



## Commemorating a Century of Palestinian Dispossession

2017 marks a series of important commemorations in the century-long oppression and dispossession Palestinians have faced at the hands of the Zionist movement and State of Israel. 100 years ago, Britain promised the Zionist movement a Jewish national home in Palestine. 70 years ago, the UN recommended partitioning Palestine into two states, setting the stage for the *Nakba* (see below). 50 years ago, Israel gained control over all of historic Palestine by occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip. And 10 years ago, Israel blockaded Gaza.

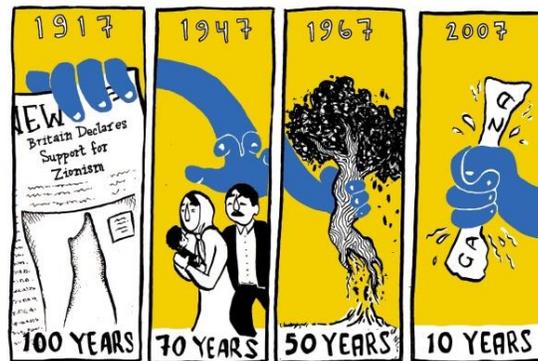
### 100 Years since the Balfour Declaration

In 1917, Britain declared its support for the Zionist movement establishing a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. This statement, known as the Balfour Declaration, was the first time the Zionist movement won governmental backing for its plan to colonize Palestine. Although the declaration stated that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights” of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, it nonetheless facilitated the Zionist movement’s acquisition of land and dispossession of Palestinians, a process which had begun in the 1880s.

The Balfour Declaration became more significant as Britain wrested control over Palestine from the Ottoman Empire during World War I and even more so after the League of Nations awarded it a “mandate” to govern Palestine in 1920, one of several mandates given to Britain and France in the region. The Mandatory Power’s mission was to prepare the inhabitants to exercise self-determination; however, in Palestine, the mandate functioned differently as Britain viewed it as a vehicle for fulfilling its pledge to the Zionist movement,

placing it at loggerheads with the indigenous Palestinian population and its emerging national movement.

Although the Balfour Declaration did not explicitly endorse Jewish statehood in Palestine, the British nevertheless worked closely with the Zionist movement to allow for quasi-governmental institutions and a militia for the Jewish community in Palestine. These entities formed the nucleus of the Jewish State the Zionist movement ultimately hoped to establish. For most of the mandate, Britain allowed large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine, increasing Palestinian dispossession. At the same time, Britain brutally crushed Palestinian institutions and manifestations of Palestinian nationalism, most notably during the Arab Revolt (1936-1939). Near the end of its mandate, Britain realized it could not reconcile the claims of Palestinian nationalism and Zionism and handed over responsibility for determining Palestine’s future to the UN.



### 70 Years since the UN Partition Plan

In 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to recommend the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish State (55 percent) and an Arab State (45 percent). Under this plan, Jerusalem and its environs were to have been an international enclave administered by the UN. At the time of the partition plan, the Zionist movement owned just 7 percent of Palestine; the Jewish community in Palestine was one-third of the population while indigenous Palestinians accounted for two-thirds. The Zionist movement accepted the partition plan in principle without agreeing specifically to its proposed boundaries. Palestinians rejected the plan, viewing it as a violation of the principle of self-determination to divide more than half of their land into another state.

The partition plan never came to fruition, however. Before Britain formally ended its Palestine mandate in May 1948, massacres and terrorism by Zionist militias led to the widespread flight of Palestinians and their ethnic cleansing. After Britain departed Palestine and Israel declared its independence, neighboring Arab states joined the fray. During this inter-state war, Israel implemented a predetermined plan for the wholesale ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the systematic destruction of Palestinian society, known as Plan D.

Israel largely completed this plan by the time it signed armistice agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in 1949, which established its sovereignty over 78 percent of Palestine. Israel had killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, engaged in dozens of massacres, and razed more than 500 Palestinian villages. Palestinians refer to this as the *Nakba* (catastrophe). Approximately 750,000 Palestinians—the vast majority of Palestinians who had lived in what became Israel—were expelled or fled and became refugees. To this day, Israel has refused to comply with international law and UN resolutions to allow Palestinian refugees their right of return.

Palestinians who remained became Israeli citizens but were subjected to harsh military rule until 1966. Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel, who account for 20 percent of Israeli citizens, face dozens of discriminatory laws which make them second-class citizens and widespread societal racism.

### **50 Years of occupation of the West Bank & Gaza**

In 1967, Israel militarily occupied the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip. These areas are known collectively as Occupied Palestinian Territory and constitute the 22 percent of historic Palestine not conquered by Israel in 1948.

Since 1967, Israel has built some 150 settlements on expropriated Palestinian land in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Today, more than 650,000 Israelis live in these settlements, which are illegal under international law and defined as a war crime by the International Criminal Court. An Occupying Power is strictly prohibited from transferring its citizens into territory under military occupation. Israel also has constructed a wall on Palestinian land in the West Bank which cuts off Palestinian communities from one another, separates Palestinian farmers from their land,

and makes it easier for Israel to annex large swaths of land. In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that the wall is illegal.

Israel allows Palestinians few, if any, legal rights under military occupation. In the process of enforcing its occupation, Israel has killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and injured tens of thousands. Israeli soldiers and settlers who commit human rights abuses against Palestinians are almost never held accountable for their actions. Palestinians under occupation are subjected to Israel's military judicial system, which convicts more than 99 percent of defendants.

Israel deems all forms of political expression “illegal” for Palestinians living under occupation. Gatherings of ten or more people for any political reason are banned. Even flying a Palestinian flag is against Israeli military orders. Israeli military occupation denies Palestinians any freedom to exercise self-determination.

### **10 Years of Israel's blockade of Gaza**

In 2006, Hamas participated in Palestinian legislative elections, which were deemed to have been free and fair, and won a majority of seats in parliament. Israel and United States did not accept the results. The US reportedly armed and trained a Fatah-led force that marched into Gaza in 2007, precipitating a civil war which resulted in Hamas controlling the governing apparatus of the Palestinian Authority there. This served as Israel's pretext to tighten its already powerful hold over Gaza into a full-fledged land, sea and air blockade.

Among other things, Israel's blockade of Gaza denies two million Palestinians adequate levels of food and potable water, makes it nearly impossible for Palestinians to receive medical treatment or travel abroad, and prevents Palestinians from operating power generating stations and sanitation systems at their needed capacities. The UN has deemed Israel's blockade to be an illegal act of collective punishment.

Israel's blockade, compounded by the effects of three devastating Israeli wars against Gaza which killed thousands of civilians and deliberately demolished key infrastructure, has kept Gaza on the brink of a humanitarian crisis. The UN has estimated that Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020 due to a combination of Israel's policies and population growth.