



KHALIDA JARRAR, Former Prisoner and Member of the PLC, 54 Years Old, Nablus

I envisage my future and the future of my family without a military occupation, like all the peoples of the world. I imagine a life full of freedom and dignity where we can move and express our opinion without restrictions. I yearn to have freedom of movement and access in my own land and abroad, and I crave the end of killing, destruction, military checkpoints, and settlement enterprises. I long for the elimination of the frightful image of heavily armed soldiers. I hope that my people will soon have full sovereignty over their land, water, and natural resources. Now my people must keep the torch of hope and self-confidence ignited, and eventually they will be able to end the occupation and live in liberty like all the peoples of the world. Palestinian women stand out as models and active partners in the struggle for liberation and independence.

YAKOUB SHAHEEN, Palestinian Singer, Winner of the 2017 Arab Idol Talent Show, 23 Years Old, Bethlehem

Occupation is intimidation. I was born and brought up under a brutal military occupation that filled us with fear, frustration, uneasiness, and insecurity. I lived through military incursions and the siege of the Nativity Church. My family used to live very close to the church and throughout the siege days the situation was horrendous. We could not buy food or leave our home. I could not go to school and my education was disrupted. We, the youth of Palestine, must not give up hope; we must persevere so that we will be able to realize our dreams without forgetting or neglecting our just cause and struggle.

LEILA AL-ISSAWI, the Mother of a Palestinian Martyr, Fadi, and Four Prisoners in Israeli Jails: Shirine, Samer, Midhat, and Shadi – 69 Years Old, Jerusalem

Occupation is my mortal enemy. It has usurped my land, my dignity, and my very existence. The occupation has robbed me of every beautiful thing in my life – my children – and turned my life into hell. My house is threatened with demolition, and whenever I go out and then return home I find on the front wall a demolition notification. I cannot live freely with dignity. Had it not been for the military occupation I would have lived happily with my family in full freedom in my homeland. I would have been in full control of my life.

NORA CARMİ - Retired Community Builder, 69 Years Old, Jerusalem

The occupation has disrupted our entire lives and life balance. It has caused the separation of my family members. Yet, and out of the suffering caused by this occupation, it has strengthened my commitment to be steadfast, to resist nonviolently, and to advocate to end the occupation, working with the local civil society and through international churches and official bodies. It is extremely difficult to be optimistic about the future if the occupation persists.

ISSA AMRO, Human Rights Defender, 37 Years Old, Hebron

I am scared of the future, especially as the military occupation forces are planning to dispossess me of my home and land, revoke my ID card, and rob me of my dignity. I envisage a bleak, difficult, violent, and bitter future. My role is to educate the world about the occupation and encourage the international community to intervene and put an end to the crimes of the occupation authorities. My role also involves the protection of human rights, bringing to light the violations of the occupying authorities, and holding perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, I promote resistance to occupation and encourage the youth and the community to learn popular-resistance and civil-disobedience strategies and means.

RAED DEBIY, Vice President of the International Union of Socialist Youth and Chairman of the Committee of International Relations of Fatah Youth, 34 Years Old, Nablus

I am a refugee, a descendant of a family that had been forcibly expelled from their home in Lod to Nablus. I was born when my father was serving a prison sentence. I was compelled to call off my university education since I was a political arrestee. Fifty years of military occupation in Palestine has hijacked the future, the dreams, and the opportunities of three Palestinian generations. It has deprived them of freedom, security, and development, and confiscated their basic rights to a decent and dignified life. Occupation is synonymous with racism, hatred, and injustice. It promotes uncertainty and obscures the future. It is an existential threat to our presence in our homeland.

MAHMOUD NAWAJAA, BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) National Committee General Coordinator, 31 Years Old, Hebron

The military occupation is every bad thing in our lives. It hinders our free movement from one place to another, prevents us from carrying out our activities, and complicates our personal lives. There is an ongoing feeling of insecurity and instability. In light of the escalation of occupation and the emergence of some of the main features of the apartheid regime, I expect that my children's future will be far worse. They will live in the midst of apartheid, and as a result, we must work hard to put an end to the occupation so that our children can live in peace and security.

