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NOTE

from :	Netherlands delegation
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Subject :	Country report on Palestinians in Syria

Delegations will find attached a report by the Netherlands delegation concerning the above subject ¹.

¹ This document is being translated into English only.
This document may be published.

Syria/Palestine: general situation report

January 2002

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1. Introduction

This report contains information concerning the position of Palestinians in Syria. The document has been compiled with a view to assessing asylum applications from Syrian Palestinians in the Netherlands and removing Palestinians who have exhausted all remedies from the Netherlands to Syria.

On 6 December 2000 a general situation report on Syria was published (ref. No. DPC/AM-675345). An updated version of that report will appear in the near future. Chapter 6 of the general situation report of 6 December 2000 (ref. No. DPC/AM-663895) concerning asylum in third countries draws attention *inter alia* to asylum practice in Syria and the UNHCR's role in that connection. On 21 December 2001 a general situation report on Syria/identity numbers was published (ref. No. DPV/AM-746495).

This report should be read in conjunction with and in addition to the aforementioned general situation reports.

This report has been compiled on the basis of reports from the Netherlands Embassy in Damascus and information supplied by UNHCR, UNRWA, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the US State Department and the International Red Cross. Specialist literature and media reports have also been used. In some cases, the text of this report is based on information obtained in confidence. A list of public sources is contained in the bibliography.

After Chapter 2 (a brief historical overview) and Chapter 3 (general information), Chapter 4 discusses the position of UNRWA. The two subsequent chapters deal with political and social factors. After Chapter 7, which outlines the situation in the various Palestinian refugee camps, Chapter 8 describes the various Palestinian groups in Syria. Subsequent chapters discuss detention, documents and re-entry. Chapter 12 describes the asylum policies of a number of Western European countries with regard to persons of Palestinian identity from Syria, and Chapter 13 contains a general summary.

2. Historical background

The region that would later become the British mandate of Palestine (corresponding approximately to present-day Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) was under Arab rule from 636 to 1099. It was then taken over by the Crusaders, under whose rule it would remain for almost a century. Under the Arabs the region was divided into two military districts on either side of the river Jordan. The western bank was named Falastin (after the Roman "Palaestina"), while the area to the east of the Jordan was referred to as Urdun (Arabic for "Jordan"). The Mamelukes took over control of the region from the Crusaders, and were followed in turn by the Turks in 1516. For the following four centuries, Palestine formed part of the Ottoman Empire. During World War I the British captured the region from the Turks.

In 1897 the World Zionist Organisation was established in Basel by Theodor Herzl. Its aim was to create "for the Jewish people a home in Palestine". On 2 November 1917 A.J. Balfour, the then British Foreign Minister, announced that the United Kingdom "viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people". When the League of Nations made Palestine and Transjordan ¹ British mandates in 1920, explicit reference was made to the "Balfour Declaration" ².

Up until 1920 there had been only a small number of Jews in Palestine, but from that year onwards Jewish immigration increased substantially, leading to the first anti-Jewish disturbances. In the 1930s, unrest between the Arab and Jewish communities grew in terms of both volume and intensity. Large numbers of Jews moved to Palestine as a result of Jewish persecution by Nazi Germany.

¹ "Transjordan" was the name used to refer to the territory to the east of the river Jordan (the present-day country of Jordan).

² For the verbatim text of the "Balfour Declaration", see "The Middle East and North Africa 1996", "Palestine Documents", p. 107, Europa Publications Limited (London, 1995).

On 29 November 1947 the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181. The Resolution recommended that the British mandate be ended and that Palestine be divided into a Jewish and an Arab state. Jerusalem would be placed under an international regime. The proposal was accepted by the Jewish Agency ¹ but rejected by the Arab population of Palestine and by all Arab countries.

On 14 May 1948, just before the expiry of the British mandate, the State of Israel was proclaimed. Almost simultaneously, army units from the neighbouring Arab countries invaded the new State and the first Arab-Israeli war broke out. After that war, which lasted for well over a year, Israel controlled most of the former mandated territory of Palestine except for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which were under Transjordanian and Egyptian control respectively.

As a result of the 1948/1949 war, around three-quarters of a million Palestinians ² were driven out of their homes and their country. They sought sanctuary mainly in the Gaza Strip ³, the West Bank ⁴, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, where they ended up in improvised camps pending repatriation. Smaller groups of refugees settled in other Arab countries in the Middle East in 1948 ⁵. Around 150.000 Palestinians stayed behind. In due course they were granted Israeli citizenship and thereby became an Arab minority in the Jewish State.

¹ As a consequence of Article 4 of the British Mandate for Palestine, the Jewish inhabitants of the territory had obtained this administrative representation. The representation's task was to establish a Jewish National Home in cooperation with the British Administration.

² i.e. the Arab inhabitants of the original British mandate of Palestine and their descendants.

