

# Q & A: THE FACTS ABOUT PALESTINE AND ISRAEL



## ***Isn't Israel the historic homeland of the Jews?***

Yes, just as it is the historic home of the Canaanites, Jebusites, Philistines, and former Jews who long ago became Christians or Muslims. Moreover, when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, as many as 80% of the world's Jews were already living abroad.

## ***But isn't Israel sacred to the Jews?***

Of course, but it is also sacred to Christians and Muslims, both of whom have holy sites scattered throughout the area. Fundamentalist Jews, who make up some 20% of Israelis, believe that non-Jews should be barred entirely from living in Jerusalem and Greater ("Eretz") Israel. [www.ameu.org](http://www.ameu.org)

## ***Wasn't Israel necessary as a safe haven for European Jews after WWII?***

Only 10% of the 3 million Jews still in Europe after WWII migrated to Israel.

## ***Why did the Israeli government want to expel Palestinians from the newly created Israeli State?***

Palestinians formed 2/3 of the population and inhabited 90% of the land designated by the UN for partition 1947. The Zionist leadership had long recognized that a purge of the original Palestinian population was imperative if Israel was to be a majority Jewish state. As a result, 750,000 Palestinians were forced to abandon some 530 villages. Their land was seized and turned over to the quasi-private Jewish National Fund for redistribution exclusively to Jews. Sadly, seizures of Arab-owned land have become an enduring and pervasive feature of Israeli rule not only in Israel but also in the W. Bank and Jerusalem where illegal land-grabs have left thousands impoverished and homeless. [www.palestineremembered.com](http://www.palestineremembered.com), [www.60yearsofnakba.org](http://www.60yearsofnakba.org)

## ***Why did the Palestinians resist the creation of Israel?***

Because they recognized that partition would result in the loss of their own villages and lands, the breakup of their communities, and the shattering of their culture.

## ***How big is Israel?***

Israel has never declared its borders. Many religious nationalist and ultra-orthodox Jews believe that Israel's boundaries should extend as far as the Euphrates. And while the Israeli government has never formally endorsed this position, politicians who share such views have often served in the Israeli cabinet. In terms of population, Israel has 6,277,000 people and Palestine 3,762,000. 20 % of Israel's population is Palestinian. [www.passia.org/index\\_pfacts.htm](http://www.passia.org/index_pfacts.htm)

## ***Isn't Israel the only democratic state in the Middle East?***

Israel is a Jewish state. Non-Jews in Israel (20% of Israel's population) do not enjoy the same privileges as Israel's Jewish citizens. While it is true that some Arab-Israelis serve in the Knesset, they are underrepresented and rarely find political allies. Arab-Israelis who question the religious/sectarian nature of the state are barred from holding office altogether. Discrimination against non-Jews in housing, social services, education, and travel is a matter of policy. Racist attitudes toward Palestinians are endemic in Israeli society and are even present in Israeli school textbooks that Palestinian children must share. Bishop Tutu calls the system "apartheid." [www.arabhra.org](http://www.arabhra.org)

## ***What about Israel's human rights record?***

Israel is responsible for extra-judicial targeted assassinations, administrative detentions, torture, restriction of access to health care, home demolitions, land confiscations, and

annexations—all of which are human rights violations and/or violations of international law.

## ***How many Palestinians are currently detained without charge?***

It is estimated that currently there are 11,000 Palestinians held by the Israeli occupiers. About 4 % are under the age of 18. B'Tselem, the Israeli human

rights group, estimates that about 83% of detainees have experienced some kind of torture. Israeli "experts" advised US Forces on the techniques used at Abu Ghraib.

[hrw.org/doc/?t=mideast&c=isrlpa](http://hrw.org/doc/?t=mideast&c=isrlpa), [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)

## ***Haven't Palestinian terrorists killed many Israelis?***

Armed resistance against an occupying military force is legal under international law. However, deadly force targeting civilians is terrorism. Too many have been killed on both sides. Since 2000, 1068 Israeli soldiers and civilians have been killed, while 5200 Palestinian civilians alone have died. Among the dead are 123 Israeli children and 1056 Palestinian children. Not included in these figures are the 1417 victims (313 of them children) of the Dec-Jan 2008-2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza. In addition, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have blown up, bulldozed, or otherwise destroyed over 5356 Palestinian homes and thousands of olive trees. "State" terrorism—Israeli killing of Palestinian civilians is commonplace. [rememberthesechildren.org](http://rememberthesechildren.org), <http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/AHRC1248.pdf>

## ***Don't the Palestinians want to drive Israel into the sea?***

The Palestinian Authority agreed in 1988 to recognize Israel and reaffirmed this in the Oslo Accords in 1993. Israel, by contrast, continues its relentless seizure of Palestinian land. Recent polls indicate that 44-67% of Israelis support ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians. Not surprisingly, most Palestinians would favor a secular state like the US that guarantees equality of all faiths.

### LAND CONFISCATION

- Israel has confiscated 87% of E. Jerusalem and 75% of the W. Bank for settlements, military reserves, and parks.
- This land is no longer available for agricultural use or housing.
- Palestinians suffer both severe housing shortages and disruptions of traditional agriculture. <http://www.icahd.org/>

### ***Isn't Israel under constant threat by huge Arab armies?***

Israel has the best-equipped and most powerful army in the region with 177,500 troops in active service and 429,000 in reserve. It receives over \$2 billion in military aid from the US each year and has the right to buy "excess" US military hardware at bargain basement prices. In addition, Israel is the only nuclear power in the region, boasting over 200 nuclear warheads. According to Jane's World Defense, Israel is one of the top five arms exporters in the world—even exporting arms to China over US protests.