ABDALLAH ABU RAHMEH, General Director of the Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission and an Activist, 46 Years Old, Bil'in

The occupying authorities confiscated my land and denied me the right to express my rejection of the confiscation through public protests, demonstrations, and marches. I was incarcerated six times, and when I was younger, during the first Intifada, the occupying authorities prevented me from leaving the country to pursue my undergraduate studies abroad. Most of the time I am deprived of free movement and access because of the military checkpoints. I cannot visit Jerusalem or the northern part of Palestine occupied in 1948. My sister is married and has been living in Lod for 15 years, but I have not been allowed to go to visit her, not even once. In light of the continuing military occupation I am always worried about my children because they may get arrested or killed at any time. My future is cloudy and is shrouded in fear and worry.

JANA JIHAD, Palestine's Youngest Amateur Reporter, 11 Years Old, Nabi Saleh Village

Military occupation means to me gas canisters, stun grenades, live bullets, and settlers incinerating children and stealing Palestinian land. My grandmother undergoes dialysis because she inhaled tear gas. They killed my uncle and my classmate, and arrested my family members and friends. If there were no military occupation I would wake up to the chirping of birds instead of to the sound of tear gas canisters and stun grenades. And I would not see settlers robbing us of our land every day. I would play freely and fearlessly. I would go around the world and visit Jerusalem and the territory of northern Palestine, which was occupied in 1948. I would also be able to see the sea, which I have never seen in my life. If the occupation were to vanish, I would see a better and brighter future. I want to study journalism and media at Harvard University, and I want to carry a message from oppressed children to the rest of the world. I also want to play football with the

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Barcelona football team to raise high the flag of Palestine. I would like to become as well a fashion designer to add to the Palestinian traditional dress.

OMAR AL-KHATIB, Former Prisoner, 52 Years Old, Jerusalem

The occupation ransacked 18 years of my life – the time I spent in prison. I had no contact with family members or friends, and in particular, I had no communication with my parents who did not live long enough to enjoy the dear moments of my release from jail. Upon release I started to rebuild my life. I had to race with time so I married and have become a loyal hard-working husband and father who never falters in his support of the Palestinian struggle for freedom and justice.

SA'EEB AL-TAMIMI, Former Prisoner, 44 Years Old, Nabi Saleh

I grew up as an orphan. My father died when I was a year and a half old, and I always complained about the fact that I did not have a father like other children. I spent 22 years in prison, and I was released only three years ago. I was put under house arrest and I cannot leave Ramallah. I cannot move freely in the country or travel abroad. If there were no occupation, I would live as a free and respected human being. Occupation steals our humanity.

OMAR SHATI, Former Prisoner, 26 Years Old, Jerusalem

Military occupation is the power that has usurped our land and continues to violate our basic human rights. Occupation has literally murdered my future. I spent eight months in jail as a result of which I lost two years of university education. I was released only last March. I was a cause of suffering for my family, especially for my mother who suffered the most. It was not easy for me to see her crying. As a result of imprisonment, I was denied the right to travel. Before I was sentenced to jail, I was in Qatar training to become a

professional football player in order to later join the Palestine Football Union. Military occupation has destroyed my future and I have no clear picture of what my future holds. I am still under surveillance by the military occupation authorities and cannot go anywhere.

AMAL AL-SA'DA, Former Prisoner, 28 Years Old, Hebron

Military occupation means imprisonment, oppression, and the stealing of lands and health. I was sentenced to jail for one year and two months. Occupation has greatly affected my mental state, social status, future, and practical life. Before my arrest, I used to work in an infirmary but today I am unemployed. I can imagine being free and secure in an independent state free of occupation. I dreamt of becoming a lawyer but I changed my mind after arrest and imprisonment because a lawyer may feel helpless before the tyranny and cruelty of the military occupation courts.