³ The original population of around 80.000 persons was joined in that area by around 200.000 Palestinian refugees.

⁴ Following the annexation of the West Bank in 1950, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan which was thereby established had a population of around 1.280.000 persons, including some 500.000 Palestinians.

⁵ In recent decades, many Palestinians have left the countries in which they originally sought refuge to work in the Arab Peninsula.

It quickly became apparent that there could be no question of a speedy repatriation for those Palestinians who had fled ¹. The establishment of strict border controls on the Israeli side of the border, for instance, made it impossible for Palestinians to inspect their own properties or visit relatives they had left behind. The Israeli authorities subsequently began to classify as "absent" Palestinians who had been away from home for long periods of time, thereby paving the way for denying them permission to return and declaring their properties forfeit. Jewish settlements sprang up in what used to be Palestinian areas. The residence of displaced Palestinians in the regions and countries in which they had been given refuge thereby became increasingly permanent in nature.

In the meantime, the international community had decided that the Palestinian refugees should not fall within the remit of the Bureau of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but that a separate UN organisation should be established. On 8 December 1949 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees ² in the Near East (UNRWA) ³ was set up, focusing on the areas of health care, education, training, social welfare and emergency aid ⁴.

¹ In the Middle East, Palestinian refugees from 1948/1949 are popularly referred to as "ladji'ien" ("refugees").

² This term refers to the Arab inhabitants of the former British mandate of Palestine and their descendants.

³ Palestinians generally refer to the UNRWA as "Al-Wikala" ("the Agency") or "Wikalat Al-Gawt" ("the Relief Agency").

⁴ See also Chapter 4.

A large number of Palestinian groups opposed to the State of Israel came into being in the refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (including Al-Fatah ¹, led by Mohammed Abdul-Rauf Al-Qudwa Al-Husseini ("Yasser Arafat" ²)). With the establishment in 1964 of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) ³, led by the Palestinian lawyer Ahmed Shukairy ⁴, an umbrella organisation came into existence which helped strengthen the structure and cohesion of the various Palestinian groups ⁵, whereby "the PLO was supposed to preserve the national identity of the Palestinians and to provide them with the political and military mechanism they needed to reclaim their national rights from Israel" ⁶.

On 11 September 1965 the member states of the Arab League, meeting in Casablanca, adopted a Protocol on the Treatment of Palestinians, whereby the various member states (including Syria) accorded Palestinian refugees the same treatment as the other inhabitants of those countries as regards residence and the right to work ⁷.

¹ The full name of this organisation is Harakat Al-Tahrir Al-Watani Al-Falastini (i.e. Palestinian National Liberation Movement). From this is derived (in reverse): Fatah ("conquest").

² Code name: Abu Ammar.

³ In Arabic, Munazamat Tahrir Falastin.

⁴ In 1948, Ahmed Shukairy was a member of the Higher Arab Committee for Palestine. He later represented Syria in the Arab League and Saudi Arabia in the United Nations. In February 1969, Al-Fatah leader Yasser Arafat took over the leadership of the PLO from Ahmed Shukairy.

⁵ The Middle East and North Africa 2001, 47th edition, Europa Publications Limited (London, 2000).

⁶ Kamal Salibi, "The Modern History of Jordan", I.B. Tauris Publishers (London/New York, 1998).

⁷ For the English text of the Protocol, see Annex 1.

Within the space of a few days during the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, Israel occupied the Sinai peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank¹ and the Golan Heights. Those areas were not annexed, but placed under military rule; only East Jerusalem was annexed. As a result of that war there was a new exodus of Palestinians². Around 355.000 refugees³ left the West Bank and Gaza Strip - where many of them had built up livelihoods only shortly beforehand - for neighbouring Arab countries. Of those, around 210.000 were not refugees, but were referred to by the UNRWA as "displaced"⁴.

Because of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, many PLO fighters moved to the neighbouring Arab countries. The main bases for Palestinian guerrillas⁵ at that time were in Syria and Jordan. Frustrated by the previous Arab defeats, many Palestinians became radicals and sought the necessary freedom of movement for military action against Israel in their host countries. Over time, the Palestinian guerrilla fighters formed such a powerful and autonomous movement that Jordanian internal stability was seriously undermined. This eventually led to Jordanian government troops taking armed action in September 1970 ("Black September") and following months, resulting in a brief civil war⁶.

¹ Until 1988, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 242, Jordan had taken the view that the West Bank constituted an inseparable part of the Kingdom of Jordan. Only in July 1988 did Jordan formally relinquish its claims to the West Bank in favour of a new Palestinian state.

² In the meantime, the Suez crisis had taken place in 1956; however, this did not lead to any new influx of Palestinian refugees in the region.

³ In the Middle East, the 1967 refugees are popularly referred to as "nazihien" ("emigrants").

