The Case of Palestinian Refugees: The Victims of Unending Conflict

Anju Lis Kurian*

Introduction

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 declares that 'everyone has the right to a nationality'.[1] The right to nationality is a fundamental human right in the international sphere. It is the right from which all other rights and entitlements flow- right to education, medical care, work, property ownership, travel, and state protection- in a nutshell, actual representation in a world composed of nation states. Palestinian refugees are the people without a homeland, the symbol of paramount political crisis in Middle East and they are the largest refugee population in the world. The Palestinian refugees are refugees for generations with a history of more than sixty years of long standing survival as refugees.[2] The UN Refugee Convention of 1951 put forward the universally accepted definition of a refugee, in which Article 1A(2) say

As a result of events occurring before I January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[3]

At the same time, Article 1(d) of 1951 Refugee Convention says that this Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving aid from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for

Anju Lis Kurian is a Ph.D Scholar in International Relations, School of International Relations, Mahatma Gandhi University, P.D Hills, Kottayam Kerala.

Refugees protection or assistance. This article was inserted during the drafting process of the convention to address the specific circumstances of the Palestinian refugees and it is noted that most of the Palestinian refugees fall under the scope of this Article.[4] So the most unfortunate reality is that numerous Palestinian refugees would not come under this definition. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of refugees in the world. The first one comprises those who are forced to leave the country of their nationality because of fear of the possibility of getting persecuted. The second kind of refugees includes the people who fled their countries because of political turmoil.[5] The Palestinian refugees come under the first type of refugees.

The most popular definition for Palestinian refugees has been put forward by United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), as a Palestinian refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict and the decedents of persons who became refugees in 1948.[6] The fact is that this definition provides only a criterion for assistance and not a definition for refugee status. The UN had set up UNRWA for the Palestinian refugees before the Convention in 1949. Only those Palestinians displaced for the first time after 1967 fall within the scope of Article 1A(2) of the Convention because they are not covered by the mandate of any other UN agency.[7]

In the Israeli definition, Palestinian refugees include only those who were displaced in 1948 and 1967 wars. They are considered as the first generation of Palestinian refugees. On the other hand Palestinian definition on refugees include children and spouses of refugees and others in refugee like conditions including those deported from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) by Israel, and persons who were abroad at the time of hostilities and unable to return and include, individuals whose residency rights Israel revoked and those who were not displaced but had lost access to their means of livelihood.[8] All these concepts, international as well as regional, in the context of Palestinian refugees reveal the absence of a universally accepted definition for Palestinian refugees and reflect actual tragedy of one nation.

Palestine remained as an Arab state since its conquest by the Arabs till it came under the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1517. Followed by the First World War, British Government

secured mandate of the League of Nations over Palestine. The entity of Palestine remained there until the European decision to resettle, reconstitute and recapture the land for Jews who were to be brought there from elsewhere, which changed the fate of indigenous people as well as eradication of a unified entity called Palestine.[9] Originally, a small Jewish community was there in Palestine and Jews from other parts of the world used to come there for pilgrimage. But in 1868, some German Jews came to Palestine to settle down, which became the first Jewish settlement there. During the second half of the nineteenth century, influence of nationalism in Europe motivated some Jewish intellectuals to come with the idea of a Jewish state, even though they did not form majority anywhere in the world.[10]

Extensive Jewish immigration to Palestine in the first half of the nineteenth century resulted in the process of Palestinians becoming refugees. But, the real Palestinian refugee problem came into being when the UN General Assembly's Resolution 181 of 1947 recommending the partition of Palestine which led to the unilateral declaration of the establishment of State of Israel on May 14, 1948. This was done under strong U.S pressure without considering the wishes of indigenous population even though the population ratio was 31 percent Jews to 69 percent Palestinians.[11] At the same time, this event laid the foundation stone of an ever increasing Palestinian refugee population.

