on a formal agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization.<sup>17</sup>
- International responsibility requires the United Nations and the broader international community to ensure compliance with international law in the city.
- Any future settlement must include Israel's full withdrawal from East Jerusalem, which is to serve as the capital of the Palestinian state.

This position has been upheld consistently by Palestinian negotiators across all rounds of negotiations led by the Palestine Liberation Organization - from the Oslo Accords, to Camp David, and through the Annapolis talks - where the demand for full sovereignty over East Jerusalem has remained non-negotiable.

### **The Israeli Vision: The "Greater Jerusalem" Project and the Refusal of Division**

Since occupying East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has maintained a clear, unwavering position: that Jerusalem - both East and West - is the unified and eternal capital of the

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<sup>16</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 478, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Jordan-PLO Agreement on the Holy Places, 2013.

Israeli state, not subject to division or shared sovereignty. This stance, which has persisted through successive governments, forms a cornerstone of Israel's political doctrine regarding the city.

Israel's vision extends beyond East and West Jerusalem and is embodied in what is known as the "Greater Jerusalem" project.<sup>18</sup> This plan seeks to annex vast areas of the West Bank into Jerusalem's municipal boundaries in order to reinforce a Jewish demographic majority. According to Israeli definitions, "Greater Jerusalem" includes areas such as:

- Ma'ale Adumim to the east, extending toward the outskirts of Jericho.
- Giv'at Ze'ev to the north, near the city of Ramallah.
- Gush Etzion to the south, between Bethlehem and Hebron.
- Kafr 'Aqab and Semiramis, and parts of Al-Bireh to the north.

This geopolitical configuration aims to establish a vast Jewish urban bloc, while fragmenting Palestinian presence into isolated and besieged pockets - effectively eliminating the possibility of dividing the city or establishing a Palestinian capital in it.

### **Jerusalem in Peace Negotiations: From Camp David to Annapolis**

Despite the sensitivity of the issue, the question of Jerusalem has been addressed in several rounds of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and successive Israeli governments. The most notable of these were:

#### **1. Camp David Summit (July 2000)**

This summit, hosted by U.S. President Bill Clinton, brought together Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak. Israel offered the Palestinians symbolic sovereignty over some neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, while retaining actual sovereignty in its hands, and proposed a joint administration of the Haram al-Sharif.<sup>19</sup>

Naturally, the Palestinian delegation rejected this proposal, insisting on full sovereignty over East Jerusalem, including the Old City and the holy sanctuary, along with international guarantees for freedom of worship and access. As a result, the summit ended without an agreement, and the issue of Jerusalem was considered the primary reason for the failure.

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<sup>18</sup> Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ). "The Expansion of Greater Jerusalem."

<sup>19</sup> Pressman, Jeremy. "Visions in Collision: What Happened at Camp David and Taba?" *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 2003), pp. 5–43.

## **2. Annapolis Talks (2007)**

These negotiations involved President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, under the sponsorship of U.S. President George W. Bush. Olmert presented a proposal to divide Jerusalem, suggesting that the Old City be placed under international administration and sovereignty over certain neighborhoods be shared.<sup>20</sup> Although the Palestinian side expressed some openness, no final agreement was reached due to political changes in Israel and the international community's lack of readiness to exert effective pressure.

## **3. Kerry Negotiations (2013–2014)**

This round was led by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, during which general principles for a permanent solution were proposed - including provisions for Jerusalem. However, the process quickly collapsed due to the intransigence of the Israeli position, increased settlement activity in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, and the breakdown of Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

### **The Geneva Initiative: A Bold Model for a Compromise Solution?**

In 2003, a group of moderate Palestinian and Israeli political figures launched an unofficial initiative known as the Geneva Initiative (or Geneva Accord). The document called for a two-state solution and the division of Jerusalem into two capitals - granting Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem and Israeli sovereignty over West Jerusalem - with international supervision over the Haram Al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).<sup>21</sup>

The initiative also proposed the creation of a tripartite religious committee (Islamic, Christian, and Jewish) to oversee the management of holy sites and to prevent any excavation or activity without the consent of all parties involved. For the first time in the history of the conflict, the initiative proposed the deployment of a multinational monitoring force to ensure the implementation of the agreement's provisions.

While the Geneva Initiative was welcomed by many European countries, it faced widespread rejection from the Israeli right-wing and from some Palestinian factions who viewed it as a form of capitulation - particularly with regard to the concept of joint sovereignty over the Old City. Despite not being officially adopted, the initiative remains

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<sup>20</sup> Kurtzer, Daniel C., et al. "The Peace Puzzle: America's Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989–2011." Cornell University Press, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> The Geneva Accord. *Model Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement*. October 2003. <https://geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/the-agreement>

a significant model for realistic and negotiable alternatives, demonstrating that practical solutions are possible when political will exists.