AMJAD AL-SHAWA, Director of the Palestinian NGOs Network, 46 Years Old, Gaza

It is really difficult to talk about the future in light of the continued military occupation, oppression, and injustice. I was born after the occupation of 1967, and the practices of the occupying power have become part of my conscious life. Occupation has affected my educational and professional life, and has damaged my health and turned my dreams into nightmares. It has restricted my freedom and spoiled my plans and relations. The occupation has turned Gaza into a place worse than a prison and continues to destroy everything that is in it. I always think about the life of my children and about their future. No matter what I do for them now, occupation will be their future.

AMAL SIYAM, Director of the Women's Affairs Center, 47 Years Old, Gaza

Occupation means that you become a refugee in your own country or that you live as a refugee outside your homeland. Occupation means that you open your eyes as a little girl and see the UNRWA flag and not the flag of your country. You meet people and get to know their names and which countries they come from, and you say in a sad tone, "I am from Palestine," but the answer comes to you like a thunder strike, "You mean to say Israel." Occupation means poverty, unemployment, discrimination, racism, disgrace, and inhuman treatment. Occupation is every ugly thing in the world. I lost many dear friends because of the occupation, and it is the reason I am called a refugee living in her own country. I cannot see my children who have been studying abroad for three years now because of the occupation. When the occupation ends, I will no longer think of death and I will not have expectations of war or aggression.

AKRAM AL-AYASA, Head of International Relations at the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees, 56 Years Old, Bethlehem

We have been refugees since 1948. I am constantly afraid that something bad may happen to my children while they are travelling through the many military checkpoints spread all over West Bank. I was arrested several times (total duration of five years). I was injured by an Israeli bullet in 1985, and my house was partially demolished because of an Israeli grenade in the year 2001. I am not allowed to cultivate my land because it's located in Area C. The Israeli occupation continues to persist, and I am worried that my children will continue to suffer in the future.

AHMAD SUB LABAN, Specialist Field Researcher in Jerusalem and Israeli Settlements at Ir-Amim, 37 Years Old, Jerusalem

I believe that remaining in Jerusalem with my family and children is the true meaning of steadfastness, especially in light of the policies that aim to expel us from the holy city of Jerusalem. This is the fiftieth year of occupation, and it is a year that is not different from previous years, and it will not be different from the coming years. The only special thing this year is that it reminds us that the years pass by and we get older. We are still living an incomplete life that can hardly be described as "normal." Our life under occupation is "uneven" and "unbalanced." One could almost scream, "I live in an unending state of imbalance that impacts every single decision I take."

IMAD HAMDAN, Director of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee, 49 Years Old, Hebron

Unquestionably, occupation is responsible for the homelessness of most of the Palestinian people, and it has created many obstacles that impede their development. The military occupation has dispersed my family and has prevented our family reunion. In addition, occupation has limited my ambitions to continue my higher education. I expect that the future will remain uncertain and grim. There is nothing that forebodes hope or optimism in the future. Fear and underdevelopment are two sources of serious concern and worry about the future of my children. Fifty years of struggle against occupation have passed and there is no room for giving in or yielding to its aims.

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FADI HIDMI, Director of the Arab Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 39 Years Old, Jerusalem

When you live under occupation you continuously suffer from oppression and humiliation, which makes you stronger in the fight for your just cause of independence. I am very optimistic that we will achieve our national aspirations for independence with Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine because our children have proved time and again since the occupation started that they never forget their sense of belonging to their beloved country and nation.

QASSEM AWWAD, General Director of Documentation at the Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, 34 Years Old, Nablus

Occupation has stolen ten years of my life – the years I was in prison. My family's home was demolished and I spent those ten years in a state of severe alienation under the worst conditions: the jails of the Israeli occupation. I will continue to expose before the international community the occupation's practices and violations of human rights. I will also document those violations against my unarmed people and chronicle their historical steadfastness. I will remain committed to popular resistance and I will boycott the products of the occupation. I will transmit our experiences and ways of thinking to future generations with a view to develop strategies to confront the occupation.