The grand majority of people in the world are capable of exercising the customary right of return based upon state practice. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights contains the provision that 'no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country'.[12] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides in Article 13.2 that 'every one has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country'.[13] There has been an attempt to justify the denial of the right of return of the Palestinians by arguing that the quoted provision of Universal Declaration obligates to permit the return of their citizens or nationals only.[14] Thus the Palestinians have been systematically denied their right of return ever since the events of 1947 and 1948.

In the opinion of Palestinians the process of denial of their national self-determination was started by Britain, which acted in concert with the Zionist movement during first part of the mandate. This process was

aggravated by the events of 1947-1949 that resulted in the destruction of much of Palestinian society by expulsion and through the flight of about half of Palestinian Arab population and consequent expropriation of their property. For the Palestinians the expulsion was an injustice in national as well as in humanitarian terms and the wrong done to them can only be righted through a return to their homeland.[15]

The Policy of Zionism

In reality, Zionism was the root cause of Palestinian refugee problem. The Jewish journalist Theodore Herzl (1904)[16] was the most prominent in eloquently disseminating the idea of Zionism. The Jewish state, a state for Jewish people was the basis of Zionism, from there evolved the notion and practice of the transfer of Palestinians from their homeland. The fundamental function of the Jewish state is to serve as a place for the ingathering of world Jewry. The attraction to the place of Palestine (holy land Jerusalem within it) was sentimental, which enabled Zionists to attract an adequate number of Jews to establish a viable state. The firm belief of Zionists was that they could not succeed in laying the foundation stone of a homogeneous Jewish state and fulfil its imperative of the immigration of Jews without removing the indigenous inhabitants. As a result compulsory transfer became the hidden agenda of Zionists who tried to transfer maximum number of Palestinians from the prospective territory to accomplish their intention of Jewish state. At the same time, they advocated the transfer as a necessary element in a solution to the Palestinian problem.[17]

The Balfour Declaration

In 1897 the Zionists held their first congress at Basle, Switzerland. The ultimate intension of the meeting was to mobilize popular support for a Jewish nation-state. At the time of First World War, Zionists provided financial help and espionage services to the Allied powers; in return they got the promised to acquire Palestine. Consequently, on 2 November 1917, the British Government, not having any right over Palestine, entitled Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to make a statement in support of the establishment of a national home for Jewish people in Palestine which came to be known as Balfour Declaration.[18]

Through this declaration, the Europeans succeeded in their long cherished dream of planting an alien entity in Middle East to act as a

Western bulwark, in order to extract their energies and to stop their growth and development by creating a permanent military and political threat to it. And simultaneously it served the Europeans urge to driven out Jews from the Europe. Above all, the Zionists preferred to see themselves as the victims rather than as Europeans occupying a foreign territory and dominating another population.[19] The Palestinians never accepted the modern reconquest of colonialism called Zionism, which permanently removed them from their homeland. Thus, they are still continuing their resistance against the new form of colonialism because they are a nation deprived of their country and become foreigners in their own land.

Exodus of Palestinians Since 1948

The Jewish endeavour to establish their own state in all possible areas of Palestine amid the declaration of independence launched a civil war. Around 70 percent of the Arabs fled from areas where Jews took over by leaving their homes, villages, and towns. New Jewish settlements were built on the bulldozed areas of Arab villages to erase the history. By the end of 1948, Israel had conquered one fourth more territory than it was allotted in the partition plan from areas that the U.N. had assigned to Palestinian state.[20]

Many Palestinian refugees tried to return to their original homes and villages to retrieve movable property or to find out their lost relatives since 1948 war. These efforts involved crossing Israel's borders but they were considered as infiltrators and took every possible step to prevent the refugees' return. The focussed efforts to depopulate Palestine took greater intensity from 1948 onwards. The programme for the transfer of Palestinians was known as Plan Dalet or Plan D. Plan D was the most important blue print for the expulsion of Palestinians. In addition, Arab localities were evacuated on various ways such as the tactic of attacking a locality from two directions by leaving escape routes, the fear of attack or being caught in the crossfire, fear of the collapse of a neighbouring town, assaults by Jewish troops and also through the psychological warfare methods of spreading rumours and whispering campaigns.[21]