### **Reasons for the Failure of Jerusalem Negotiations**

A review of past negotiation experiences reveals that the failure to reach an agreement on Jerusalem stems from a mix of internal and external factors - on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides:

#### **From the Israeli side:**

- A consistent insistence on exclusive Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem.
- Systematic expansion of settlements during negotiation periods.<sup>22</sup>
- Political pressure from religious parties and the far-right, influencing Israeli policy.
- Using negotiations at times as a diplomatic façade without genuine intent to reach a settlement.

#### **From the Palestinian side:**

- Limited political leverage and influence in negotiation settings.
- Ongoing internal political division between the West Bank (Fatah) and Gaza (Hamas).<sup>23</sup>
- The absence of flexible negotiation strategies that protect core principles while allowing for tactical maneuvering.
- The marginalization of women voices and civil society expertise in national decision-making processes.

#### **International factors:**

- The clear bias of certain major powers toward Israel - particularly the United States after 2017.
- The declining role of the European Union as an effective mediator.
- The lack of a binding international enforcement mechanism to implement UN resolutions.

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<sup>22</sup> Levy, Gideon. "Peace Talks and Settlement Expansion." Haaretz, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group. "Palestine: Divided Politics, Divided Nation." Middle East Report N°106, 2001.

## **The Palestinian Women Perspective: Jerusalem as a Horizon, Not Just a Symbol**

The new generation of Palestinians views Jerusalem as more than just a political or religious symbol. For many, it represents the essence of struggle, the anchor of national identity, and a compass for their aspirations. Young activists increasingly believe that Israel's ongoing Judaization policies cannot be countered solely through official statements or high-level negotiations; rather, they require bold and innovative approaches, including:

- Internationalizing the issue through media and legal platforms: Leveraging digital media, social networks, and human rights advocacy to challenge Israel's narrative and amplify the Palestinian voice on the global stage.
- Framing Jerusalem within global justice movements: Linking the city's struggle with broader issues such as social justice, religious freedom, and human rights to attract global solidarity with the Palestinian cause.
- Cross-border women-led initiatives: Facilitating dialogue with open-minded Israeli women and youth to deconstruct dominant narratives, counter incitement and racism, and propose alternative models of coexistence that transcend entrenched polarization.
- Digital documentation and institutional engagement: Utilizing online platforms and formal channels such as UN bodies to expose Israeli policies through professional, rights-based discourse.

Palestinian women believe that lasting solutions for Jerusalem will not emerge from political summits alone, but from the grassroots - through public engagement, shifting international perceptions, and reaffirming the city's role not only as a center of conflict but also as a symbol of hope and resistance.

### **Jerusalem-Gateway to Peace or War**

This paper affirms that the complexity, history, and sanctity of Jerusalem cannot be addressed solely through the logic of power. What the city needs is historical justice, political courage, and mutual readiness to acknowledge rights, grievances, and narratives.

There can be no lasting peace without Jerusalem, and no future can be imposed on its people without their will. As long as the legal status of the city continues to be ignored, and as long as policies of coercion and annexation persist, stability in the region will remain an elusive mirage.

We, a group of engaged Palestinian women activists, present our perspective with the conviction that Jerusalem is not merely a story of conflict, but also one of resilience and hope. The city does not have to remain a gateway to war and destruction - it can instead become a gateway to peace and a better future for all.

We believe the younger generation can revive the values of justice and equality - if given space, support, and meaningful participation in shaping decisions on both sides of the conflict.



## SETTLEMENTS AND BORDERS

*"The growing influence of far-right and religious parties, who are among the strongest advocates of settlement expansion, and the fact that most recent Israeli governments rely on coalitions with these parties, has rendered any decision to freeze or dismantle settlements nearly impossible."*

By: Ms. Du'aa Abu Sunineh, Ms. Jumana Abu Ghazala and Ms. Suad Zied

### Introduction

The issue of Israeli settlements and the borders of a future Palestinian state stands among the most complex and contentious in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is not merely a dispute over territory but reflects the fundamental contradiction between the Palestinian vision of an independent state on the 1967 borders and Israel's strategy of expansion and the imposition of geopolitical realities through force. Since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, successive Israeli governments have pursued a systematic settlement enterprise aimed at seizing the largest amount of land, dismantling the geographical integrity of Palestinian territory, and weakening the possibility of establishing a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.

Over more than five decades, this project has reached an alarming scale: hundreds of settlements have been established, over 750 military checkpoints have been installed, and the West Bank has been fragmented into more than 167 isolated geographic enclaves.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the international community has remained largely ineffective in enforcing its decisions regarding the illegality of settlements, and the instruments of international law have failed to halt this relentless expansion.

This paper aims to offer a comprehensive analytical reading of the current state of settlements and borders, exploring the legal and political challenges that prevent the enforcement of relevant international resolutions. It also presents two realistic scenarios for addressing the issue - one rooted in international legitimacy and the two-state solution, and the other based on a model of functional coexistence in the face of a stalled political process.

