

while the remainder was for aid and the costs of moving them from the camps and resettling them. Afterwards, responsibility for the refugees would be turned over to the Arab governments. Though the political committee of the Arab League was ready to accept this plan, the Palestinian people rejected it. The Executive Committee of the Arab (Palestinian) Refugees made the following statement to the Arab Foreign Ministers: "We reject this plan and consider resistance to any enforced resettlement to be a means of struggle to defend our national cause, as are the threats to the interests of those countries that created Israel and work to preserve it. Any Arab leader who agrees on resettlement is a traitor to the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian people are not ready to make any compromises in exchange for their dear homeland. Thus, we reject all forms of resettlement and will not budge one iota from our objective: the return to our homeland."

Nevertheless, resettlement projects continued. A plan was proposed to resettle refugees in the northwestern Sinai. Preparations for this plan began shortly before the US Secretary of State, on June 1, 1953, said that some of the refugees could be resettled in 'Israel', while the majority of them could, in one way or another, be assimilated in the neighboring Arab countries, but this depended on the irrigation projects through which new territories could be reclaimed. In June 1953, through US-Egyptian cooperation with UNRWA, a program was adopted whereby \$30 million would be invested in this plan aiming to resettle 59,500 refugees living in the camps of Gaza, in the Sinai. The land was supposed to be transformed into an agricultural area, villages built and employment provided. It was proposed that the resettlement project duplicate the existing social structure in the camps, keeping the hamulas (extended families) intact in order to preserve traditional social relations and leadership. The plan was to be implemented over 25 years.

The danger of this was the fact that the US was serious about implementing such a comprehensive plan, viewing it as a basis for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and a prelude to having 'Israel' as a full partner in a regional alliance against the growing Arab national liberation movement and the socialist camp. As the plan was being forwarded, 'Israel' waged a terror campaign against the Palestinians in the Gaza camps to force them to accept it. However, the Palestinian people and their political

forces in Gaza demonstrated under the slogan "No to resettlement."

After the Israeli invasion of Gaza in February 1955, the Palestinian masses declared that they would not be subjugated by the stick and carrot policy. They insisted that the essence of the Palestinian problem is not economic or psychological, but that it is a national question and requires the fulfillment of Palestinian national rights.

Initially, the Egyptian administration in the Gaza Strip used violent means to enforce resettlement along the lines of the US plan. It later changed its position as a result of escalating tension with the US, due to Nasser's refusal to join the US-sponsored regional pact (Baghdad Pact). Also, the Israeli attack on Egypt in February had led to this change. The UN Secretary General's 1959 report recognized this fact; he said that assimilation was not possible or acceptable if implemented by force, and that the question should be dealt with on a voluntary basis if permanent results - political and economic stability - were desired.

The new occupation

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, and Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Zionist authorities thought that conditions were ripe for dismantling the refugee camps. By preserving and concentrating the Palestinian national, social and cultural identity, the camps continuously contribute to the Palestinian national struggle. In the camps, the hope of return and freedom is embodied and continues to grow with each new generation. With this in mind, the Israeli authorities understood that there would be daily confrontation with the Palestinians, and that the camps must be liquidated in order to achieve full control of the territories and to be able to root out the commandos. The Israelis destroyed houses close to the main streets and opened wide roads to make it easier for the army to control the camps during demonstrations. They attempted to break down densely populated areas, and move part of the population to other sites in order to dismantle social relations among the residents and push them to search for housing elsewhere, preferably outside the occupied territories. While contributing to destroying the camps, these practices also aimed to reduce the international sympathy with the Palestinian struggle, which is elicited by the refugee problem, and ultimately to

end any international responsibility for the Palestinian people.

Prior to the present one, the Israeli government has attempted two significant resettlement projects:

1. The attempt to tie the camps to the municipalities in order to end their distinctive, independent character. By subjecting the camps' activities and services to the municipality system, the Israelis prepared to end UNRWA's jurisdiction over the refugees. In 1971-72, this attempt failed due to the united position of the Palestinian mayors and the masses of the camps; some who collaborated with this plan were liquidated.

2. Building housing projects in the Gaza Strip, as started in 1975, for instance Al Nasr (Victory) project in Gaza, and Beit Lahda and Al Amal (Hope) projects in Khan Yunis. There the occupation authorities built model units where apartments could be leased for 30,000 Israeli pounds by anyone who would forfeit his house in the camp, or by families whose houses had been destroyed in the broadening of roads. These houses were leased for 99 years to married couples. Later on, the authorities sufficed with giving a piece of land for people to build their own house. Gradually the size of these plots diminished to only 70 square meters per family. In addition, there was an annual housing tax of 5,000 shekels.

Many forms of pressure were applied to implement this project, such as preventing people from renovating or enlarging their houses. According to Israeli sources, this project now encompasses 8,000 families (50,000 people). Even though this project continues, the number of people enticed into it is decreasing constantly.

So far, about 5,000 persons have been transferred from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, particularly to Jenin, Tulkarem and Jerico. Others were transferred to Rafah camp in the Sinai Peninsula, which created a problem with the Egyptian authorities. UNRWA cooperated in this project by ceasing aid to refugees for renovating their houses, and by generally reducing services, totally suspending the distribution of food rations and school materials to students.

It is important to mention that the Israelis' focus on the Gaza Strip was specifically motivated by the population concentration there, where refugees constitute 60% of the total population, and by the very active role of the Palestinian resistance movement in the camps, and its military operations.