⁴ Minority Rights Group International, "The Palestinians", report 97/5 (London, July 1998).

⁵ Arabic "fedayeen" (i.e. "those who sacrifice themselves").

⁶ The Middle East and North Africa 2001, 47th edition, Europa Publications Limited (London, 2000).

Many Palestinians subsequently sought refuge from Jordan in Syria and Lebanon. Syria often endeavoured to use the presence of Palestinian groups within its territory for its own political ends. The country allowed Palestinians only very limited freedom of movement. The Syrian authorities refused to permit any action from within Syrian territory for fear of Israeli reprisals.

In October 1973 war broke out again in Israel when Syria and Egypt launched attacks on Israeli positions. The war did not lead to any new influx of Palestinian refugees.

3. Size of the Palestinian community

At 30 June 2001, 391.651 Palestinians were registered with UNRWA/Syria. This represents around 2,5% of the population of Syria and around 10% of the total number of Palestinians registered with UNRWA. The persons in question are refugees from the 1948/1949 war and their descendants. Some 30% of the Palestinians registered with UNRWA/Syria reside in camps ¹.

Around 418.000 Palestinians are registered with the Syrian authorities (General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees - GAPAR) ², including many Palestinians who are registered with UNRWA as well as Palestinians who came to Syria after 1948/1949.

Estimates of the number of Palestinians who are not registered with either UNRWA/Syria or GAPAR range from 40.000 to 50.000 persons ³. The persons in question are mainly Palestinians who came to Syria after 1948/1949 and their descendants.

On the basis of these data, approximately half a million Palestinians may be estimated to be residing in Syria.

¹ UNRWA in Figures (Gaza, September 2001).

² See section 5.2.

³ See Chapter 5.

It is reported that the Syrian Government contributes more than US\$ 60 million per annum by way of socioeconomic assistance for Palestinians. In 2001, the ordinary UNRWA budget for Syria amounted to US\$ 22 million. Additional contributions are regularly received from donor countries, including the Netherlands.

Most Palestinians in Syria are the descendants of refugees who left the former British mandate of Palestine in 1948/1949. Around 95.000 Palestinians moved to Syria at that time. Most came from the areas surrounding the towns of Safad and Tiberias; another large group came from the regions of Haifa and Akko. The majority of Palestinians sought refuge in and around Damascus, with the remainder scattered across the Syrian provinces. They were later joined by other Palestinians, including those who had moved from the demilitarised zone in the Golan Heights to elsewhere in Syria in the 1950s, Palestinians from the border villages on the West Bank and Palestinians who had left Jordan after the Black September of 1970. During the Six-Day War in June 1967, when Israeli forces occupied the Golan Heights and the area surrounding the town of Al-Quneitra among other places, a number of Palestinians who were already registered with UNRWA/Syria also left for Damascus. Some of that group settled in the south, near the town of Dera'a'.

4. UNRWA

Palestinian refugees from the 1948/1949 war are not eligible for the UNHCR's international protection¹, nor are they covered by the Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees. Pursuant to Article 1D of that Convention, the Convention shall not apply to persons who are receiving protection or assistance from UN organs or agencies other than the UNHCR. When such protection or assistance of such other UN organs or agencies (e.g. UNRWA) has ceased for any reason, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of the Convention².

On the basis of the existing terms of reference, UNRWA cannot offer protection to Palestinians who claim to fear persecution by the authorities. Nor can the organisation represent Palestinians in court, as the UNHCR, for example, could do. UNHCR/Syria cannot take action on behalf of Palestinians residing in Syria under UNRWA auspices, or on behalf of any other Palestinians there.

¹ In accordance with Section 7 of the UNHCR Statutes, which constitute an addendum to Resolution 428 (V) of the United Nations General Assembly of 14 December 1950, "... the competence of the High Commissioner ... shall not extend to a person: ... Who continues to receive from other organs or agencies of the United Nations protection or assistance."

² Article 1D of the Convention on the Status of Refugees reads as follows: "This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance. When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitely settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall ipso facto be entitled to the benefits of this Convention."

UNRWA defines a Palestinian refugee as "any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." ¹. UNRWA distinguishes between (descendants of) refugees who came to Syria as a result of the 1948/1949 war and (descendants of) refugees who came to Syria at a later stage. The latter category does not fall within UNRWA's formal mandate. Nevertheless, Palestinian refugees who are not registered with UNRWA may be eligible for special UNRWA emergency relief programmes ², including emergency medical assistance and food packages.

UNRWA was assigned the task of setting up reception, assistance and employment projects for Palestinian refugees from the 1948/1949 war in cooperation with the host countries. UNRWA concluded bilateral agreements with the various host countries (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt); its agreement with Syria was concluded in 1953 ³.