### First: Historical and Legal Context of Settlements and Borders

Israeli settlement expansion intensified after the June 1967 war, despite international resolutions affirming the illegality of occupying land by force. Dozens of UN resolutions have condemned the settlements - foremost among them Resolution 242, which called for Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied in the war, and Resolution 446, which

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.btselem.org/topic/settlements>

declared Israeli settlement policies illegal. These were followed by additional resolutions, culminating in Resolution 2334 (2016), which affirmed the illegality of all forms of settlement activity in the 1967 occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.

However, Israel-backed by the United States at various times - has refused to comply with these resolutions and continued to build and expand settlements. It even went so far as to declare that the West Bank is "disputed" territory rather than "occupied," a claim that directly contradicts international law and the Geneva Conventions.

### **Second: Political Geography in the Post-Oslo Era**

The Oslo Accords (1993) produced a complex geographical reality, dividing the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, thereby entrenching fragmentation. The Palestinian Authority has partial control over Areas A and B, which comprise about 40% of the West Bank, while Area C - covering 60% - remains under full Israeli control and hosts the bulk of settlement activity.

This has resulted in the confiscation of over 40% of West Bank land, the construction of bypass roads for settlers, the separation of Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings, and the erection of the separation wall, which itself appropriated thousands of dunams. Over 87% of the Jordan Valley is now under Israeli control, despite the region constituting 30% of Palestine's agricultural output.

Today, more than 700,000 settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in sprawling settlement blocs, further complicating the establishment of a geographically contiguous and sovereign Palestinian state.

### **Third: Settlements from the Perspective of International Law**

International legal bodies - including the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, and the International Committee of the Red Cross - are unanimous in their view that settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories constitutes a blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), particularly Article 49, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its civilian population into occupied territories.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, Israel continues to construct settlements, providing them with military protection and economic incentives.

The international community has failed to enforce these rulings; even Resolution 2334 has seen no practical implementation, despite its unequivocal assertion that settlements

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<sup>25</sup> International Court of Justice. "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." Advisory Opinion, 9 July 2004. <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/131>.

are illegal.<sup>26</sup> This international inaction has emboldened successive Israeli governments to deepen their settlement agenda.

#### **Fourth: Political and Security Challenges**

Beyond legal complexities, there are intertwined political and security challenges:

- **Internal Israeli Politics:** The growing influence of far-right and religious parties, which are among the strongest supporters of settlement expansion. Most recent Israeli governments rely on coalitions with these parties, making any decision to freeze or dismantle settlements nearly impossible.<sup>27</sup>
- **Security Pretexts:** Israel uses settlements as a justification for maintaining a military presence across vast areas of the West Bank, under the pretext of protecting settlers. This leads to road closures, checkpoints, and restricted Palestinian movement.
- **Palestinian Division:** The continued division between the West Bank and Gaza weakens a unified Palestinian position and gives Israel an excuse to claim that there is no single Palestinian partner for final status negotiations.
- **Biased International Support:** Since the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017 and its 2019 declaration that settlements do not violate international law, Israel has enjoyed political cover for settlement expansion, despite muted international criticism.

#### **Fifth: The Impact of Settlements on the Feasibility of a Palestinian State**

Settlements are not only a legal violation - they represent a fragmentation project that undermines the possibility of a sovereign Palestinian state:

- Settlement expansion has fragmented the West Bank into more than 160 isolated Palestinian communities connected only by roads controlled by the Israeli military.
- East Jerusalem has been separated from its Palestinian surroundings through settlements like Ma'ale Adumim and Gilo, and the separation wall.
- The Jordan Valley, despite being vital for Palestine's food security, is now largely off-limits to Palestinian investment.

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2334 (2016). [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2334\(2016\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2334(2016))

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group. "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Way Forward." Middle East Report N°202, 10 December 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel/palestine/202-israeli-palestinian-conflict-way-forward>.

Thus, sustaining the two-state solution requires an immediate freeze and gradual dismantling of settlements - or at the very least, the evacuation of those located outside major settlement blocs within a mutually agreed land swap framework.

### **Sixth: Scenarios and Future Visions for Addressing Settlements and Borders**

In light of this reality, the paper outlines two primary scenarios:

#### **Scenario 1: Reviving the Two-State Solution Based on International Legitimacy**

This scenario is anchored in the following principles:

1. A return to the June 4, 1967 borders as the basis for two sovereign states.
2. Dismantling illegal settlements and unauthorized outposts.
3. A limited, mutually agreed land swap to ensure the geographic contiguity of a Palestinian state.
4. Establishing an international monitoring and oversight committee involving the UN, the Quartet, and peacekeeping forces from neutral countries.
5. Linking Arab-Israeli normalization to progress on the Palestinian issue and a halt to settlement activity.

Implementation would require a new international conference and an action plan that includes:

- Suspending Israel's membership in certain international institutions if it refuses to comply.
- Financially supporting UNRWA to rehabilitate refugees within a gradual return framework.
- Imposing economic sanctions on companies operating in settlements.