ADEL AL-HALLAK, Director of Al-Aqsa Islamic Schools and Lecturer at Al-Quds Open University, 77 Years Old, Jerusalem

Occupation is slavery. I want to see my homeland free like all other countries in the world. Occupation is racism, oppression, imprisonment, and humiliation. It has affected my life and my thinking as well as the possibility of self-development. It has also adversely affected the education

of my children and their mental state. I cannot plan for the future and I am waiting for the departure of the colonizers. However, I am optimistic that soon we will have our long-awaited rights because our cause is righteous. Israel is oppressing our people, especially in Jerusalem. But racism and slavery will not last forever. We will be liberated like the South African people.

HADEEL WAHDAN, Lecturer of Media at Birzeit University, 37 Years Old, Ramallah

Occupation is my constant thirst for a different future. Occupation has deprived us of the charm of mystery when it distorted the past and confiscated the present and decided on the future. Occupation deprived me of my right to manage my own affairs in my own way. It interferes in the minutest details of my personal life: where I go and what I dream about. I cannot decide about the future and I will always think of Palestine as an idea and not as a reality. I do not want this to happen to me and I cannot let it happen to my children. Unfortunately, occupation has taken away from me the ability to dream. When my life becomes free of occupation, I will not have pangs of conscience and I will laugh and feel joy. I will not allow my dignity to be humiliated at a checkpoint or border crossing. I will think a lot before I say, "On this land there is something worth living for." Finally, I will be able to drive my car for four hours without stopping and without passing through the same place more than once.

AMJAD ABU AL-IZ, Lecturer of Political Science at An-Najah University, 39 Years Old, Nablus

The Israeli occupation is the arrogance and conceit that I see in the spiteful eyes of Israeli soldiers as they look at us at checkpoints. I have a constant feeling that I can be arrested at any minute and I may sleep and wake up the next day and see myself in prison. I believe that I exercise the rituals of life and not life itself because

of occupation. I cannot travel and I feel I am being watched by the occupation at all times. I feel I am navigating on my land without any possibility of return. Occupation has strengthened my will to challenge and rebel against unjust forces that try to control my behavior. Occupation has influenced the Palestinian character. We are rebels and at the same time we adapt well and underneath the ashes there is a blaze. No occupation means freedom, openness, and security. It means that I feel I am part of this world and that I am recognized by the world. I feel I am equal to all people and I feel that I own myself and my dignity.

IBRAHIM IBRASH, Retired University Lecturer and Former Minister of Culture, 65 Years Old, Gaza

Occupation is the control of one state or a group of people over another state or people and denying them the right to economic, social, and political self-determination. In other words, occupation is depriving people of freedom and confiscating their territory. I am living the life of a refugee because of occupation and I have been denied the right to return to my hometown in Ramla. I am not living as a free citizen in an independent Palestinian state but as a permanent resident in PA territory. I cannot enter or leave the territory without a special permit from the occupying authorities. Like every Palestinian working in his or her own professional field, my role is to support and promote our historical narrative and rights, as well as to preserve our culture and national identity by all means possible. I have raised my children on the love of Palestine, struggling for the land, resisting the occupation, ending the political split, and achieving national unity.

CHRISTINE RINAWI, Reporter at Palestine TV, 28 Years Old, Jerusalem

I am writing this testimony from my experience as a press correspondent working in the city of Jerusalem. I am forced to see victims of collective punishment from close range and the blood of martyrs shot dead by the occupying forces. I document the suffering of the martyrs' families and I see families dispossessed and expelled from their homes in Jerusalem. All this leaves a negative impact on me and my life, and I sometimes feel that I need therapy due to the volume of pain and oppression that I witness daily. Living in Jerusalem is taxing, and Palestinians in the city have to pay a heavy price to stay in the city to preserve its Arab culture. Living in Jerusalem without occupation would be equivalent to living in paradise.

ELIA GHORBIAH, Freelance Journalist and Filmmaker, 25 Years Old, Jerusalem

For me, occupation means limitations on everything, even dreaming. I work as a journalist, and I have lost many opportunities because I have a green ID card (for residents of the West Bank). I filmed my first visit to Jerusalem as a news item, although Jerusalem is only 30 minutes away. I wish I could move freely so that my parents wouldn't be so afraid every time I leave the house and call me a thousand times a day. My generation is disappointed with the typical tools [of resistance] that have been affiliated with factions and organizations, but the fact that we are moving towards individual resistance using the new tools of social media is also disappointing. There will be no future under occupation, the cage we live in is becoming smaller and smaller.

