

Occupied Palestine

Resettlement

Resettlement, the central idea in Ben Porat's new plan for the camps of the West Bank and Gaza, is not new. Since 1948, when the majority of the Palestinian people were uprooted and dispersed in refugee camps, many attempts have been made to resettle them. The ultimate aim of all these plans has been to eliminate the will of our people to be steadfast and to struggle to return to their home. The plans have intended to push or entice the Palestinians to give up the struggle against occupation and dispossession in favor of finding new sites to settle down in order to attain a minimal standard of living. Furthermore, these plans are all part, directly or indirectly, of the Zionist and imperialist efforts to resolve the Middle East conflict without addressing the Palestinians' national rights to self-determination, return and an independent state. Rather, they deal with the Palestinians as a group of refugees whose economic and social, but not political, needs must be satisfied in order to achieve stability in the area.

Ben Porat's Project

In November, Mordechai Ben Porat, Israeli Minister without Portfolio, told a press conference that 'Israel' wants to liquidate the Palestinian refugee camps in the 1967 occupied territories. He did not elaborate on how this is going to be done, but termed the plan "humanitarian" and "voluntary". Yet clearly, this project is politically motivated. It aims to negate the Palestinian people's status as refugees and thereby also their rights to their homes in the part of Palestine occupied in 1948, from whence the refugees of the West Bank and Gaza Strip originate.

In the beginning of 1983, the Israeli government appointed Ben Porat to draw up a plan dealing with the problem of the Palestinian refugees in the camps. This was called "Project to improve the conditions of the Palestinian refugees." For this purpose, a committee was formed including Ben Porat, Yitzhak Shamir, Moshe Arens, Moshe Nissim, Yuval Neeman and David Levy. Porat and other Israeli officials made special visits to Palestinian camps such as Anata, Akabat Jabr and Duheisheh, to convince the people to leave their camps. They were promised financial compensation, or homes to be built in other areas, if they are willing to hand over their UNRWA ration cards and ownership papers to land inside the "green line" to the Israeli authorities. The refugees refused this offer due to their understanding of the political motives behind it. To back their claim, they cited the "voluntary" resettlement of refugees in the Gaza Strip, initiated by the Zionist state in 1975.

In June 1983, Porat made his committee's proposals to resettle 170,000 more refugees in Gaza, and 80,000 in the West Bank. The committee proposed dividing the camps into three categories:

1. Camps to be improved without moving residents.
2. Camps to be demolished and residents moved to nearby, unpopulated areas.
3. Camps to be demolished and residents moved to totally new areas. This is similar to what has happened in the Gaza Strip.

After the Zionists tried to destroy the camps in Lebanon in 1982, they are now continuing this war in the occupied territories.

The project's requirements

To implement this project, the following steps are being taken or planned by the Israeli authorities:

1. Pressuring the refugees in the camps. This is done by continuous destruction of houses under security pretexts; roads are widened to make it easier to control the camps; surrounding land is confiscated to prevent expansion. Renting or selling houses in the camps is forbidden without the military authorities' permission. More directly terrorist methods are also used: military siege, curfews, travel restrictions, and facilitating the Zionist settler gangs' attacks on the camps.

2. Coordination with UNRWA in order to decrease its services to the refugees until its jurisdiction over the camps' is ended. This serves a dual purpose: While eliminating international responsibility for the refugees, it also increases the hard-



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