### ***Why don't Palestinians employ nonviolent resistance against the Israelis?***

In fact there is far more nonviolent resistance than violent confrontation to the occupation. Demonstrations frequently result in serious injury and even death to unarmed Palestinian demonstrators. However, this is almost never reported in the American press. [www.ifamericansknew.org](http://www.ifamericansknew.org)

### ***Is press coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict biased?***

To cite just one example, in 2004, eight Israeli children and 179 Palestinian children were killed. The three major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) reported the Israeli deaths 83% of the time, however, the deaths of Palestinian children were reported on average only 8% of the time. [www.ifamericansknew.org](http://www.ifamericansknew.org)

### ***Why has Israel built the separation wall inside the 1967 armistice line?***

Israel says this 30-foot concrete barrier (declared illegal in 2005 by the International Court of Justice) is for security, but the wall is built inside the 1967 armistice line, creating new borders that annex settlements of 182,000 Jews who are illegally settled on occupied land. It confiscates huge blocks of the Occupied Territories. It divides Palestinian land into 13 separate ghettos. It separates farmers from their fields and markets, children from their schools, and the sick from clinics and hospitals. Along with bypass roads and settlements, it precludes the possibility of a viable Palestinian state. [www.stopthewall.org](http://www.stopthewall.org)

### ***What are living conditions like in Palestine?***

Israel, which under international law is responsible for the people it occupies, controls every aspect of the Palestinian economy. Unemployment is at 29% of the workforce, and 57% of the population is living below the poverty line of \$2 per person per day. Tourism has declined by 95% and construction is at a standstill. Add to this the daily humiliations of checkpoints, home demolitions, artillery barrages, water shortages, and armed Jewish settlers stoning Palestinian school children or shooting at Palestinian farmers and you have a fair idea of life in the Territories. The Palestinian quality of life continues to deteriorate amidst the economic paralysis created by the occupation [domino.un.org/unispal.nsf](http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf)

The situation is even worse in Gaza which has been blockaded by Israel since 2006. Even before Israel's invasion in December 2008, the British NGO, Oxfam, was describing it as a "humanitarian implosion." Here the economy is in complete collapse with unemployment in excess of 80% and the number of households earning less than \$1.2 per person per day at 70%. Its 1.5 m. people suffer chronic malnutrition with 10-30% of children stunted. Lack of fuel for electricity generation and transport has compromised sewage treatment facilities and the water supply. [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

### ***Haven't the Israelis made repeated efforts to make peace with the Palestinians?***

It is important to distinguish between what the Israelis say they will do and facts on the ground. For example, the Oslo Accords (1992) promised Palestinian sovereignty and an end to new Jewish settlements/colonies in the Occupied Territories. In the first 4 years after the Oslo accords the settler population in the Territories increased by 48%.

### ***How many colonies ("settlements") are there?***

There are between 145 and 198 colonies (Jewish-only towns and cities) and another 130 outposts, which are caravan or tent settlements usually set up by the most radical fundamentalist Jewish settlers. It is such colonists who killed 54 Palestinian farmers and their children over the past 5 years.

### ***What are the possibilities for peace?***

Israel has persistently refused to negotiate in good faith with all parties to the conflict. Meanwhile it continues to illegally expand Jewish only colonies in the W. Bank and E. Jerusalem while denying Gazans access to their ports and air strips. History suggests that Israel's policy of talk while building will continue without concrete international pressure in the form of boycott, divestment and sanction. [electronicintifada.net](http://electronicintifada.net)

### ***Isn't negotiation with terrorists like Hamas impossible?***

Although Hamas like Israel has attacked civilian targets it has clearly indicated a willingness to negotiate on *equal* terms with the Israelis. This means that it expects Israel to recognize a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders in exchange for a truce anticipated to become full recognition if Israel stands by its agreements. Israel claims that the sticking point is Hamas' unwillingness to recognize Israel, but it is worth noting that the US and Britain did not demand that Irish dissidents recognize the legitimacy of N. Ireland's government before initiating negotiations with Sin Fein/IRA, a group which ultimately rejected terrorism and joined the government. In the end, the real question is whether the Israeli government wants to negotiate at all or simply define "peace" on its own terms. [palestinemonitor.org](http://palestinemonitor.org)

### ***Why pick on Israel – There are other countries with bad human rights records, aren't there?***

None of them receive \$4 billion + in US aid each year, loan write-offs, and US backing for their illegal behavior and none have a greater negative impact on US relations in the Middle East.

### ***Why economic sanctions now?***

Because the human rights abuses have been going on for over 50 years. Because the situation in the Occupied Territories continues to deteriorate. Because the threat of economic sanctions has caused Israel and its supporters to stand up and pay attention for the first time in years. Because peace in the ME depends on a just peace in Palestine. And finally because sanctions have worked elsewhere to end longstanding human rights abuses, notably in S. Africa. <http://www.endtheoccupation.org>

#### **TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS**

- ***Israel has placed 471 physical barriers on Palestinian roads to block traffic.***
- ***According to the UN there 600 checkpoints in the W. Bank.***
- ***Palestinians, whose cars are marked by blue license plates, cannot travel on many of the better roads which are reserved for Jews alone.***