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SHIREEN ZYADEH, Founder of Ramallah Ballet Center, 29 Years Old, Ramallah

Growing up in Palestine makes me feel like I am living in an open jail surrounded by a huge wall. I love to dance and I use it as a tool to fight. So establishing Ramallah Ballet Center six years ago has given me and the Palestinian kids and youth I work with a space to move freely in a country where freedom doesn't exist, to break down walls hoping that we can live without occupation and checkpoints, to allow our kids to grow in a healthy atmosphere, to be creative, to have peace, and to feel safe as individuals so that together we can build Palestine and make it flourish.

GEORGE IBRAHIM, Founder and General Director of Al-Kasaba Theater and Cinematheque, Playwright, Director, and Actor, 72 Years Old

I continue to fight the occupation and expose its oppressive measures through art and the production of plays that mimic the diverse difficult aspects of our life. Sometimes we stage our plays in different parts of the world to send a message to the global community that we are people who want freedom and life. During the past years I learned how to confront the occupation and I was always ready to engage in a real and stubborn war to prove my right to life and existence on the Palestinian stage. And when creativity and innovation become a right and part and parcel of the surrounding environment then we are generously rewarded. On the other hand, I think the future of my daughters and grandchildren will be full of oppression and persecution and I am not sure whether they will benefit from my personal experience and arm themselves with it to confront the occupation.

MAHMOUD ELAYYAN, Photographer at Al-Quds Newspaper, 45 Years Old, Jerusalem

As a press photographer working for Al-Quds Arabic daily and the American Associated Press Agency, I can say that the occupation has done all it can to attack and harass journalists. The occupying authorities make every effort to prevent us from publishing the truth about the atrocities and massacres they commit against the Palestinian people. The occupying authorities have on different occasions physically attacked journalists in Jerusalem and prevented photographers from taking photos. "Occupation" is an ugly word and has negative connotations. We are a people incarcerated in cantons and living through the bitterness of military checkpoints that have become part of the daily life of the Palestinian people. The large prison the occupying authorities are putting us in deprives us of our basic human rights.

IBRAHIM FARAJ, Photographer, 28 Years Old, Gaza

The blockade on Gaza imposed by the occupying authorities makes it extremely difficult and almost impossible for the Gaza population to go to other Palestinian cities or to Arab or foreign countries. Indeed the occupation has killed my dream to participate in international exhibitions and extinguished my ambition to hold a photography exhibition abroad. But I am struggling to realize my dreams in life and we are determined that the occupation will not make us kneel. As a Palestinian photographer, I expose the crimes of the occupying authorities and show the whole world what Israeli war machines do to our people. I also highlight the steadfastness of our people and their struggle against the cruel occupier.

JAMIL DABABAT, Photographer at WAFANews Agency, 40 Years Old, Tubas

For me occupation cannot be measured by time. The occupation of an hour may cause as much pain as the occupation of many years. Time is not as important a factor as the act of occupation itself. For me occupation means the loss of my natural will in exercising my inherent humanity. This feeling stems from the suspicion that there is someone who is watching over my life all the time and determining my actions. Fifty years of occupation means that neither my grandfather's dream of a free life nor my father's dream that I live a free life has come true. I am not sure if my dream of a free life for my son will ever be realized.

MUNIR NUSSEIBEH, Lecturer in Law and Director of the Community Action Center, 35 Years Old, Jerusalem

As a human rights advocate and academic, my whole life is about dealing with the negative consequences of Israel's oppressive occupation and colonization regime. The future without the occupation would be about building a better future, as opposed to working towards the minimum standards of dignity, which is impossible under the circumstances designed by the occupation regime.

