

## **Open Letter to President Mahmoud Abbas**

To: President Mahmoud Abbas  
Chair of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee  
President of the Palestinian National Authority

### **Re: The Rights of Palestinian Refugees and the Final Status Negotiations**

Dear Mr. President,

Greetings of Return

We, the undersigned Palestinian refugee organizations, civil society movements and institutions in the Palestinian homeland and in exile are national organizations working to defend the right of return. We appeal to you now because we are convinced that the alignment of the official Palestinian position and the position of the Palestinian people with regards to the final status negotiation issues is of the highest priority. Foremost among these issues is the cause of the Palestinian refugees.

We are convinced that the alignment of popular and official positions is the main guarantee of a strong Palestinian position in the current negotiation process, which is taking place in a local, regional and global context that jeopardizes the national rights of the Palestinian people. In this context, we are concerned in particular about the rights of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their original lands and properties, restitution of their homes, lands and properties and compensation for damages incurred over the past 60 years. Based on the fact that all of these rights are guaranteed under international law, and based on our awareness of the enormous pressures faced by Palestinian negotiators and the tactics of negotiations, such as secrecy with regards to the negotiation proceedings, we call upon you to adopt a negotiation strategy that is based on openness with the entirety of the Palestinian people - irrespective of their current place of residence - regarding all aspects and details of the negotiation process. Implementation of the Palestinian refugees' right of return was and continues to be the main purpose for which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established, a purpose which forms the central pillar of the PLO's legitimacy as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Transparency and candidness of our representatives with all sectors of our society will guarantee that our rights are best defended, and strengthen our position in the face of enormous pressures.

It has been clear at all stages of the negotiations that this process aims to eliminate the core issue of the Arab/Palestinian struggle for freedom and justice: the Palestinian refugees and their rights of return and restitution. In fact, elimination of these central Palestinian/Arab demands form the center-piece of both Israeli and US policies. It is also no secret that during the so-called "Oslo Peace Process" these policies have employed insidious tactics in order to nullify these rights altogether. Such tactics include attempts to substitute the return and restitution of the refugees with monetary compensation; to reduce the number of those entitled to exercise these rights from over 7 million Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons to a tiny minority, including so-called "hardship cases" that would be arbitrarily defined by Israel; to suggest that the refugees return to homes located in the areas administered by the Palestinian Authority; and other humiliating "trade offs" whereby Palestinians are expected to surrender the right of refugees to return to homes, lands and properties of origin in exchange for other rights and demands, such as self-determination, borders, the reclamation of Jerusalem and removal of the illegal settlement-colonies. The Palestinian leadership has rejected such degrading bargaining tactics in previous negotiations, notably those known as the second Camp David summit and the Clinton initiative. The late President Yasser Arafat rejected these tactics, and he was made to pay for that with his liberty and

his life.

**Whereas** the rights of return, restitution and compensation are enshrined in international law and specifically affirmed in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and UN Security Council Resolution 237;

**Whereas** we see that increasing US pressure aims to force Palestinian negotiators to agree to an obscure framework for a solution that is to be achieved by any means and at the soonest date, and that such a framework is largely for internal US consumption in the context of a US Presidential election;

**Whereas** it has become clear that the US administration is working on other fronts to market its obscure framework for a solution in the September 2008 session of the UN General Assembly;

**Whereas** we realize, as a result of our movement's long and difficult experience with Israeli politics, that Israeli political actors seek to solve the internal Israeli political crisis by venting destruction on the Palestinian front through various policies and practices, all of which work to entrench Israeli occupation, colonialism, and apartheid, and aim to attain international recognition of Israel as a 'Jewish State';

**Whereas** Western and Israeli election platforms must not be employed to put pressure on the Palestinian negotiators, who should in no way be a party to the political maneuvers of US and Israeli political candidates, particularly in order to protect the legality, legitimacy, and sanctity of Palestinian national rights regardless of who emerges victorious in foreign elections;

**Whereas** we perceive the retreat of the once principled European position, and the transformation of this position into one that conforms to the US policy of total complicity and support for Israel;

**Whereas** we clearly see the weakness and inability of the Arab countries to take action or play any effective role;

**Whereas** we witness the sharp, painful and unprecedented deterioration in the internal Palestinian political arena;

**Whereas** it has become plain and obvious that powerful external pressures aim to annul Palestinian refugee rights, particularly the right to return to their original lands and properties and the restitution of these lands and properties;

**Whereas** Israel and the US, according to Israeli officials, are intensifying their efforts to reach a framework for a solution that is acceptable to both Israel and the US and will be viable regardless of the ruling party;

**Whereas the primary measure of the legitimacy of any solution remains the extent to which it will lead to the exercise of the right of self-determination by the Palestinian people, including foremost the right of Palestinian refugees to choose to return to their original homes and lands regardless of their current place of refuge,**

We approach you with this statement based on our strong desire to chart a way forward that is built on the highest levels of clarity and candidness with the Palestinian people; a way forward that aims to strengthen the Palestinian position in this sensitive stage of the Palestinian struggle; a way forward that ensures that any framework for a solution will include the following principles in clear and immutable language :