Registration

Registration of Palestinians with UNRWA takes place on a voluntary basis. Palestinians regularly have births registered, but often fail to register the deaths of family members. The number of Palestinians registered with UNRWA does not correspond to the total number of Palestinians residing in Syria ⁴.

If they have not been registered anywhere, Palestinians who satisfy the definition of a Palestinian refugee applied by UNRWA may nevertheless register with UNRWA.

¹ "UNRWA and the Palestine refugees: 50 years of service" (Gaza, July 2000).

² In Resolution 2252 (ES-V) of 4 July 1967, the United Nations General Assembly supported "the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure, to other persons in the area who are at present displaced and are in serious need of immediate assistance as a result of the recent hostilities." (source: Takkenberg, Lex, "The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law", Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1998)).

³ This took place in the form of an exchange of notes containing an agreement between the Syrian Government and UNRWA in 1953.

⁴ See Chapter 3.

Entitlement to services

All Palestinians registered with UNRWA may call on the services provided under the auspices of UNRWA. The children of Palestinians registered with UNRWA who were born outside the UNRWA mandated area can also claim UNRWA assistance. In principle, unregistered Palestinians cannot apply for UNRWA assistance. However, in exceptional cases they may be eligible for special UNRWA emergency relief programmes ¹.

Palestinians who are not registered with UNRWA/Syria but who are registered with UNRWA elsewhere may (continue to) apply for UNRWA assistance on the basis of such registration.

If a woman registered with UNRWA marries a Palestinian who is not registered with UNRWA, that family will not receive any assistance from UNRWA. This principle is based on the definition of a refugee used by UNRWA, which follows the male line.

In order to be eligible for UNRWA services in the form of education, health care or assistance, it makes no difference whether Palestinians live inside or outside camps.

Medical care

UNRWA provides medical care via a network of its own doctors, health centres and private clinics in Syria. Registered refugees are not charged for this service. Particularly complex medical procedures are performed outside the UNRWA structure (in local private hospitals), supported by an UNRWA financial contribution. For economic reasons, however, UNRWA transfers patients to private clinics only in emergencies. Syrian state hospitals are open to all patients without distinction. However, because of the great distances between Palestinian refugee camps and such hospitals and the absence of an adequate ambulance service, Palestinians cannot make optimum use of Syrian medical services.

UNRWA supplies medicines to the health centres which it administers.

¹ See earlier in this chapter.

Education

UNRWA provides its own educational programme for Palestinians registered with the organisation. The programme comprises primary education and secondary education (first three years). UNRWA has its own institute in Syria providing technical education. The institute, known as the "Damascus Training Centre", provides "vocational and semi-professional post-preparatory and post-secondary training" to hundreds of Palestinian students¹.

Most of UNRWA's school buildings date from the 1960s. As a result of economy measures, UNRWA has been unable to ensure the proper upkeep of the buildings.

Social and financial support

UNRWA provides assistance on the basis of one allowance per quarter consisting of food and money (US\$ 120 per person per annum for families which do not include a male wage earner aged between 19 and 60). The financial support for one-parent families ceases when the eldest son turns 18; he is then considered to become the wage-earner. UNRWA also has community centres, women's centres and centres for the handicapped. These centres are financed partly by UNRWA and partly by the local Palestinian community. UNRWA is also responsible for refuse collection in the refugee camps officially recognised by it. In addition, UNRWA has a programme for providing small-scale loans and financial guarantees to help refugees with income-generating projects. UNRWA's social assistance programme also provides an opportunity for giving financial support to the establishment of small businesses managed by women.

Budgetary problems

UNRWA is facing an ever-increasing number of budgetary problems. For some years now it has been suffering serious financial shortfalls which it is barely able to cover each year. Consequently, the salaries of UNWRA staff have had to be frozen, maintenance of UNWRA equipment postponed and the number of employees posted abroad considerably curtailed. UNWRA/Syria is also beset by budgetary problems which may affect the quality of services as a result of cutbacks in such areas as primary health care, education and assistance.

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Canadian Mission to Palestinian Refugee Camps and Gatherings in the Syrian Arab Republic, October 31-November 4, 1998" (Ottawa, 1998).

5. Political factors

The basic political tenet of the Syrian authorities is that they are opposed to the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Syria. In their view, this could undermine the right of Palestinians to be repatriated.

5.1. Integration ¹

In 1948 the situation in Syria differed from that in other Arab countries offering shelter to Palestinian refugees. Unlike in Lebanon and Transjordan, for example, there was scarcely any unemployment at the time of the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948/1949, nor were natural resources limited. Moreover, the influx of between 90.000 and 100.000 Palestinian refugees did not threaten Syria's economy or social structure. Over the years, Syria received relatively fewer Palestinian refugees than other Arab countries in which UNRWA is active. Palestinians have never accounted for more than 3% of Syria's total population.

