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Palestine

# Marking the 50th Land Day

- Features -



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**This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first Land Day – the annual memorial and protest day of Palestinian citizens of Israel. On 30 March 1976 Israeli police and border guards shot dead six Palestinian citizens and wounded hundreds more.**

Following the 1948 Nakba – the establishment of the Israeli state on the ruins of Palestine, and the forcible expulsion of hundreds of thousands from their homes and their land – about 150,000 Palestinians remained within Israel, and isolated from the rest of the Palestinian community and the Arab world. In many ways, they have become the forgotten section of the Palestinian community.

## Apartheid

Although most analysts now recognise that Israel imposes a form of apartheid in the territories it occupied in 1967 (the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights), many still believe the myth that the Israeli state itself is democratic and that non-Jews enjoy at least formal equality. But this is far from the truth. From the very first days of the Israeli state, it has imposed apartheid rule over Palestinian citizens and residents of the state.

Until 1966, they lived under military rule, while Israel systematically dispossessed them and transferred most of their land to Zionist bodies. Through many varieties of legalised fraud and trickery, land was transferred from Palestinians to the Israeli state, which then transferred control of these lands to the World Zionist Organization and its subsidiary charities, which undertake to provide services for Jews only.

One of the means used was Israel's invention of the unprecedented and oxymoronic term "present absentees" – people who were physically present in Israel, but legally absent. This meant that their lands could be transferred to the "Custodian of Absentee Property" until the end of the conflict – which, 78 years on, is no closer than it was in 1948. Another common practice was to declare fields and grazing areas to be "closed military zones", and then, three years later, to invoke an old Ottoman law that land uncultivated for three years was considered abandoned, and forfeited to the state.

By these and other dubious means, the Israeli state was able to steal most of the land belonging to Palestinians, without even once passing an overtly discriminatory law. This land was transferred to Zionist bodies, which now control over 93% of the land in the Israeli state within its pre-1967 borders, and which are bound by their charters to allow only Jews to use or live on this land.

## Legal discrimination

Adalah, the Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, maintains a regularly updated list of discriminatory laws in Israel. The list currently comprises more than 70 such laws – nearly half of them enacted since Binyamin Netanyahu came to power in 2009. As Adalah notes, most of these laws are not directly racist, but indirectly and by intention.

Many laws, for instance, distinguish between those eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return, and those not eligible, without spelling out what this means. The Law of Return itself grants citizenship to all Jews (using the

religious criterion, a Jew is the child of a Jewish mother), the child or a grandchild of a Jew, or the spouse of any of these. Thus, many other laws restrict rights to Jews, without ever using the word. Other laws restrict some rights and privileges to those who have served in the army, or been granted religious exemption (only available to Orthodox Jews). Thus, Palestinians, who are not conscripted and very rarely volunteer, are again excluded by apparently neutrally worded laws.

## Economic inequality

In addition to this legislative discrimination, Palestinian citizens are subject to huge economic inequalities. A combination of discriminatory budgetary decisions, and the reliance on overseas donors (principally Zionist “charities”) to pay for much of the social and community infrastructure, has ensured that Palestinian localities are significantly poorer and less well-resourced than Jewish localities. A 2009 detailed report by Adalah found that 53.8% of Palestinian families lived below the poverty line, compared to 15.2% of Jewish families; that 35.3% of Palestinians did not attend high school, compared to 12.9% of Jews; and that infant mortality was 7.2 per thousand in Arab communities, compared to 3 per thousand in Jewish communities. Other indices show similar disparities. Another report notes that since the Israeli state was established, it built more than 600 new towns and villages for Jews, but not even one for Palestinians. Indeed, many long-existing Palestinian communities are not even recognised by the state, and are subject to constant threat. The Beduin village of al-Araqeeb, ethnically cleansed in 1951, was totally demolished by the state, for the 244th time, in December 2025.

## Kufr Qassim massacre

'48 Palestinians have also been subject to more direct and brutal attacks. The most notorious of these was the 1956 Kufr Qassim massacre. During the Sinai war with Egypt, the Israeli imposed a curfew on the then-border village, while most of the residents were away at work. On their return, Border Guard troops opened fire killing 49 civilians. At the subsequent trial of several soldiers, the judge ruled that “the black flag of manifest illegality” flew over the order to open fire, and it was a duty to disobey. Eight of those responsible received prison sentences ranging from seven to seventeen years. However, these were reduced – first by the Court of Appeal, then by the Army Chief of Staff, then by the President, and finally by the Committee for the Release of Prisoners, with the result that all eight were free within two years. Soon after, the officer in command was appointed head of security at the Dimona nuclear research station, and one of the platoon commanders was appointed Head of Arab Affairs by the so-called “mixed city” of Ramleh.

In the 1970s, the Israeli government grew increasingly concerned at the growing Palestinian population in the state. In some areas, Palestinians still formed a majority. One response was the introduction of a programme officially described as “Judaisation of Galilee” – an area where, by 2023, Jews formed just 15% of the population. Among the proposals was the widespread confiscation of land from Palestinian communities for the construction of fifty new Jewish communities. In order to implement this, Israel announced the imposition of a curfew in several Palestinian towns and villages; in response, Arab towns called for a general strike and mass demonstrations on 30 March 1976. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and in refugee camps in Lebanon, also announced solidarity demonstrations.

Israel responded with panic, and flooded Galilee with thousands of police and troops. In the subsequent repression of the protests, six Palestinian citizens were shot dead, and hundreds injured. The events of Land Day proved a turning point for '48 Palestinians, leading to greater and more organised coordination between different communities and parties, as well as with those under military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, and those in exile. It signified

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that they rejected Israel's attempt to partition the people as well as the land of Palestine, and that they increasingly saw themselves and their future inextricably linked to the struggle of all Palestinians for return and reunification.

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Source: [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

PS:

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