RAED SA'ADEH, Chairman of Jerusalem Tourism Center, 55 Years Old, Jerusalem

The Israeli Wall around Jerusalem has deprived Jerusalem of its hinterland and from its local market. On the other hand many Jerusalemites choose to do their business and seek their social life and their activities outside Jerusalem because their family and friends are blocked from entering the city. This has exacerbated the deterioration of businesses that serve local clients and has negatively affected their sources of income.

FADI KATTAN, Chef and Hotelier/Tourism Expert, 39 Years Old, Bethlehem

The future is very dark, even though each time I create a new dish, each time tourists enjoy their stay in Palestine, each time I carry the voice of a certain Palestine I still feel hopeful. The future looks bleak in the darkness of this religious extremism that invades people's minds in Israel and in the region, and I believe that it is crucial to preserve – on a daily basis – the values of a secular Palestine.

SALAH ABU-HASIRA, Chairman of Gaza's Hotels, 43 Years old, Gaza

Occupation has prevented me from developing myself and from seeing the development that is taking place all over the world. Occupation has isolated us from the outside world and forced us to live in a large prison that we cannot escape from. If there were no occupation my life would be prosperous and I would have opportunities for self-development on the cultural, economic, and family levels. I would have the chance to move and travel freely and visit my friends and family here in Palestine and abroad. But in light of the continued occupation neither I nor my children have a future. There is only frustration, discontent, and pessimism on the family and personal levels.

JAWDAT AL-KHUDARI, Chairman of the Museum Hotel, 57 Years Old, Gaza

Occupation means the loss of hope and freedom. It has caused the isolation of Gaza from the rest of the world and turned it into one large prison. There is no life under occupation. I imagine myself living the life of ordinary people. And now I have to live and stay firm on this land.

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TAYSEER ABU EISHEH, Merchant, 54 Years Old, Hebron

Occupation is the siege imposed on us that isolates us from our land, our property, and our families. My house is located inside a settlement called Ramat Yishai in Tel Rumeideh in the city of Hebron. It is surrounded on all sides by the settlement, a military camp, and two military checkpoints. I also have a store that is five minutes from my house, located near Shuhada Street. Every morning I have to cross four checkpoints to reach my store. Occupation has affected me economically and morally, and deprived my wife and children of the right to visit me at home. No one may reach the place where I live, not even physicians, and ambulances need special coordination with the occupying authorities. I feel like a prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment.

AMER HLEIHEL, Actor-Director and Art Director at Al-Midan Theater, 37 Years Old, Haifa

Occupation for me means that I was not raised under the chestnut tree planted by my great grandfather in the deserted village of Qadita, and that I haven't been able to sneak a taste of the fruit of the carob tree behind our neighbor's house in the village. Occupation means I can't take the bus from Safad to Gaza to watch a movie or buy sweets or new clothes. I now live in Haifa, and whenever I pass one of the deserted and locked-up Palestinian homes in Wadi Salib, I remember that I am a refugee in my own country. I am engaged in an unending battle with the occupation and I am hopeful of an occupation-less future. I hope that one day I will have breakfast in Haifa, take lunch in Beirut, and enjoy dinner in Damascus.

DALAL ABU AMNEH, Palestinian Artist and Neuroscientist, 33 Years Old, Nazareth

Occupation is the shackles that restrict my cultural, social, artistic, and spatial freedom. It is the type of restriction that forced me to live in isolation from the larger Palestinian and Arab society. It is a restriction that pushes me and my children toward surrender and toward forgetfulness and historical belonging. We Palestinians who live in the 1948 territory are constantly struggling to determine where we belong and identify our national identity. I am sincerely worried that the Palestinian people living inside the 1948 territory will lose their cultural and social identity – something that unfortunately can be seen happening – in spite of the fact that for 69 years we have been able to preserve our history and Arab Palestinian identity. We are struggling with time and I do not wish to see the future generations from the 1948 territory distance themselves from their original identity or lose faith in their right to liberation and to one day return to their homeland.

