

BACKGROUND: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ISRAELI- PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Zionism – a movement to find a homeland for the Jewish people – began in the late 1800s. Although the Zionist movement considered several locations, they eventually targeted historic Palestine as their land of choice.

According to the Ottoman census at this time, the population was about 6% Jewish, and 94% non-Jew. After World War I, the British administered Palestine until after World War II. During this period, there was massive Jewish emigration to the region – in the hundreds of thousands – as the Jews sought to escape persecution and death under the Nazis.

By 1947, largely through this massive emigration, the Jewish population was about 33% of the total. Despite considerable investment from Jewish financiers, the Jewish population actually owned only about 6% of the land.

Following WW II, Zionist leaders had convinced the Western powers to create a Jewish state in the Middle East. In 1947, the United Nations (UN) devised a plan to partition historic Palestine between the Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants: Resolution 181. The Jewish state – representing only 33% of the population – was to have a country representing 53% of the

land. The Palestinian state – representing 67% of the population – was to have a country comprised of 47% of historic Palestine. Jerusalem was to have been an international city, shared by all peoples of the region. The Zionist movement embraced the plan as it was a very favourable arrangement for them. The Palestinians (and the neighbouring Arab countries) found the plan extremely unfair, and rejected it.

Britain withdrew in 1948, and Jewish leaders immediately declared the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state. Having the support of Britain and the U.S., and having prepared

carefully for its establishment, Israel was prepared when fighting broke out. During the fighting, Israel invaded areas of Palestine intended for the Palestinians, and gained control of 77 percent of historic Palestine. More than 700,000 Palestinians became refugees through the partition plan, fleeing to settle in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Jordan annexed the West Bank, and Egypt annexed the Gaza strip. For the Palestinians, this was “El-Nakba” – “The Disaster” – leaving them with 22% of the land, and with half of their population living as refugees.

War broke out again in 1967, and again Israel invaded areas intended for the Palestinian population. When the fighting ceased, Israel had occupied both Gaza and the West Bank – the Israeli-occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT.) Israel moved quickly to annex all of Jerusalem, and started colonizing the West Bank and Gaza. UN Security Council resolutions condemned the Israeli occupation, condemned the annexation of Jerusalem, and condemned the colonization of the OPT. Israel, for its part, ignored these condemnations with impunity.

Despite the fact that the 1993 Oslo Accords called for Israel to stop colonizing the OPT, the number of Israeli colonists doubled between 1993 and 2002, reaching well over 400,000. Since 1967, Israel has also been creating a separate infrastructure for its Israeli colonists in the OPT, creating entire towns, roads, schools, and industries only for Israeli colonists. With Israel’s construction of its Separation Wall – which is built entirely within the West Bank, and which will entirely encircle the West Bank – Israel effectively annexes another 10% of historic Palestine, leaving only 12% for Palestine.