#### **Scenario 2: Economic Coexistence and Managing the Status Quo**

This scenario is based on a sobering realism that acknowledges the near-impossibility of removing settlements in the foreseeable future. It calls for the establishment of economic cooperation models and the neutralization of contentious issues, while fostering functional connectivity among Palestinian areas:

1. Developing Shared Infrastructure: Joint transportation corridors, electrical networks, and cross-border trade initiatives.

2. Integrating Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Leveraging them as economic and social bridges between the West Bank and Israel.
3. Investing in Education and Training: To build a comprehensive Palestinian business ecosystem.
4. Tripartite Arab Oversight: Involving Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in supervising development projects.
5. Establishing Joint Industrial Zones: As seen in projects like Rawabi and Tarqumiya.

While this approach entails political concessions, it may, in the absence of a political breakthrough, offer improved living conditions for Palestinians and prevent a humanitarian collapse.

### **Seventh: Strategic Recommendations**

- Promote a comprehensive political resolution grounded in international law, not just power dynamics.
- Strengthen coordination among Palestinian factions to form a unified front against settlement expansion.
- Document settlement violations and refer them to the International Criminal Court.
- Pressure the European Union to enforce labeling and import restrictions on settlement products.
- Launch a global campaign titled “Settlements Are Illegal,” involving artists, thinkers, and international influencers.
- Encourage Palestinian innovation in maximizing use of remaining land for agriculture, housing, and education.

The issue of settlements and borders lies at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A just and lasting peace cannot be achieved without addressing it fundamentally. While Israel has bet on time to entrench irreversible settlement facts on the ground, Palestinian women can upend this equation through determination and awareness, which offers new visions grounded in justice, law, and universal principles.

In the face of political deadlock, what is needed is not only condemnation of settlements, but a comprehensive civil, media, and diplomatic resistance project - one that repositions the Palestinian cause on the global agenda and restores the momentum it rightfully deserves.

## WATER – TOWARDS WATER JUSTICE FOR A LASTING PEACE

*"Despite the establishment of the Joint Water Committee (JWC), effective control remained in the hands of the Israeli side, which used veto mechanisms to obstruct the development of Palestinian water infrastructure, especially in Area C - reflecting the imbalance of power and the absence of political will to achieve water justice."*

By: Ms. Balqees Al-Deek, Ms. Roa' Qatanneh, Ms. Zeina Harbawi and Mrs. Ameera Mousa

### Introduction

Water has long stood as one of the most complex and pressing issues within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Its dimensions go far beyond technical or environmental considerations; they intersect powerfully with politics, sovereignty, social justice, and international law. Israel's near-total control over shared water resources, its disproportionate usage, and the constraints it places on developing water infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories have all contributed to a dire reality - one in which Palestinians suffer from chronic shortages of clean drinking water and lack the capacity to manage their own natural resources.

This paper aims to analyze the current water situation in Palestine from legal, economic, environmental, and political perspectives. It also offers actionable recommendations for achieving water justice through a sustainable and inclusive framework. Drawing on successful case studies from around the world, the paper highlights that the management of shared water resources can be a foundation for cooperation and stability - rather than a source of continued conflict.

### I. The Water Situation in Palestine

#### 1. Available Water Resources

Palestinians rely on three main aquifers: the Western, Eastern, and Northeastern aquifers - collectively referred to as the "Mountain Aquifers of the West Bank." However, Israel effectively controls around 80% of these resources and prohibits Palestinians from drilling new wells in areas rich in water. Additionally, Palestinians have been denied access to the Jordan River since 1967, despite its vital role as a surface water resource, as Israel maintains control over both banks and bars Palestinian usage.

In the Gaza Strip, the population depends almost entirely on the coastal aquifer, which is now severely degraded due to over-extraction and seawater intrusion. Studies show that over 97% of Gaza's water is unfit for human consumption.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reconnecting-water-restoring-lives>

## **2. Water Consumption Gap**

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, the minimum acceptable level of domestic water use is 100 liters per person per day. In contrast, the average Palestinian consumes only about 85 liters daily, while Israelis and settlers consume between 250 to 300 liters per person per day - revealing a stark disparity in distribution and access.<sup>29</sup>

## **3. Political and Institutional Constraints**

The Oslo II Accord (1995) acknowledged Palestinian water rights but postponed defining them until final status negotiations. In the interim, it allocated limited water quantities to Palestinians and established the Joint Water Committee (JWC), which oversees all water projects in the West Bank. In practice, however, the JWC has functioned as a mechanism of Israeli control, frequently obstructing critical Palestinian projects, especially in Area C - which constitutes more than 60% of the West Bank.<sup>30</sup>

## **4. Environmental and Economic Challenges**

- Over-extraction of groundwater has led to salinization of aquifers, especially in Gaza.<sup>31</sup>
- Pollution of water sources due to wastewater and agrochemicals poses severe public health risks.<sup>32</sup>
- Weak infrastructure and limited water availability adversely impact agricultural productivity, further fueling poverty and unemployment.