Israel was accepted as a member of the UN in 1949, on its pledge that it will allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties and would enforce the UN resolutions. However, the Zionist Government passed Absentees'

Property Law in 1950, which allowed Jews to take control of properties left behind by the Arab refugees. Simultaneously, an additional legislation, the Law of Return enabled Jews all over the world with an automatic right to return to Israel while Palestinians were prevented from returning to their own homes from refugee camps across Israeli borders.[22] Thus, Zionists succeeded in establishing a sovereign Jewish nation state in 78 percent of historic Palestine. And the natural by-product of these happenings was the dispossessed, dispersed and stateless Palestinians, who are the refugees living in camps of nearby living in the hope of returning to their homes and lands. At the end of 1948 catastrophe called al-Nakba, Palestinians were scattered under different Arab regimes. In fact, they suddenly became homeless and in many cases penniless, disoriented, and scared forever and could not find a solution in the foreseeable future.[23]

Benny Morris (1989)[24] provides different reasons for the exodus of Palestinians such as the war of 1948 and the incapability of Palestinians to resist it, the lack of adequate support from Arab states, instead they refused to accept Palestinian refugees to in their lands. All these factors directly or indirectly contributed to the mass accumulation of refugee population at the early stages of the conflict.

Another wave of refugees occurred as a result of 1967 war. The tension between Israel and the Syrian-Fatah alliance led to the war. The territories of all the mandatory Palestine, territories of Egypt and Syria come under Israeli occupation. In this war half a million Palestinians, most of them refugees, who were originally displaced in 1948, sought refuge in neighbouring Arab states.[25] The 1967 war was a catastrophe for the Palestinians because relatively benign Arab control over Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, was exchanged for a hostile Israeli military occupation and collectively known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The refugees from this war were officially termed as displaced persons. The total number of Palestinians displaced for the first time from Occupied Palestinian Territories range from just over 100,000 to nearly 300,000. Some estimate that around 20,000 Palestinians were displaced per annum after 1967 and the process of displacement was carried across the Green Line, which was the internationally recognized border between the territories of Israel and OPT.[26]

Palestinians, who were dispelled

from their homeland during the 1948 and 1967 wars fled to neighboring Arab countries. These Palestinians naturally flocked to neighboring countries and expected that they would be welcomed in these Arab countries. The circumstances which they are facing in different Arab countries are different. However, the crisis of being a refugee, stateless, dispossessed, lacking the passport of a state, not having even the theoretical option of returning to one's country or in other words, not having even the right to have rights is unchanged for each refugee in the refugee camps.[27]

The war of 1973 was fought by the Arab states to regain their lost territories of 1967 war. Again, this war contributed only to aggravate the difficulties of Palestinian refugees especially those who were in West Bank and Gaza Strip. This war forced the Palestinians to forgo the areas occupied in 1948-1949 along with a truncated West Bank and Gaza which left the five million Palestinian refugees into impasse. King Hussein of Jordan moved to thwart the power of the PLO and tried to drive them out of that country. This incident was later termed as 'Black September' of 1970 in which the Jordanian army entered Palestinian refugee camps and brutally forced them out.[28] In 1982 Israel made an onslaught on Lebanon in order to finish off the Palestinian issue forever and thereby crush the Palestinian resistance forever. The ultimate aim of this onslaught was to impose the dream of Zionist supremacy over the Middle East. Saddam Hussein's war on Kuwait in 1990 was also a set back to Palestinians because it affected the economy of the Occupied Territories and it worsened the living conditions of refugees around the refugee camps.[29] All these incidents reiterate the vulnerability of refugee camps as any turmoil occurs in the region and exposes the accumulating difficulties of refugees who are devoid of legal rights.

Efforts to Resolve Refugee Crisis

The Palestinian refugee problem became prominent with the 1948 and 1967 wars. After every Arab- Israeli war, many peace proposals including UN resolutions have been forthcoming. Each peace proposal discussed the fate of Palestine and its people even though they are not a party in most of these negotiations. None of these proposals could produce lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. The position of Palestinians seemed to be hopeless aftermath 1948-1949 war in which their society ravaged and their political hopes ruined.

