
Nakba Day 2021



On the eve of Nakba Day, UK charities urge government and Parliament to uphold the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people as they face ongoing dispossession

14th May 2021

We are a group of UK-based humanitarian, development, human rights and faith organisations working for the rights of the Palestinian people. The world has been given a stark reminder on the eve of the 73rd anniversary of what is known by Palestinians as the Nakba ('catastrophe') that the dispossession that began in 1948 is a process that continues to this day.

As events in Israeli occupied East Jerusalem and Gaza have illustrated, today in Palestine, no home is safe, no civic institution secure, no holy site sacred as long as the promise of the Palestinians' inalienable rights, including the right to return remains unfulfilled.

As we write, once again military attacks have escalated. At this critical moment, it is vital that all parties adhere to their binding duties under international humanitarian and human rights law. All attacks on civilians and civilian objects must cease immediately. As is consistently the case, it is Palestinians in Gaza that are disproportionately affected.

Thirteen years of illegal closure and decades of occupation have left people and institutions struggling to cope, even before the pandemic grew. Left without international protection, Palestinian citizens face a violent military occupation and extreme settler population alone.

For the residents of Sheikh Jarrah, themselves refugees from the Nakba, the risk of being made homeless once again to make room for Israeli settlers is imminent, in actions that the UN has warned may constitute a war crime. Palestinian communities inside Israel – long subjected to

policies of land confiscation and systematic discrimination - have now joined the protests as they look at the threat of evictions in Jerusalem and worry for their future too.

Over 73 years ago the process began by which a majority of the Palestinian people were dispossessed of their homes, their towns and villages destroyed, and their society torn apart.

The right of return of Palestinian refugees - a foundational principle in international law and repeatedly insisted upon by the UN – continues to be denied while the failure of the international community to achieve a just and lasting resolution to their plight has meant that over 5 million Palestinian refugees depend on UNRWA services today.

Established in 1949 by the UN General Assembly in the wake of the Nakba, in recent years, the Agency's prolonged funding crisis has led to Palestinian refugees suffering cuts in essential aid and services at a time when the pandemic, occupation policies and the closure is undermining the basic dignity of Palestinians.

The promised restoration of US funding is a welcome step, as is the UK government's recent contribution. However, this is still well below what UNRWA requires to fulfil its mandate and for the UN to discharge its basic humanitarian duties to Palestinians.

Today we commemorate the Nakba by re-dedicating to working for the realisation of Palestinian rights and an end to their systematic denial, which is the key to a just and peaceful future for all.

We call upon the UK government and Parliament, with its unique historical relationship with the Palestinians as the colonial Mandatory Power when the displacement of the majority of the Palestinian people began in 1947-1948, to uphold their moral, legal and historic duties to the Palestinian people.

We urge the government to take immediate action in cooperation with the international community to achieve the urgent cessation of the use of force, prevent a potential war crime of the forcible transfer of Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem, and demonstrate support for steps towards accountability, including full respect for the International Criminal Court's opening of an investigation into the situation in Palestine.

Moreover, we urge the government to show robust support for UNRWA, which is essential for upholding the dignity of Palestinian refugees, increase its financial assistance to the Agency and work for its long-term sustainable funding.

Statement endorsed by the following 16 agencies:

- ABCD Bethlehem
- Amnesty International UK
- Amos Trust
- Christian Aid
- Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu)
- Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel - UK and Ireland (EAPPI UK and Ireland)
- Embrace the Middle East
- Friends of Birzeit University (Fobzu)
- **Friends of Nablus and Surrounding Areas (FONSA)**
- Interpal
- Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR)
- Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)
- Quakers in Britain
- Sabeel-Kairos UK
- War on Want
- Welfare Association