Consequently, the attitude of the Syrian authorities differed from that of other Arab host countries from the moment the Palestinian refugees began to arrive. Some economists saw the newcomers as beneficial for the country's future development. In 1949 the then Syrian Prime Minister Husni Al-Za'im said he was willing to receive 300.000 Palestinian refugees in Syria as part of a general solution to the Arab-Palestinian conflict. Under his proposal, Palestinians would settle in the region of Al-Jazirah ² in northeastern Syria with a view to cultivating the fertile and underpopulated area along the Euphrates river ³. However, the proposal never took shape as Prime Minister Za'im was deposed by a military coup shortly afterwards.

¹ For more on this subject, see also Takkenberg, Lex, "The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law", Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1998).

² Arabic for "island".

³ Shlaim, Avi, "Husni Za'im and Plans to Resettle the Palestinian Refugees in Syria", Journal of Palestine Studies, No. 60, summer 1986, pp. 68-80.

In 1949 the Syrian Government launched the first of what was gradually to become a series of laws guaranteeing Palestinians in Syria virtually the same treatment as Syrian nationals as regards residence and the right to work. In September 1949, for example, Legislative Decree No 37 exempted Palestinians from a provision of the Civil Servants Act permitting only those persons who had resided in Syria for a minimum of five years to enter the Syrian civil service ^{1 2}. UNRWA's annual report for 1951-1952 summarises the legal measures aiming to facilitate the economic integration of Palestinians in Syria ³.

Law No 260 of 7 October 1956 states that "Palestinians residing in Syria as of the date of the publication of this law are to be considered as originally Syrian in all things covered by the law and legally valid regulations connected with the right to employment, commerce, and national service, while preserving their original nationality." ⁴. However, the Law did not cover such areas as education, travel, rights of ownership or pensions. A decision on those areas was left to the various Syrian government bodies.

With regard to education, however, it is clear that practice is in accordance with the provisions of the above Law of 1956. The vast majority of Palestinians receive primary and secondary education at UNRWA schools. Palestinians are eligible for free secondary education at Syrian state schools; such schools provide preparatory technical education as well as vocational training. Palestinians may attend universities and other institutions of higher education in the same way as Syrian nationals. The associated tuition fees are the same for Syrians and Palestinians.

¹ Vernant, J., *The Refugee in the Post-War World*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1953, p. 430.

² Brand, Laurie, *Palestinians in Syria: The Politics of Integration*, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42, No 4, autumn 1988, p. 623.

³ UNRWA, *Annual Report, 1951-1952*, p. 46.

⁴ *The Yearbook of the Palestine Question (Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi li-al-Qadiyyah Al-Filastiniyyah 1971)*, Beirut, IPS, 1972, p. 133.

Palestinians do not require a work permit in order to work in Syria.

Palestinians may have more than one business or commercial enterprise in Syria. They may also rent/rent out or lease/lease out property. Palestinians are also free to join an employers' organisation (under the control of the Syrian Government).

Palestinians are free to travel throughout Syria and settle wherever they wish.

Syrian law is applicable to Palestinians.

Palestinians may also become members of the Palestinian branch of the Baath Party, but are not obliged to do so. It is estimated that some 6% of Palestinians in Syria are members of the Palestinian branch of the Baath party.

Although Palestinians are treated in the same way as Syrians in many respects, there are some exceptions.

For example, Palestinians do not have the right to vote. Nor can they stand as candidates for the parliament or presidency. Consequently there are no Palestinian ministers, members of parliament or governors.

Palestinians are not permitted to buy farmland, nor do they have the right to own more than one house.

Syria is the only Arab country in which Palestinians are liable for military service. When the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) was set up in 1964, Palestinians in Syria were given the choice of enlisting in the PLA or the Syrian army. Nowadays Palestinians are incorporated into a Palestinian battalion within the Syrian army.

Palestinians in Syria encounter the same problems as Syrian nationals if they wish to set up a (non-governmental) organisation¹. They are obliged to comply with the restrictive conditions which the Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs places on the establishment of an NGO.

¹ See also subsection 3.2.2 of the general situation report on Syria of 6 December 2000 (ref. No. DPC/AM-675345).

There is apparently little initiative on the part of the Palestinian community in Syria to set up new Palestinian organisations. One striking exception is the Palestinian group known as "Aidoun"¹, whose members are considering establishing an organisation to campaign for the right of repatriation. As far as is known, the Syrian authorities have not yet granted them permission to set up such an organisation.

Some Palestinians who came to Syria after 1949 are registered with UNRWA/Jordan or UNRWA/Lebanon rather than UNRWA/Syria. Between 40.000 and 50.000 Palestinian refugees in all are estimated to be affected. They do not have Syrian identity cards as most of them are not registered with the Syrian "General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees" (GAPAR)². Some of them possess Jordanian passports, most of which have expired. Their legal position in Syria is comparable to that of nationals of other Arab countries. Such Palestinians may reside in Syria without a residence permit and in principle have access to public education and health care services. However, they cannot work in the public sector, nor are they permitted to own real estate³. As long as such persons do not come into contact with the police, they apparently have little to fear. If they do, however, they risk being deported to countries such as Jordan or Lebanon. It is not known whether persons from this group are deported, and if so, how often.