Immediately after the civil war of 1948, General Assembly of the UN passed Resolution 194 in 1948. This resolution resolved that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss of or damage of the properties which under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible. This resolution's terms have been reaffirmed every year since 1948. The same resolution established the Palestine Conciliation Commission, which was charged with reaching agreement on the refugees, as well as borders and the status of Jerusalem. It instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation.[31] Accordingly, Western powers called on Israel to permit at least a portion to return to their homes, but Israelis resisted this pressure or tied its acceptance to the conclusion of peace agreements with the Arab governments.[32]

In 1965, Yasser Arafat, as the leader of PLO presented several proposals to the third Arab League Summit in Casablanca, which resulted in the Casablanca Protocol concerning the treatment of Palestinians in Arab countries. This is the most comprehensive document regulating issues arising from the Palestinian presence in the Arab world, and setting standards and guarantees of protection. The Arab states responded differentially to Casablanca Protocol. The Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq etc accepted it without reservation. However, Kuwait, Lebanon etc accepted the basic framework but included certain reservations to it.[33]

The 1967 war between Arabs and Israel was another major conflict which was a severe jolt to the international system. The U.S president Johnson put forward five principles for the resolution of the conflict that involved the Arab Israeli settlement, the removal of the threats against any nation in the region, justice for the refugees, freedom of navigation, an end to the arms race and respect for the political independence and territorial integrity of all the states in the region. But Egypt and Jordan showed the willingness to acquiesce Israel's existence within her prewar borders transformed Arab problem into a weak negotiating position.[34] The stagnating situation has been tackled through the British sponsored

Security Council resolution 242 of 1967, which embodied key aspects of President Johnson's speech and represented a carefully negotiated compromise.

The UN Security Council Resolution 242 adopted in 1967 affirms that the Palestinian people should be enabled to exercise their inalienable national right of self-determination, including the right to establish an independent state in Palestine in accordance with the charter of the United Nations. The rights of the Palestinian refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors to do so and the right of those choosing not to return to receive compensation for their property and also that Israel should withdraw from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967. It affirmed the necessity for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem. It has become the basis of all subsequent peace moves. The PLO's position on the Resolution 242 is that it obliterates the national and nationalist rights of their people and deals with their peoples' cause as a refugee problem.[34]

The Geneva conference held in 1973 to reach an agreement on Yom Kippur war and its significance lay in the fact that Egypt and Jordan sat down at a conference table with Israel, and Syria, while standing aside, had not tried to work against it. The resolution 338 was adopted at the Conference to reaffirm the Security Council resolution 242. At the same time, Israel secured American assurance that the American's would not recognize or negotiate with the PLO as long as the organization did not accept Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. Kissinger had brought a degree of stability out of the 1973 war but the Palestinians were once again the missing element in the peace settlement. This peace negotiation also didn't address the problem of refugees when Israel neglected the presence of PLO, and the refugees virtually lost somebody to represent their problem. In 1974 Conference of the Arab Heads of State passed a resolution which recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestine people. It affirmed the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland and to self-determination. As a consequence, once again the Arabs could attract the global attention on the refugee problem.[35]

Jimmy Carter, who became U.S president in 1976, decided to seek a comprehensive Arab- Israeli accord, to be negotiated at the international conference that included the Soviet Union. In addition, he believed that the Palestinian question had to be

considered and that the PLO should be invited to an international conference if it accepted Resolution 242, apparently willing to reconsider its clause relegating the Palestinian question to that of refugees. The outcome of these efforts was the Camp David Agreement of 1978 between Egypt and Israel as a last effort to salvage something out of his search for a comprehensive peace.[36] Egypt and Israel decided to work with each other and with other interested parties to establish agreed procedures for a prompt, just and permanent implementation of the resolution of the refugee problem. But, from this agreement, Israel gained clear advantage and their purpose was to secure a bilateral peace treaty with Egypt while giving away nothing of substance on the issue of right of return and OPT.