## **II. Legal Principles Governing Shared Water Resources**

### **1. International Law**

International law - particularly the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses - establishes the principle of “equitable and reasonable utilization.” This principle holds that shared water resources must be used fairly and proportionately, based on the needs of each riparian party, with due consideration for factors like population, climate, and existing dependency.

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<sup>29</sup> B'Tselem highlights that the average daily water consumption for Palestinians in the West Bank is approximately 82.4 liters per person, compared to 247 liters per person for Israelis

[https://www.btselem.org/publications/202305\\_parched](https://www.btselem.org/publications/202305_parched)

<sup>30</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Council reports that in practice, Israel retained primary control over water resources, often using its position to delay or deny Palestinian water projects, particularly in Area C.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno\\_2021.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2021.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/study-warns-water-sanitation-crisis-gaza-may-cause-disease-outbreak-and-possible-epidemic>

Another foundational concept is the “no significant harm” principle, which prohibits one party from using shared water resources in a way that causes substantial damage to another party’s ability to access or benefit from them.<sup>33</sup> While Israel has not ratified the 1997 Convention, the principles it outlines are considered part of customary international law and thus remain binding.

## **2. Oslo Accords and Water Agreements**

- The Oslo II Accord did not assign a definitive or proportional water quota to the Palestinians but instead deferred this issue to future final-status talks.
- The Joint Water Committee (JWC) was established to oversee water coordination, but in practice, it has reinforced Israeli dominance. The Israeli side maintains veto power, which has frequently been used to block Palestinian development efforts.
- As a result, the agreement effectively froze the development of the Palestinian water sector and subordinated progress to Israeli approval mechanisms - reinforcing structural inequality.

## **III. Strategic Proposals to Protect Palestinian Water Rights**

These recommendations are guided by the principles of water justice, international law, and the Palestinian right to self-determination over natural resources:

### **1. Reallocation of Water Resources**

- Establish a minimum daily per capita share of 120 liters, factoring in population growth and the return of refugees.
- Allocate 400–500 cubic meters per dunum annually for agricultural use, based on irrigable land area.
- Ensure equitable distribution of shared resources-including aquifers and the Jordan River - according to population needs and development goals.

### **2. International Oversight Mechanism**

- Establish an independent monitoring body under the supervision of a neutral third party (such as the United Nations or the European Union) to track compliance with water-sharing agreements.

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<sup>33</sup> [https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8\\_3\\_1997.pdf](https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8_3_1997.pdf)



- Impose legal obligations on both parties to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of water.

### **3. Historical Compensation and International Fund**

- Demand reparations from Israel for decades of denied water access and resource exploitation.
- Create an international fund to finance water infrastructure projects in Palestine - including desalination plants, wastewater treatment facilities, dams, and distribution networks.

### **4. Sustainable Water Management**

- Encourage investment in non-conventional water resources, such as:
  - Desalination, especially in Gaza.
  - Wastewater treatment and reuse for agriculture.
  - Rainwater harvesting through the construction of cisterns and dams.
- Reduce reliance on Israel as a water supplier by diversifying sources and expanding local control.

### **5. Legal Protection and Enforcement**

- Activate international legal mechanisms:
  - Apply the “polluter pays” principle to hold Israel accountable for environmental harm to Palestinian water sources.
  - File legal claims with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning Israel’s denial of Palestinian access to natural resources.

### **6. Equitable Regional Cooperation**

- Strengthen joint water management committees with the involvement of third parties (e.g., the UN, EU, FAO).
- Promote transboundary water agreements based on sustainability and fairness, ensuring all parties have access and decision-making power.

## **IV. Implementation Mechanisms and Institutionalization**

In order to achieve the desired outcomes of the above recommendations, concrete and measurable implementation tools must be adopted. These mechanisms are designed to

move from principles to practice, ensuring long-term governance, transparency, and equitable use of water resources.

### **1. Accurate Quantification of Water Allocations**

- Domestic use = (Total population + returnees) × 150 liters per person per day.
- Agricultural use = Number of irrigable dunums × 400 cubic meters annually.
- Industrial use = Allocate 16% of domestic water for industrial purposes.
- Total water rights = Domestic + Agricultural + Industrial allocations.

These formulas create a technical basis for planning, negotiation, and enforcement of equitable water distribution based on demographic and land-use realities.

### **2. Empowerment of Local Communities**

- Establish and support functional local water committees in villages, camps, and urban centers to oversee water distribution and management.
- Train women – and youth - in water resource management, network maintenance, and environmental monitoring.
- Integrate these committees into policy-making processes, allowing for local perspectives to influence national water strategies.

### **3. Technology Integration**

- Deploy smart irrigation systems and solar-powered pumps to enhance efficiency and sustainability.
- Use digital applications to monitor water consumption and report leaks or infrastructure issues.
- Build and maintain Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map water resources and track environmental changes in real time.

### **4. Strategic Partnerships with International Organizations**

- Collaborate with NGOs and donor agencies to implement projects that improve infrastructure and build local capacity.
- Organize training workshops and technical assistance programs to support community-level resilience and improve public service delivery in the water sector.