¹ Arabic for "those who have returned".

² See also section 5.2.

³ In practice, Saudi nationals do own houses in Syria.

5.2. General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees

Although the Syrian Government has gradually granted Palestinians almost all of the privileges associated with Syrian citizenship ¹, the Syrian Government continues to monitor closely all matters relating to Palestinians ². By Law No 450 of 25 January 1949, it established the Palestine Arab Refugee Institution (PARI), whose task it was to regulate and manage all matters relating to the presence of all Palestinians in Syria ³. The organisation which subsequently took over PARI's tasks and responsibilities, the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) ⁴, which forms a semi-autonomous department of the Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, is responsible for most matters relating to Palestinians in Syria.

GAPAR's starting position for all Palestinian aid projects is that such projects do not affect the right of Palestinians to return to their country of origin. GAPAR is responsible for the registration of Palestinians in Syria, and for the day-to-day management of the Palestinian refugee camps ⁵ in the country. It also oversees the provision of housing, health care and education to Palestinians.

GAPAR also manages three orphanages. It has its own budget and programme of assistance for refugees. It works in close cooperation with UNRWA in implementing a number of programmes ⁶. The two organisations work together in the areas of sewerage and road repair. In the past two years, GAPAR, in cooperation with UNRWA, has focused its attention on all kinds of infrastructure projects, including improvements to the water supply and sewerage system in Palestinian refugee camps.

¹ See section 5.1.

² Peretz, D., "Palestinian Refugees and the Middle East Peace Process", United States Institute of Peace Press (Washington D.C., 1993).

³ Whether or not registered with UNRWA.

⁴ In Arabic: Al-Haya' Al-'Ameh li-al-Laji'een Al-Falastinyeen Al-'Arab.

⁵ See also Chapter 7.

⁶ Peretz, D., "Palestinian Refugees and the Middle East Peace Process", United States Institute of Peace Press (Washington D.C., 1993).

5.3. Nationality

It is difficult to say how many Palestinians now have Syrian nationality. In order to avoid hampering any possible future repatriation of Palestinians, the Syrian Government - in accordance with its political principles ¹ - maintains a policy whereby Palestinians in Syria are not permitted to acquire Syrian nationality. In practice, however, Palestinian women regularly acquire Syrian nationality by marrying Syrian men. As far as is known, the reverse situation (whereby Palestinian men could acquire Syrian nationality by marrying Syrian women) does not occur. In practice, problems arise when determining the nationality of children born of such unions, as Syrian women cannot pass their Syrian nationality on to any children born of a relationship with a Palestinian man. Under Syrian law, only Syrian men may pass their Syrian nationality on to their children, regardless of their partner's nationality.

6. Social factors

Many Palestinians have built up livelihoods in Syria unaided. Palestinians are not obliged to live in refugee camps in Syria. Palestinians who have an opportunity to settle outside such camps will frequently take advantage of that opportunity. Consequently, only the poorest Palestinians remain in the camps. Accommodation in refugee camps is free. In practice a de facto right of ownership often arises in respect of a particular dwelling. When residents leave their camp, they can transfer that right of ownership to those left behind or to newcomers.

¹ See introduction to Chapter 5.

As regards age distribution, the Palestinian community in Syria is a relatively young community. In 1998 around 44% of the members of that community were below the age of 15 ¹. Around 54,5% of Palestinians are estimated to be of working age, while some 2,3% of the Palestinian community in Syria are aged 60 or over ². The birth rate is 43 per 1000 ³, and average life expectancy is around 66 years. According to UNRWA, the child mortality rate is 0,29 ⁴. In 1997 the average age of marriage was 20 years ⁵.

7. Refugee camps

The Palestinian refugee camps in Syria are managed by the Syrian Government via GAPAR. UNRWA acts merely as a "service provider" in those camps which it recognises. The camps look like integrated residential areas, with mainly brick-built houses and a frequently antiquated infrastructure.

Socioeconomic conditions in the camps are generally poor. There is a high population density in the camps and people live in cramped dwellings. Basic facilities such as roads and sewers are inadequate.

Living conditions vary widely as between the different camps. In the Palestinian refugee camp near the town of Hama, for instance, a modern community centre has been built with the assistance of the Italian non-governmental organisation Movimondo. The new centre offers classes, e.g. embroidery classes for women, and consideration is also being given to computer training and mother and child care facilities. In the Palestinian refugee camp of Naireb ⁶, near Aleppo, on the other hand, poverty is widespread and living conditions wretched.