The emergence of Hamas in the wake of *intifadah*, the Palestinian uprising in 1987, provided an epoch making change in the history of Palestinian struggle for an independent state. Hamas, the 'Islamic Resistance Movement', is a Palestinian anti-occupation organization. The most important leaders and supporters of Hamas are part of Palestinian refugees. Unlike any other Palestinian organizations, Hamas is well placed to look after the issues of the refugees. Hamas has an influential role in the refugee camps because of its trademark social services and social welfare for the refugees. It opened the Palestinian Return Center (PRC), with the aim of promoting the Palestinian Right of Return. The most important demand made by Hamas is the recognition of the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. It declared its primary aim as that of resolving the issue of the Palestinian refugees.[37] The Palestinian right of return has been a central element of the Palestinian position through out post Madrid peace conference of 1991 on the refugee issue. The right of return is expressed in terms of both the moral claim of refugees to return to homes from which they have been displaced, and by the reference to a number of United Nations resolutions.[39]

Under the auspices of the Norwegian Foreign Minister Jahann Jorgen Holst, in 1993 Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin exchanged letters which marked the historic beginning of an attempt to arrive at a settlement. The PLO and Israeli teams reached an agreed draft of Declaration of Principles [DoP]. The DoP called for the immediate negotiations on interim Palestinian self-government in some portions of the West Bank and Gaza, the permanent status issue of refugees, the border settlements

and the Jerusalem. Arafat's letter assured Rabin that the PLO recognized the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security, renounced terrorism and pledged to remove the sections of the National charter, which was adopted by Palestine National Council affirming that Palestine is the home land of the Palestinian Arab people - an indivisible part of the Arab homeland and the Palestinian people as the integral part of the Arab nation. In a separate letter to Holst, Arafat called upon the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza to reject violence. The Rabin's reply recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.[39]

The essence of the agreement to which the two men committed themselves looked forward to the imminent withdrawal of Israeli troops and administration from Jerico on the West Bank and from Gaza, followed by elections for a Palestinian Council to run the West Bank and Gaza for five year period, during which the two sides would negotiate a final settlement. When the two leaders signed their agreement known as Oslo Peace Accords at the White House and then with the U.S president Clinton's encouragement shook hands, it was clear that the Arab Israeli conflict had taken a new turn.[40] However Israel's decision to proceed with new settlement activity in occupied territory led to the weakening of the peace process. The Israeli's argue that the key reason for the failure of Oslo accords is the Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and the core issue from determining borders to resolving the dispute over Palestinian refugees.[41] The absence of genuine progress toward the two-state plan envisioned by the Oslo peace process put forward an opinion for a single state alternative. The proponents of single a polity solution note that it would bypass the need to dismantle settlements and to deny Palestinian refugees the right of return both.[42]

In 2000, U.S President Bill Clinton hosted an intensive summit meeting in Camp David between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. With regard to refugees, he noted that a solution would have to be found for the Palestinian refugees who have suffered a lot. A solution that allowed them to return to a Palestinian state that would provide all Palestinians with a place they can safely and proudly call their home. All Palestinian refugees who wish to live in this homeland should have the right to do so. All others who want to find new homes whether in their

current locations or in the third countries, should be able to do so consistent with those countries' sovereign decisions that include Israel. All refugees should receive compensation from the international community for their losses, and assistance in building new lives. Massive gap existed on all issues because Arafat put forward the claim for the Palestinian right of return to Israel within its 1967 boundaries and Barak apparently proposed a right of return to the future Palestinian State, with a number to be determined which allowed reentry to pre-1967 Israel. Barak's territorial offer was totally unacceptable to the Palestinians while Arafat's position on the right of return was equally so to all Israelis.[43]

Finally Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met in Taba to secure an overall permanent status agreement. The talks were largely based on the Clinton's proposals which made substantial progress on the refugee issue. Concurrent with the wording of a declaration that would absolve Israel of legal responsibility for the refugee problem, a mechanism was worked out at Taba with the aim of diffusing the highly charged issue of the right of return. Any way, the Taba negotiations failed to produce a comprehensive agreement on this and other permanent status issues.[44]