## **V. Case Studies of Successful Water Cooperation**

Across the globe, water scarcity has sparked both conflict and cooperation. In regions with complex political or geographic challenges, some initiatives have demonstrated that shared water management can become a foundation for peace and regional stability. This section presents notable case studies that offer lessons relevant to the Palestinian-Israeli context.

### **1. The Red Sea–Dead Sea Conveyance Project**

This regional initiative exemplifies cooperation among adversarial or politically distant states. The project aims to pump water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea to address the severe drop in the Dead Sea's water level. At the same time, it will desalinate a portion of that water for human consumption, benefiting Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. Despite political and logistical delays, the project illustrates that regional collaboration on water issues is possible when political will aligns with environmental necessity.

### **2. Joint Environmental Management Program Funded by the World Bank**

A series of small-scale initiatives implemented across the West Bank and Gaza, in partnership with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have focused on:

- Improving water quality through basic treatment systems.
- Raising environmental awareness through community outreach.
- Reducing water loss in networks through better monitoring and maintenance.

These initiatives demonstrate how even modest investments in cooperative water projects can yield long-term environmental and social benefits.

### **3. The Colorado River Basin (United States)**

A successful model for managing a shared river basin across seven U.S. states: California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Key features include:

- Periodic negotiation mechanisms to balance diverse water needs
- Data sharing and real-time monitoring
- Joint investments in infrastructure to ensure sustainable supply
- Regular updates to agreements to reflect climate change and consumption trends

The Colorado River model underscores the value of adaptive governance in managing shared water systems.

#### **4. The Nile Basin Initiative (East Africa)**

This initiative brings together 11 African countries sharing the Nile River: Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Eritrea (as an observer). Highlights of this model include:

- Transparent data exchange and cooperative monitoring.
- Joint development projects that serve multiple nations.
- Mutual consultation mechanisms on national water plans.

The Nile Basin Initiative proves that even in regions with a history of conflict, shared legal frameworks and inclusive governance can foster cooperation.

### **VI. Strategic and Political Recommendations**

To move toward a fair and sustainable resolution of the water crisis in Palestine, it is essential to go beyond technical fixes and adopt a comprehensive political and strategic approach. The following recommendations aim to elevate water rights as a core issue within the broader struggle for Palestinian sovereignty and justice.

#### **1. Mobilize International Political and Diplomatic Support**

Advocate globally to anchor Palestinian water rights within international legal and diplomatic frameworks. This includes presenting the issue at the United Nations, engaging with EU institutions, and building coalitions with sympathetic states and civil society actors.

#### **2. Integrate the Water Issue into Final Status Negotiations**

Water should not be treated merely as a humanitarian or technical matter. It must be addressed as a core final-status issue - equally important as borders, refugees, and Jerusalem - in any future peace talks.

#### **3. Link Regional Cooperation and Normalization to Water Justice**

Condition any regional agreements or normalization efforts with Israel on its compliance with equitable water-sharing arrangements, and on ending discriminatory policies in water access and infrastructure development.

#### **4. Invest in Non-Conventional Water Resources to Reduce Dependency and Strengthen Sovereignty**

Scale up efforts to develop independent water infrastructure through desalination, wastewater treatment, and rainwater harvesting - especially in areas under severe stress like Gaza. This enhances local control and builds resilience.

#### **5. Establish a Palestinian National Water Authority**

Form an empowered and independent High National Water Authority to lead water policy development, infrastructure planning, data management, and negotiations. The body should ensure participatory governance, transparency, and alignment with national priorities.

Securing water rights for the Palestinian people is not merely a technical or environmental matter - it is a fundamental component of self-determination and national sovereignty. In the face of occupation and systemic control, a holistic approach is needed: one that combines legal action, technical innovation, diplomatic engagement, and grassroots empowerment.

Transforming water from a source of conflict into a platform for cooperation and peacebuilding requires the political will to uphold international law, invest in sustainable development, and respect the dignity of those denied access to their most basic rights.

By committing to the principles of water justice, fostering community-based water management, and building regional and global alliances, Palestinians can carve a path toward a future where access to clean, equitable water becomes not a privilege - but a guaranteed right for all.

## GAZA – “THE DAY AFTER”

*"Analyzing the positions of various parties and deconstructing political rhetoric makes clear the urgent need to preserve the two-state solution as a cornerstone of regional peace and stability, away from the extremist ideologies rising on both sides, which are dragging the region into yet another abyss."*

By: Ms. Maryam Aql, Ms. Walaa Hajawi, Ms. Mais Makhoul and Ms. Bara'a Shawka

### Introduction

The “day after” the war on Gaza is one of the most complex and difficult questions to answer at all levels - local, regional, and international - due to the multitude of intersecting political agendas and interests, many of which come at the expense of Palestinian national priorities. The central role of the Israeli occupation and its vision for the day after - framed around its own security, political, and expansionist interests - further complicates the landscape.