JAMAL ABU SHA'BAN, Member of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Displaced People (ADRID), 43 Years Old, Acre

Occupation has taken away my home from me and displaced my family into the diaspora and refugee camps. Occupation has deprived me of the right to exercise my freedom and beliefs. It is the force that has obliterated a whole nation and destroyed its cultural, religious, and historical heritage. If there were no occupation, I would live in peace and our nation would be the richest and most beautiful Mediterranean country. My life would be stable and I would have a position in the government. I would also be able to visit my family and friends in the West Bank and Gaza unimpeded by checkpoints or oppression. In light of the current regional conditions and the

dominance of the right-wing extremists all over the world, and in light of the existence of an occupying power that rejects all peaceful solutions and settlement, I see a bleak and bloody future. I expect more human rights violations, more oppression and displacement, and more suffering for the Palestinian people.

AISHA HUSSEIN ARISHI, 77 Years Old, Palestinian Refugee in Sweden

I am a Palestinian refugee from a small village called Faram in the Galilee. My family was expelled in 1948, and I can still remember our home vividly, the fig trees and the olive trees. After the Nakba we went to Baalbek Refugee Camp in Lebanon, where we lived until we migrated to Sweden in 1990. My husband was martyred in an explosion in Beirut in the 1970s, and later I was obliged to work, harvesting crops and providing for my family that consisted of 13 boys and girls. We lived in the refugee camp in very dire circumstances. I also lost 15 members of my family in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. I feel alienated and since I was severed from my family and friends I have not been able to smile or laugh wholeheartedly.

MAHMOUD ALA'DIN, retired Palestinian Ambassador, 73 Years Old, Palestinian refugee in Germany

I was born in Jaffa but my family comes originally from Bethlehem. We moved from Bethlehem and settled in Ramallah, and in 1965 I left Ramallah to study at university in Germany. In the same year I joined Fateh. I could not return home because of the occupation. If it were not for the occupation I would return to my homeland and work for my people and contribute to building our nation. But I was denied the right to return home and see my family and friends. I will certainly return home when the occupation comes to an end. I miss my homeland and my hometown Jaffa. As time passes my yearning and nostalgia grow and likewise

the anger in my heart continues to grow. In the blink of an eye I have lost my history! I lived for so many years and I always thought to myself, "When will the occupation end so that I can return home?"

AHMAD AMRO, Unemployed and Currently Studying French – A Palestinian Refugee Born in Yarmouk Refugee Camp who Fled to France after the Destruction of the Camp, 41 Years Old

Occupation means the death of hundreds of Palestinians who could not return to their homeland and who drowned in the Mediterranean while fleeing the destruction of their camps. Occupation is the permanent question we are asked by others: Why did you come to our land? Occupation is the only thing that can obliterate my name and the way I define myself while everybody insists on calling me a "refugee."

BASSAM AL-AZA, Merchant – Palestinian Refugee in Al-Baqa' Refugee Camp in Jordan, 55 Years Old

Occupation means losing all of your homeland: land, trees, stones, and everything. Occupation was the thing that made us homeless and turned us into refugees. It took away our rights, and I found myself living in a refugee camp unable to return home. My family was displaced and made homeless twice: Before the Nakba of 1948 my family used to live in Hebron and owned large areas of land, but after the Nakba we were displaced and became homeless and forced to move to Aqabat Jaber in Jericho, and in 1967 my family was expelled to refugee camps in Jordan where we settled in Al-Baqa' Refugee Camp. We uphold our right of return and we will never give it up. We are waiting for the end of occupation so that we can return home and live in freedom and dignity.

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MUHANAD ODEH, Teacher, 42 Years Old – Palestinian Refugee in Syria – Born in Yarmouk Refugee Camp and Today Living in One of the Old Damascus Suburbs

Occupation means that you lose hope and live in permanent helplessness. It means that you're pushed away at a very young age from the lap of your mother and tied to a cold wooden chair where there is fear and darkness. Occupation is not to forget the furniture of your grandmother who had put her head on your lap and murmured, "I miss Safad."