1. The rights of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons to return, restitution and compensation are fundamental rights under international law and relevant UN resolutions – particularly UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and UN Security Council Resolution 237. The content of these rights is non-negotiable irrespective of the manner in which they will be exercised;
2. The right of return is an individual right held by every Palestinian refugee and internally displaced person. This right is passed on from one generation to the next, based on the individual's choice on whether or not to return, an inalienable and indivisible right, and not

affected by any bilateral, multilateral, or international treaty or agreement. Any such agreement must respect the fundamental precepts and principles of international law;

3. The right of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons to return is a collective right that is not limited to one group or another, and it is an integral part of the Palestinian right of self-determination;
4. The right of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons to return is not subject to referendum.

May you remain steadfast in our struggle for freedom and dignity

***Drafted: August 2008***

**Signed:**

1. 194 Association (Syria)
2. Abassiya Association (Palestine)
3. Abnaa Al-Balad Center for the Defense of the Right of Return (Syria)
4. Aidun Group (Lebanon)
5. Aidun Group (Syria)
6. Al-Awda Palestine Network (Holland)
7. Al-Awda Palestine Right to Return Coalition (North America)
8. Arab Cultural Forum (Gaza, Palestine)
9. Arab Liberation Front
10. Arab Palestinian Front
11. Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced (Palestine)
12. Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (Palestine)
13. Beit Nabala Association (Palestine)
14. Bisan Association (Syria)
15. Coalition of Right of Return Defense Committees (Jordan)
16. Coalition of Right of Return Defense Committees (Jordan)
17. Committee for the Rights of Palestinian Women (Syria)
18. Confederation of Right of Return Committees (Europe: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Greece, Germany, France, Holland, Poland, Finland)
19. Coordinating Committee of Palestinian Organizations Working in Lebanon (Lebanon)
20. Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine (Palestine)
21. Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
22. Democratic Palestine Committee
23. Depopulated Towns and Villages Associations (Gaza, Palestine)
24. Farah Heritage Society (Syria)
25. Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (Palestine)
26. Higher Follow-up Committee on Prisoners (Palestine)
27. Higher National Committee for the Defense of the Right of Return (Palestine)
28. Inevitable Return Assembly (Syria)
29. Islamic Jihad Movement
30. Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas]
31. Istiqlal Youth Union (Lebanon)
32. Istiqlal Youth Union (Syria)
33. Ittijah: Union of Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (Palestine)
34. Jafra Youth Center (Syria)
35. Jimzo Association (Palestine)
36. Lajee Center, Aida Camp (Palestine)
37. National Assembly of of Palestinian Civil Society Organizations (Palestine)
38. National Committee to Commemorate the Martyr Ahmad Al-Shuqairy (Jordan)
39. National Nakba Commemoration Committee (Palestine)
40. Palestine Democratic Union [Fida]

41. Palestine House Educational and Cultural Center (Canada)
42. Palestine Liberation Movement [Fatah]
43. Palestine Remembered (USA)
44. Palestine Right of Return Coalition (Global)
45. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (Palestine)
46. Palestinian Civil Society Coordinating Committee in Palestine and Abroad (Global)
47. Palestinian Liberation Front
48. Palestinian National Democratic Movement (Palestine)
49. Palestinian National Initiative
50. Palestinian People's Party
51. Palestinian Popular Struggle Front
52. Palestinian Refugee Rights Defense Committee (Balata Camp, Palestine)
53. Palestinian University Professors Union (Gaza, Palestine)
54. Palestinian Women's Grassroots Organization (Syria)
55. Palestinian Youth Democratic Union (Syria)
56. Palestinian Youth Organization (Syria)
57. Palestinian Youth Struggle Union (Syria Branch)
58. People's Assembly of the Towns and Villages Depopulated in 1948 (Palestine)
59. Platform of Associations in Solidarity with Palestine (Switzerland)
60. Popular Committees to Defend the Right of Return (Gaza, Palestine)
61. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
62. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
63. Refugee and Right of Return Committee (Syria)
64. Refugee Camp Popular Committees (West Bank & Gaza, Palestine)
65. Refugee Executive Office (Palestine)
66. Right of Return committee (Switzerland)
67. Ruwwad Cultural Center (Aida Camp, Palestine)
68. Salameh Association (Palestine)
69. Secular Democratic State Group (Gaza, Palestine)
70. Union of Right of Return Committees (Syria)
71. Union of Women's Activity Centers, West Bank Refugee Camps (Palestine)
72. Union of Youth Activity Centers, Refugee Camps (Palestine)
73. Vanguard for the Popular Liberation War [Sa'iqa]
74. Women's Activity Centers (Gaza, Palestine)
75. Yaffa Charitable Fund (Jordan)
76. Yaffa Cultural Center (Balata Camp, Palestine)
77. Youth Assembly (Gaza, Palestine)
78. Youth Struggle Union (Lebanon)