Analyzing the positions of various actors and decoding the surrounding political rhetoric reveals the necessity of safeguarding the two-state solution as a core objective and stabilizing factor in the region. This must be pursued apart from the extremist ideologies gaining traction on both sides, which are only accelerating the descent into further chaos. This complex equation presents a daunting challenge in finding realistic solutions that uphold Palestinian rights and preserve a horizon for peace amidst an ongoing, entrenched conflict.

### 1. Gaza in the Modern Historical Context (1948–2025)

The Gaza Strip has long held a central position in both the geographic and political trajectory of the Palestinian cause since the Nakba of 1948. That year, waves of Palestinians displaced from their towns and villages sought refuge in Gaza. Following the Nakba, the “All-Palestine Government” was formed in Gaza as an early attempt to preserve a Palestinian political framework amidst widespread dispossession.

Egypt, while administering Gaza, never formally annexed it, instead treating it as a temporary arrangement - leaving the Strip in a political vacuum. This vacuum became fertile ground for the emergence of nationalist movements, many of which would form the early core of Palestinian resistance.

Over the decades, Gaza evolved into a flashpoint: a stage of direct confrontation with Israeli occupation, a breeding ground for national movements, and a zone of influence for competing regional powers.

Following Israel's full occupation of the Gaza Strip in 1967, the population suffered under repressive conditions, settlement expansion, and military crackdowns. The absence of any Palestinian sovereign framework left residents vulnerable to systemic control.

With the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Gaza became the first territory to come under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA), generating early hope for a future Palestinian state. That hope eroded rapidly after the internal Palestinian divide of 2007, when Hamas forcibly took control of Gaza following violent clashes with PA security forces.

Since that division, Gaza has endured four devastating wars - in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021 - culminating in the unprecedented destruction of the 2023 war. These wars not only devastated infrastructure but also entrenched internal divisions and deepened the geographic and political rift between Gaza and the West Bank.

## **2. Gaza's Strategic Importance in a Two-State Solution**

Despite its small size, Gaza holds immense strategic weight in any vision for a just political settlement. Home to over two million people<sup>34</sup> - roughly 40% of the population in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 - the Strip possesses demographic and political significance that cannot be ignored.

Geographically, Gaza's Mediterranean coastline offers rare access to the sea, and its border crossing with Egypt provides a vital gateway to the Arab world. These features make Gaza a potential political and economic lifeline for any future Palestinian state.

Additionally, around 80% of Gaza's residents are registered refugees,<sup>35</sup> symbolizing the unresolved plight of displaced Palestinians. As such, Gaza serves as both a humanitarian epicenter and a spiritual anchor of the right of return - posing a significant challenge to any attempts to undermine or bypass this core demand.

Therefore, any plan that excludes Gaza or seeks to permanently separate it from the West Bank undermines the very foundation of Palestinian unity and fatally weakens the feasibility of a two-state solution.

## **3. Key Stakeholders Shaping the "Day After"**

- The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): Still internationally recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, its

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/01/no-exit-gaza>

influence has waned due to internal fragmentation and limited representation in Gaza.

- The Palestinian Authority (PA): While holding legal status under the Oslo Accords, the PA cannot assert control in Gaza without a broad national reconciliation and regional-international consensus.
- Israel: Despite its 2005 “disengagement,” Israel retains control over Gaza’s airspace, borders, and trade. Since 2007, it has enforced a policy of separation between Gaza and the West Bank to block the emergence of a unified Palestinian entity.<sup>36</sup>
- Egypt: The most influential regional actor, given its shared border and security concerns. Egypt maintains a cautious stance toward Hamas but strongly opposes displacement plans and insists on keeping Gaza within the Arab framework.
- Saudi Arabia: Views Gaza through a broader regional lens. While opposing Hamas’s continued rule, Riyadh supports a comprehensive political solution that returns Gaza to Palestinian legitimacy.
- The United States: The key global player shaping future arrangements. Washington’s current position supports Israel unconditionally, refuses to engage with Hamas, and favors a renewed role for the PA.
- Qatar: For years, Qatar has provided financial and humanitarian support to Gaza and maintained communication channels with both Hamas and Israel. However, it faces increasing pressure to clarify the scope and political nature of its involvement.
- Jordan: Works in coordination with Egypt and the PA, viewing Gaza’s stability as integral to any final-status agreement.

#### **4. Possible Scenarios for “The Day After”**

- **Gradual Return of the Palestinian Authority:**

A phased reintroduction of PA governance in Gaza through a national and regional consensus, tied to reconstruction and the institutional reintegration of Gaza into the Palestinian political framework.

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<sup>36</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/gaza\\_strip/control\\_on\\_air\\_space\\_and\\_territorial\\_waters](https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/control_on_air_space_and_territorial_waters)



- **Temporary International Administration:**

A proposal gaining attention in diplomatic circles, involving a multinational force to manage Gaza during a transitional phase, paving the way for political restructuring and general elections.

- **Continued Hamas Governance:**

Though weakened by the war, the possibility of Hamas remaining in control cannot be ruled out if alternative agreements collapse or external efforts falter.