In 2003, the U.S President George Bush made his statement on Road Map peace plan of 2002 to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict. Confirming his support for a Palestinian state that abandons forever the use of terror, he called upon the Israel to end settlement activities and take concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable and credible Palestinian state.[45] The Americans released the text of the Performance Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two State Solution with the intention of a comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005. The plan falls short of detail over key issues such as borders, refugees, Jerusalem and whether a state meant an independent country, rather it provided endless possibilities for prolonged negotiation. This settlement failed on the pretext that Israel insisted on the declared references on the Israel's right to exist as Jewish state and to the waiver of any right of return of refugees to the State of Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad rejected the plan.

In the midst of all peace efforts, UNRWA depicts that refugee camps are suffering from serious problems like no proper infrastructure, overcrowding, poverty and unemployment. The greatest burden they carry is the fact that their children do not have any legal existence. The

Danish Refugee Council with the support of European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department is working to give a human face to the under-reported, unrepresentative and marginalized group of Palestinians living in Lebanon without any form of identity.[46] The Jordan has the largest number of exiled Palestinians. The Palestinian population of Jordan has grown internally through successive waves of forced migration. The Jordan is the only Arab country, which provides citizenship rights to some Palestinian refugees.[47] Impoverished and marginalized Palestinian refugee communities constitute the major destabilizing factor in West Asia and its impact on host societies as well as on the region and equally on the world cannot be ignored.

The unilateral disengagement of Israeli settlers from Gaza Strip in 2005 gave much hope to the Palestinians that it will bring better economic future and they would no longer be subjected to harassment by the Israeli army and settlers. But, Israel continues to control the entry and exit of all people and goods into the Gaza Strip, patrol its coast and air space, manage its water, fuel, electric utilities and enters Gaza with military forces at will. Under international law, effective control is the measure of whether a territory is occupied or not.[48] Thus, according to this definition, the Gaza Strip is still under occupation even after the disengagement.

The U.S President Barak Obama resumed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in 2009 in which the establishment of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem became the cornerstone of his broader regional policy. His view is that Israelis must acknowledge that, just as Israeli's right to exist cannot be denied – the same can not be denied to Palestinians.[49] The Arab uprising in the Middle East and the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's address to the UN General Assembly of 2011 are positive developments of recent times on the issue of Palestinian refugees and the goal of their statehood.[50]

Conlcusion

Today, the crucial aspect of Palestinian refugee issue is that the continuing ignorance of about the existence of more than four million Muslim and Christian Arabs, who are known to themselves and others as Palestinians. If there is no country called Palestine, it is not because there are no Palestinians; rather this entity has been deprived of their status with the establishment of

Israel. In the era of liberation movements and assertion of human rights, Palestinians continue to remain rootless. Israel continues to preclude refugees from returning to their homes and refuse to give reparations over the past six decades in a blatant violation of international law. In every case of Palestinian problem whether conflict or peace negotiations refugees are the most vulnerable section and the consequences and sufferings fall on them.

The Palestinian refugee question could be resolved only through the establishment of a full fledged sovereign Palestinian state within the framework of a comprehensive regional peace settlement. Peace settlements could offer the opportunity to widen rather than limit the options for refugees. The settlement packages should provide the compensation and right of repatriation in accordance with the UN Resolutions and full citizenship rights in host countries for those who choose not to return or who are not allowed to return to homes of origin in pre-1948 Palestine. Until this happens, Palestinian refugees should not be excluded from the general inter-national legal regime created for the protection of refugees and stateless persons. Prospects for ending the conflicts in the foreseeable future remain quite uncertain and the time is ripe for the UN to take steps and devise machinery to enforce the observances of its decisions. I may conclude with the famous lyrics of well known Palestinian national Poet Mohmoud Darwish:

I came from there…

I have learned and dismantled all the words to construct a single one:

Home

Yes, they also have the right to have a home. ■

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