



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

A sacred right

**The west was taken in by the Zionist propaganda for several decades,
but what is more natural than a Palestinian returning home?**

by Salman Abu Sitta

The Guardian
29 March 2007

Why should I, a Jew from north London, be permitted to take up Israeli citizenship, when that right is denied to a Palestinian who languishes in a refugee camp in Lebanon? Especially when I acknowledge that a large majority of those that left in 1948 were ethnically cleansed by Israeli forces.

Those are the words of Alex Stein, writing for Comment is free last week. A commendable admission of injustice to Palestinians, you would say. But then he derives conclusions that are contrary to this premise; that the right of a Palestinian to return to his home is neither sacred, legal nor possible.

This split-personality theme has been infamously adopted by Benny Morris who pored over hundreds of declassified Israeli files. Morris confirmed in minute detail that, in 1948, Israeli invasion forces committed massacres, expelled Palestinians, destroyed their villages,

looted their property, burnt their crops, poisoned their wells and shot on the spot any Palestinian who tried to return to his home. Referring to the remaining minority, Morris then solemnly declared that he was sorry that Ben Gurion "did not finish the job".

Both Alex Stein and Benny Morris escape from the fact, slowly seeping into the western conscience, that Palestinians were - and are today - subject to the most massive, comprehensive, meticulously planned and executed and continuous ethnic cleansing operation in modern history. This has long been denied by Israeli historians. A notable exception is a brave and honest Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé.

The sensation created by Benny Morris's revelation about al-Nakba, grudgingly accepted by some Jews, is a stark measure of how the west was taken in by the Zionist propaganda for several decades. The Palestinians do not know whether to laugh or cry, for the "revelations" are only some of what they have been saying all along since 1948. Hundreds of thousands of refugees gave graphic details of their plight but these were dismissed by the Zionist Europeans as "a figment of oriental imagination" until an Israeli historian found damning evidence in Israeli files.

Facts have a way of surfacing. The facts, documented on maps and records, show that in 1948 Israelis depopulated the Palestinian inhabitants of 675 towns and villages, that their land represents 93% of Israel's area; that half of all the refugees have been expelled in the last six weeks of the British Mandate, before the state of Israel was declared and before any Arab regular soldier set foot on Palestine to save its people from the invasion of Jewish European immigrants who had just waded into their shores to build Israel on the ruins of Palestine.

What is more natural than a person returning to their home? If Stein does not believe this is "sacred", he has to ask 6 million Palestinian refugees (two-thirds of all Palestinians) why are they still determined to fight for their right to return over a period of six decades and through three generations and many wars. That the right of return for Palestinians has been affirmed by the UN more than 130 times is enough to put this matter to rest. No need to spill more ink on that score.

If defeated on both counts, Zionists usually resort to their last defence: that the right of return is not possible to implement.

In a civilised society, if a crime is committed, its consequences must be reversed. The criminal should not be rewarded, and his crime should not be forgiven or even legitimised. The stolen property must be returned. Rights must be reinstated and reparation paid for material losses.

This is what the international community insisted upon, sometimes using military force, in implementing the return of refugees to Bosnia, Kosovo, Burundi, Cambodia, East Timor, Georgia, Guatemala, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tajikistan, Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

This is also what the European Jews rightly got when they returned to their former homes (if they so wished), recovered their property in Europe and received massive amounts of compensation for their suffering during the second world war, without the benefit of a single UN resolution.

The pretext that return is not possible because of the influx of Jewish immigrants to Palestine to replace the expelled Palestinians is not a valid one, morally, legally or politically. But we are spared the argument on this point. Here we have yet another one of the misconceptions designed to mislead and misinform the western public. It is **not true** that it is physically impossible to implement the right of return.

Palestine is the most documented among conflict-torn countries, certainly much more than Bosnia and Kosovo. We have complete UN-documented ownership records of every acre of land. Not a single Israeli Jew has an equivalent title deed after al-Nakba. We have detailed maps of what every acre was, what it is today and can visualise what it could/should be in the future.

We have a huge database of millions of Palestinians - where they come from in Palestine, and where they are residing today, their family structure and their ages. Today, 90% of them reside within 100 km of their homes, 50% within 40km and many can actually

see their home on the opposite hill.

That is not all. The refugees' land is still sparsely populated. Eighty per cent of Israeli Jews still live in the same area they acquired during the Mandate and a little more, but 15% of Israel in total. About 18% of the remaining 20% of the Jews live mostly in half a dozen originally Palestinian or mixed cities, considerably enlarged. This leaves 2% of Israeli Jews who are the members of Qibbutz and Moshav.

This small number of population, in addition to the army, use and control 85%-88% of Israel's area, which is the patrimony of 6 million Palestinian refugees. To take an example, all the rural Jews in the southern district from Ashdod (Isdud) to Eilat (Umm Rashrash) are less in number than one refugee camp in Gaza. Their density is six persons per square kilometre while that of Gaza population - the owners of this very land - is 6,000 per square kilometre. These owners of the land are held captive by the occupier in a concentration camp called Gaza.

Salman Abu-Sitta is a Palestinian refugee. He is a member of the Palestine National Council and the general coordinator of the Right of Return Congress. He is the founder and president of Palestine Land Society, London.

He has written several books, including the Atlas of Palestine 1948, and over 200 articles about refugees. He is a frequent visitor to Palestinian refugees in Arab and other countries.

Web link

http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/salman_abusitta/2007/03/salman_abu_sitta.html