



SEARCHING FOR LOST SONS AND DAUGHTERS

STATISTICS ON PALESTINIANS
IN THE DIASPORA



By Ola Awad

Statistical data indicate that on the eve of the 1948 war, the population in Palestine had reached 2.1 million, 1.45 million of which were Palestinians. Varying estimates and divergent figures have been circulated by different sources regarding the number of Palestinian refugees displaced from their homes during this war. The Israeli occupation took over 774 Palestinian cities and villages, 531 of which were completely demolished, whereas the others were subjugated to the Israeli occupation and its regulations, eventually to be incorporated into the Israeli state. In the course of their 'cleansing process,' Zionist gangs committed more than 70 massacres against the Palestinian people and caused the death of more than 15 thousand Palestinians. The most modest estimates of Palestinian refugees counted around 736 thousand individuals, more than 50 percent of the Palestinian population. They were moved to refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the neighboring countries Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

In the early 1950s, as the suffering of the Palestinian refugees at the economic, social and living levels kept increasing, some of them, separately or jointly and collectively, started to move to Arab states and to countries in Europe and the two Americas, searching for a better life. Although many of them have integrated into the societies into which they migrated and are making effective contributions at the economic, social and cultural levels in their adopted countries, they have not forgotten their homeland or discarded the Palestinian cause. Thus, they started forming groups and gatherings, creating Palestinian communities in the diaspora that hosted and engaged in social, cultural and political activities. These communities aim to save and preserve among their members and over generations the strength of their Palestinian national identity, knowledge of their heritage, and feelings of belonging to their homeland.

At the end of the year 2019, according to data gathered by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the estimated number of Palestinians in the world reached about 13.4 million. At least 50 percent of them live outside their homeland or in refugee camps, whether in neighboring Arab states,

which Palestinians used to call the "surrounding and/or confrontation countries," or in exiles all over the world. They live under many different circumstances. Some enjoy individual and citizenship rights that respect their humanity as persons whose collective identity was taken away, whereas others are still facing abuse and violations of their basic human rights, being deprived of the right to work and movement because they are stigmatized as refugees.

Given PCBS' responsibilities in providing official statistics on Palestinians in all locations and

Many diaspora Palestinians are highly accomplished and stand out in various fields that include medicine, the arts and literature, the economy, social sciences, natural sciences, and more.



Palestinians in the diaspora unify around messages of hope.

places, and as conflicting figures are available from different sources regarding their numbers, moreover not knowing their characteristics and geographic distributions – data that frequently are subject to the speculations of researchers, academics and interested persons – PCBS has put on great efforts to collect, tabulate, and disseminate all statistics related to Palestinians in all places of residence worldwide.

PCBS has begun to collect historical statistical documents on Palestine before the year 1993, which includes the periods under Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, the Jordanian government, and the Israeli occupation. We managed to obtain from the Italian Statistics Library reports of censuses that were implemented by the British government in historical Palestine in 1922 and 1931. Also, we



New platforms are needed to familiarize new Palestinian generations with their history, strengthen their identity, and work towards assuring their right of return to their homeland, Palestine.

obtained statistical reports from the archive of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Beirut that contains a large number of statistics on Palestine during the period from 1976 to 1987. These

Working with Palestinian embassies worldwide, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Refugee Affairs and Palestinian Expatriate Affairs departments of the PLO, and the Palestine Academy for Science and Technology, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics is in the process of creating a database of diaspora Palestinians.

efforts have faced many obstacles and difficulties. Among them were the lack of independent statistics of Palestinians in diaspora countries as well as inaccurate and outdated data that are based, largely, on the speculations and records of various international agencies and interested researchers.

At the beginning of the current century, PCBS took the initiative of listing Palestinians who live in the diaspora in order to build a database that may serve as the basis for efforts to bridge existing gaps between the Palestinian people in their homeland and in the diaspora in order to connect them. Hence, PCBS started the preparation of a work plan for designing such a database that accounts for different places of residence in the diaspora. This catalogue will be the tool by which data are collected and monitored, providing as well an agreed-upon list of indicators. The database will be updated whenever possible. Palestinian embassies and representative offices in places around the world where Palestinians live constitute the main source of

data and serve as focal points and PCBS' link to Palestinian diaspora communities.

In a series of meetings with the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs the mechanisms and tools for collecting the data have been discussed. A shortlist has been published containing the minimal indicators and specifying what data that are required and must be monitored to enable the drawing of a pure statistical picture on the numbers and conditions of diaspora Palestinians. Subsequently, this initiative was crowned with the issuance of a presidential decree that outlined the forming of the higher committee that is to supervise the data collection. This committee is presided over by the Palestinian Expatriate Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and includes representatives of PCBS, the PLO's Refugee Affairs Department, the ministry of foreign affairs, and the Palestine Academy for Science and Technology. The committee has to date convened in a number of meetings in which it discussed which indicators are to be collected, suggested mechanisms for data collection, outlined potential problems and obstacles, prepared an action plan, and determined the roles of each partner involved.

The project came to its initial fruition in late November 2019 with the first experimental attempt to list Palestinians who live in the diaspora. The Republic of Venezuela was chosen as the first state in which this project is to be implemented, and a mission that included representatives of the Palestinian Expatriate Affairs Department and PCBS visited the country. They participated in numerous meetings with local Palestinian embassy officials and

Historical statistical data collected by PCBS include documents obtained from the times of the Ottoman rule and the British Mandate Era, such as the 1922 and 1931 censuses.

with effective and influential figures of the Venezuelan-Palestinian community in order to discuss the potential means of collecting the required statistical data on Palestinians who reside and live in Venezuela. They also explained how to fill in the online questionnaires via the application form that has been developed for this purpose.

With this project on the way, we hope that in the near future, PCBS will be able to provide a more comprehensive picture of the numbers, location, and conditions of Palestinians who live in the diaspora.

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