NA'IFA KHALED HAMOUDEH (UM ALI), a Palestinian Refugee in Al-Wihdat Refugee Camp in Jordan, 69 Years Old

I was only one month old when the *Nakba* took place. My siblings and I lost our family for 15 days. We used to sleep under the fig trees and as a result my sister contracted conjunctivitis that remained with her all her life. Occupation forced us to live in refugee camps, deprived us of education, and took away all our rights. Before occupation we used to live luxuriously in Deir Tarif. We owned a big house and large areas of land cultivated with citrus and olive trees. How much I yearn to go back to my homeland! But I will never return as long as the occupation is still there. I can never put up with seeing the occupation killing and humiliating our people.

ADNAN AI-ASMAR, a (blind) Palestinian refugee in Al-Baqa' Refugee Camp in Jordan – director of the Community Rehabilitation Center for the Disabled in the Camp, 62 Years Old

We are originally from Beit Natif Village in Hebron district. We left our home in 1948 and took refuge in Aqabat Jaber in Jericho. In 1967, we moved to Al-Karama Refugee Camp and later to Al-Baqa Camp where we have been living since 1967. Occupation causes poverty, hunger, and instability of income among refugees. I am a displaced refugee living a hard and

humiliating life outside my own country. We lived in poverty in tents with no services – a humiliating and painful life. There is no dignity for any person who lives as a refugee outside his country. Many of my family members contracted skin diseases as well as diseases in their digestive system because of displacement and homelessness. Occupation has also affected my and my family's educational status. I studied in a tent until the sixth grade and later I went to a school built of corrugated steel and asbestos sheets.

DIEGO (not his real name), Lawyer, a Palestinian Refugee in Chile, 26 Years Old

My grandfather was forced to leave his homeland. We are always terrified that the occupiers are not going to let us enter Palestine, or that they will subject us to psychological torture in order to enter our own homeland. We travel without even knowing whether we'll be allowed in or not. We live with the fear that if we say all that we think we may not be allowed to enter Palestine again. Israel has built its illegal annexation Wall through our lands in Beit Jala, Cremisan. We live in fear that those lands will eventually be annexed in order to expand an illegal settlement. Several of my relatives have had to leave Palestine because of the occupation. I definitely want to return to the State of Palestine, and until that happens we'll continue to support the process of liberation from wherever we are.

MOHAMMAD OWEISS, Businessman and Political Analyst – A Palestinian Refugee in the United States, 62 Years Old

I was born in Ein Al-Hilweh Refugee Camp but I am originally from Al-Manshiye in Acre. My family was expelled in 1948 and moved to Ein Al-Hilweh. When I was five, we moved to live in Al-Arsh Refugee Camp in south Lebanon. When I was twenty, I went to Saudi Arabia and then to the United States where I have been living for the last forty years. The only ones who can understand the meaning of

being a refugee are the Palestinians who have actually experienced displacement and homelessness. I myself feel like a tree with its roots in Palestine and its trunk somewhere else. The tree cannot take in food or water from the land where it has grown. The fall of the trunk means my end and the end of my Palestinian identity because I am not living on my land. If it were not for the occupation I would have been a productive businessman working in my country where I would farm and cultivate the land, grow and die on it. If the occupation were to end tomorrow, tomorrow I would be back home.

NABIL MOHAMMAD, Vice President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) – A Palestinian refugee in the United States, 53 Years Old

I come originally from Samahta Village in Acre. My family was expelled in 1948 to Baalbek in Lebanon, and then we moved to Tel Al-Zaatar Refugee Camp and later to Al-Rashidiyye Camp and then to Sabra and Shatila Camp. My grandfather owned olive trees and an olive press in Acre and when asked in Lebanon if he wanted to obtain the Lebanese ID card he said, "The olive press is waiting for my return and I am sure one day I will eventually return home." Around ninety relatives of my extended family were killed during the Tel Al-Zaatar massacre, including my father and elder brother. More of my relatives were killed during the Sabra and Shatila massacre, including my mother and five of my siblings. Only my little brother and sister and I stayed alive. We are determined to stay alive in spite of the harsh conditions we have experienced while living in refugee camps. We have learned not to lose hope. Occupation is the cause of our homelessness and displacement, and if it were not for the occupation there would be no Palestinian refugee camps.