¹ Dr Nayef Jarrad, "Profiles: Palestinian Refugees in Syria" (Damascus, 2000).

² Central Bureau of Palestinian Statistics in Damascus, report 1997-1998.

³ UNRWA Report Refugees (Gaza, 1998).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ In some of the documents consulted this camp is also referred to as Neirab.

"Self-help groups" are active via "Women's Programme Centres" in the refugee camps and the "Palestinian Charitable Organisation", set up in the 1960s ¹. These groups aim to encourage self-help and the strengthening of communities by improving education; such "self-help groups" may also address other issues.

Offices of the Syrian Baath party and political security services are located in every Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. The camps do not have their own Palestinian law enforcement bodies. In fact, the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria have the same law enforcement structures as the rest of Syria, and there is comparable government control of possible dissident opinions, meetings and demonstrations.

Of the total number of refugees registered with UNRWA, around one third live in refugee camps. Around one quarter of all Palestinian refugees in Syria live in refugee camps. UNRWA officially recognises the following Palestinian refugee camps in Syria (figures relate to the number of registered refugees in the camps in 2000) ²:

Near the capital

Damascus

1. Jaramana	5.680
2. Khan Danoun	8.152
3. Qabr Essit	12.895
4. Sbeineh	16.550
5. Khan Eshieh	15.804

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Canadian Mission to Palestinian Refugee Camps and Gatherings in the Syrian Arab Republic, October 31-November 4, 1998" (Ottawa, 1998).

² UNRWA, map of area of operations, 30 June 2001.

*Near the town of Dera'a*¹

6. Dera'a	5.950
7. Dera'a (Emergency)	5.557

Near the town of Aleppo

8. Naireb	17.628
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Near the town of Homs

9. Homs	13.669
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Near the town of Hama

10. Hama	7.485
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A brief description of the refugee camps in Syria is set out below^{2 3}.

Damascus and surrounding area

Yarmouk

Over 100.000 Palestinians live in the district of Yarmouk in Damascus. This district is also referred to in Syrian popular parlance as "mukhayyam" (Arabic for "camp"). It is not in fact an official refugee camp and is not recognised as such by UNRWA. However, UNRWA is active there.

¹ The two camps in Dera'a are known as the "old camp" (established in 1950) and the "new camp" or "Emergency Camp" (established in 1967).

² The data which follow are based on information obtained from the report entitled "Canadian Mission to Palestinian Refugee Camps and Gatherings in the Syrian Arab Republic; October 31-November 4, 1998", Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Ottawa, 1998).

³ This description includes the camps in Husseiniyya, Ain Tell and Latakia, which are not officially recognised by UNRWA, and the large concentration of Palestinian refugees in the district of Yarmouk in Damascus.

Over one million people live in greater Yarmouk (i.e. Yarmouk and surrounding area). Yarmouk contains one of the highest concentrations of Palestinians in the Middle East. Initially, many of the refugees came from the areas of Safad and Tiberias. Over the years, large numbers of Palestinians have also come to Yarmouk from other parts of Syria because of its economic and political significance. After the Gulf War, Yarmouk attracted many Palestinians who had previously worked in the Gulf States.

There is a relatively low unemployment rate of around 20% and a low illiteracy rate. Many refugees work in the services sector, in particular in education and in the government.

Many refugees have their own small businesses or work in nearby factories. As Yarmouk is close to Damascus (8 km from the city centre), there is easy access to employment outside the area. The head and all members of Yarmouk district council are Palestinians, although the majority of the inhabitants of greater Yarmouk are Syrian nationals.

UNRWA has 28 schools in Yarmouk, with 600 teachers for around 23.000 pupils. There are various Syrian secondary schools in the area. UNRWA has two "Women's Programme Centres". GAPAR has a children's crèche which is partly private and partly government-owned. There are also private crèches. In addition, there are various private institutions offering language and computer courses and vocational training (mechanics and electronics).

UNRWA runs three health clinics. There is also a Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) hospital and associated dental and prosthetic clinics. The PRCS has its own pharmaceutical business providing its institutions with cheaper drugs and medicines. There is also a PLA hospital. There is a free state hospital around 6 km from Yarmouk. In addition, there are various private clinics in the vicinity. The Palestine Charitable Organisation has a small hospital in Yarmouk.

Although Yarmouk is a relatively prosperous community, the large and ever-increasing number of Palestinians living there means that it draws heavily on local resources and infrastructure.

Jaramana

This camp, located near the village of the same name, was established in 1948 and accommodates over 5.000 refugees in an area of around 30.000 m². It consists of an area in which the official camp is situated and an area outside the camp perimeter which also houses refugees. It is located 8 km from Damascus at the beginning of the road which leads to the airport.

