

Final Declaration

The 2nd Right of Return and Just Peace Conference

in Nazareth, December 16-18, 2005.

Hundreds of Palestinians and Jewish activists gathered on a cold and rainy day in Nazareth for a three days conference on the Palestinian Right of Return. This was the second one, following the successful first ever such conference in Israel that took place in March 2004 in Haifa.

The first day was devoted for the opening session, overshadowed by the refusal of the Israeli authorities to allow Qasim Qasim, a representative of the refugees' network in Europe, to enter the country and participate in the conference. Nonetheless, the participants could listen to his speech through a phone call. Other guests came from the occupied territories and the exile communities around the world.

The second day was a fruitful day of discussions that produced the following declaration (the third day is dedicated to visits to the destroyed villages of Palestine).

Final Declaration

The conference was organized by the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Israel, Zochrot (Remembering the Nakbah in Hebrew), The Emil Touma Institute for Palestinian Studies and in cooperation with Ittijah – Union of Arab Community Based Associations

By proposing the Right of Return, the organizers wished to reinforce the Palestinian cause and to develop projects for the return of refugees who find themselves in a situation of statelessness. They also wished to put this question into the center of the political debate in Israel, and to counteract a historical policy in Israel that aims to delegitimize the Right of Return. In their view, these attempts are the main obstacle for a just peace.

The Second Right of Return and Just Peace Conference in the city of Nazareth took place simultaneously with a number of similar conferences in Europe, the United States and the Arab world. It was the result of unified efforts and coordination between numerous Palestinian refugee institutions and solidarity movements, who together aimed to face the challenges of Israeli and international peace plans that will prevent the implementation of the Right of Return. Together, the institutions aimed to reinforce a Palestinian and international movement in favor of the return of Palestinian refugees to their towns and villages, of the return of the refugees' property, and of the implementation of international resolutions, most notable the UN resolution 194 for the return of Palestinian refugees that is based on international human rights.

The conference has affirmed the commitment of the organizers and the participants to the rights of the Palestinian people, which they are convinced is not negotiable. They have raised their united voice against each plan, whatever party may propose it, that tries to weaken the Right of Return and the rights of the Palestinian people for an end of the occupation, for freedom and independence.

The organizers of the Right of Return and Just Peace Conference are proud of the participation of their Palestinian sisters and brothers from the occupied territories and the Diaspora. They are also very proud of the greeting messages of many Palestinian institutions from the West Bank and Gaza, and refugee camps in Lebanon and in the Diaspora, who have excused for not being able to attend the conference. The conference considers these

messages and the participation as a sign for the importance of a new unification of the Palestinian people, wherever they may live, under a shared aim.

The conference also appreciates the participation of progressive Israelis who aim for a Right of Return of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced People. They are our partners in developing this project and changing the opinion of the Israeli public, in order to build a foundation for the return project.

The discussions and lectures of the conference insisted on the necessity to revive the memory, and to draw future visions on the human, legal, public and political level. They showed that there exists a potential that will be important to use for developing actions and institutional efforts, and for realizing envisioned projects.

The conference has affirmed its rejection of all projects that will abolish, avoid and destroy the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees. The conference reiterates in front of the world at large that there will be no just peace without the unconditional implementation of the Palestinian Right of Return. The organizers alert the world against the Israeli campaign to obtain international, Arab and Palestinian recognition in Israel as a Jewish State through the elimination of the Palestinian Right of Return.

The conference condemns the Israeli authorities for preventing the representative of the Palestinian refugees' networks in Europe from entering the country and from participating in the conference. We pledge not to let go of the issue and we will take all the necessary steps to confront this Israeli policy. We also affirm that the deportation of our brother Qasim Qasim is only going to reinforce our ties with our people in exile and in the homeland; we will all stand together in our campaign for the implementation of the Right of Return.

We call upon the world public opinion to acknowledge that an ethnic cleansing operation took place in 1948 against the Palestinian people and that this policy continues unabated until today.

We ask the Palestinian leadership, on all levels, to relocate the Nakbah of 1948 at the center of its agenda and to derive the necessary and essential conclusions from what happened in the past so as to avert the occurrence of a new Nakbah.

We demand from the Israeli Academia to allow free and critical research – according to the international standards of academic openness- on the Nakbah. We call upon it to stop being a mouthpiece for the authorities while silencing any dissenting voices in it.

We leave this conference determined to strengthen our struggle for the Right of Return and to expand the popular participation in the efforts for its realization. We are looking forward to our next and third conference of the Right of Return and the Just peace - dreaming and hoping to see as soon as possible all the refugees returning to their homes and homeland.

Organizers:

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