- **Permanent Separation of Gaza:**

A dangerous scenario promoted by certain factions in Israel, advocating for the formal severing of Gaza from the West Bank, effectively dismantling the Palestinian statehood project.

- **Forced or Voluntary Displacement:**

Though widely rejected regionally and internationally, the idea of emptying northern Gaza of its population surfaced during the latest war through joint U.S.-Israeli suggestions.<sup>37</sup> Firm opposition managed to stall - but not eliminate - this scenario.

## **5. A Palestinian Vision for the “Day After”**

Amid the complex and volatile dynamics surrounding Gaza’s future, there is a growing need for a unified and comprehensive Palestinian vision - one rooted in national principles, international legitimacy, and the people’s aspirations for freedom and independence.

This future must not be confined to rebuilding post-war devastation but should serve as a catalyst for reimagining and reconstructing the Palestinian national project on more inclusive and democratic foundations. The core pillars of this vision include:

- **Renewing Political Legitimacy through Elections**

Any genuine “day after” scenario must begin with general presidential, legislative, and National Council elections, guaranteeing representation for all segments of Palestinian society. Elections are not only a democratic tool but also a means to regenerate national leadership, restore political legitimacy, and end internal division.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/23/israel-benjamin-netanyahu-plan-northern-gaza-palestinian-civilians-hamas>

- **Empowering Women and Youth in Reconstruction**

Women and youth constitute the vast majority of Gaza's population - they are the lifeblood of resistance and the hope for a better future. Their active participation in reconstruction, political planning, and priority-setting is essential, alongside ensuring meaningful roles for women in decision-making processes.

- **Education as a Catalyst for Peace**

Education must serve as a strategic vehicle to shape Gaza's future, beginning with revising school curricula to promote tolerance, openness, and critical thinking - free from ideological indoctrination and divisive rhetoric.

- **Launching a Resilient Economic Vision**

Given the near-total collapse of Gaza's economy due to war and blockade, a new economic framework is needed - one focused on reconstruction, local resource development, agricultural revitalization, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Strategic partnerships with local and international private sectors will be key.

- **Strengthening Civil Society Institutions**

Civil society plays a central role in development and democratic transition. It must be empowered to operate independently, free from political subjugation. Strengthening its role in reconstruction, social accountability, and public oversight will promote transparency and justice.

- **A Unified, Non-Factional National Security Strategy**

Security institutions in Gaza should be restructured into a unified, professional body under civilian oversight and free from partisan influence. The new force should protect citizens rather than control them, upholding law and national accountability.

- **A Cultural and National Framework for Collective Memory**

The recent war must be documented. Memorial centers should be established to honor victims and preserve the collective memory. Art and cultural projects should safeguard the Palestinian narrative and fortify national identity against erasure and distortion.

## **6. Reassessing International Responses**

The recent war on Gaza laid bare the fragility of international commitment to Palestinian rights. Many nations merely expressed concern or called for de-escalation without taking concrete steps to halt aggression or hold Israel accountable. Nonetheless, there were notable developments in international discourse, including:

- Rising calls to suspend military aid to Israel.
- Increasing demands to impose sanctions on Israeli leaders.
- Growing recognition by human rights organizations that actions in Gaza may constitute war crimes.

Despite these shifts, global responses remain insufficient. More robust grassroots and diplomatic pressure is needed to cement a rights-based narrative and pursue legal accountability for violations.

## **7. Lessons from War and Glimpses of Political Opportunity**

Despite its devastation, the latest aggression on Gaza revealed critical insights and potential political openings for the Palestinian cause:

- **The Failure of Israel's Separation Strategy**

Palestinian unity - demonstrated across both Gaza and the West Bank - exposed the futility of Israeli attempts to isolate Gaza. The collective Palestinian struggle defies geographic and political fragmentation.

- **The Return of Palestine to Global Attention**

Through resilience and sacrifice, Gaza reignited international focus on the root of the conflict - occupation. Dormant issues returned to center stage, reigniting long-ignored global debates.

- **Reviving International Diplomacy**

There is now a window to resuscitate a viable peace initiative in which Gaza is integral. Practical, law-based solutions - aligned with recent regional and international shifts - can pave a way forward.

The "day after" in Gaza is not merely a phase of physical reconstruction. It is an opportunity to forge a new national compact - to rebuild the Palestinian cause on inclusive, democratic foundations.

The future is shaped not only in conference rooms but also in the hearts of ordinary people - in schools, in collective memory, and in the unbreakable will of Palestinians to live, despite the rubble and despair.

Gaza deserves a future worthy of its sacrifice - one rooted in dignity, linked to the realization of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The true

challenge lies not in imagining a post-war Gaza, but in creating the political, social, and economic conditions to ensure that this is the last war.

The success of this “day after” is a test of international sincerity and Palestinian resilience - particularly among Gazans - to transform tragedy into opportunity, division into unity, siege into openness, and despair into hope.