The village is situated in a traditionally Druze Christian area. Jaramana is one of the poorest camps in Syria. The refugees who live there were originally farmers. Many now work as seasonal farm labourers. According to UNRWA and GAPAR, over half of the camp's refugees are unemployed. Aside from agriculture, most men find intermittent work in the construction and catering industries. Many women work as cleaners, and child labour is a fact of life.

There is an UNRWA health clinic and a state hospital 5 km from the camp. Anaemia is very common.

There are eight schools with around 3.500 pupils. The nearest secondary schools are in the village. Illiteracy is commonplace, particularly among women and the elderly. Despite the fact that education is compulsory, a relatively large number of girls in the camp leave school early. There is a "Women's Programme Centre" with a crèche.

Both Palestinian and Syrian families from Jaramana (over 5.000 people) have been moved by the Syrian authorities to a housing project in Husseinliya because of the widening of the motorway leading from Damascus to the airport.

Husseiniyya

Husseiniyya is a Syrian Government housing project located 3 km from the Qabr Essit camp. It is intended for people who have had to leave their homes because of government construction projects. Several thousand Palestinian refugees have been moved to this housing project from camps such as Jaramana.

UNRWA has a primary and intermediate school there. There is a health centre and a Women's Programme Centre.

Khan Danoun

Khan Danoun is around 23 km south of Damascus. It was established in 1950, covers an area of around 255.000 m² and houses some 8.000 refugees. More and more housing is being built outside the camp perimeter.

Many of its inhabitants work in the agricultural sector, while others work in nearby factories. The average unemployment rate is estimated at 50%; much of the work is seasonal. Khan Danoun is one of the poorest refugee camps in Syria.

The illiteracy rate is an estimated 40%. UNRWA has two schools with a total of more than 1.600 pupils. An above-average number of pupils drop out of school early. The nearest secondary school is in Kisweh, 3 km from the camp. There is no crèche. There is a Women's Programme Centre offering courses in hairdressing, embroidery, sewing and computing.

There is an UNRWA health centre and a PRCS clinic. The nearest state hospital is in Damascus, 25 km away.

Khan Danoun has the highest maternal death rate of all the camps in Syria. As in Jaramana, a large number of the refugees are anaemic. The poor sewage system constitutes another problem. Typhus is common because of the inadequate sewage system and open rubbish dumps.

Qabr Essit

Qabr Essit is around 15 km south of Damascus. The camp was established in 1948 and covers an area of just 23.000 m². With around 13.000 refugees, it therefore has a high population density. The unemployment rate in this camp is high. The main forms of labour are street vending and house-cleaning.

UNRWA has four schools with a total of around 3.500 pupils. The camp does not have a crèche. The Women's Programme Centre offers various language courses. Income-generating projects also exist. Women in the camp have set up a "community banking service" which provides small loans on a mutual basis.

UNRWA has a health centre in this camp. The nearest state hospital is in Damascus. Residents of this camp suffer from anaemia. Children often fall ill from scavenging in rubbish dumps. The sewage system is inadequate.

Sbeineh

Sbeineh was established in 1948. The camp, which has more than 16.000 inhabitants, is 14 km south of Damascus. Several thousand inhabitants came to this camp from the Golan Heights in 1967. Although the camp is located close to factories, unemployment is high. This is partly because of the current economic decline in Syria, which has caused some private companies to cut their workforces. Some refugees work on farms.

UNRWA has six schools in the camp providing classes for around 4.000 pupils. A large number of children drop out of school early. The school buildings date from 1970 and stand in need of repair.

There is a health centre and a doctor. The PRCS has a small medical office. The nearest state hospital is in Damascus.

There is a crèche for around 125 children. There are computer classes and a small library.

It is difficult to ensure a clean water supply for the camp. Residents obtain their water via a system of springs which often dry up when there is no rainfall. Insufficient finances mean that not enough water can be supplied by lorry.

Khan Eshieh

This camp, which houses over 15.000 refugees, is 27 km southwest of Damascus. It was established in 1949 and covers an area of 690.000 m². Several thousand refugees live in the camp's vicinity.

The camp's residents are generally well-educated. Many students from the camp are completing their university studies. UNRWA has six schools providing education for around 3.000 pupils. There is a public secondary school nearby. There is also a Women's Programme Centre offering basic courses, and a crèche for around 45 children.

UNRWA runs a health centre. There is also a private hospital. The nearest state hospital is in Damascus.

Some inhabitants work in nearby factories. Many work as farmers, while others are civil servants or teachers. The unemployment rate is around 30%.

Province of Dera'a

There are some 23.000 Palestinian refugees in the province of Dera'a in southern Syria. There are two camps within the Dera'a town limits with a total population of some 11.000 people. These two camps are known as the "old camp" (established in 1950) and the "new camp" or "Emergency Camp" (established in 1967). The "old camp" is in fact located in the centre of the town of Dera'a, while the "new camp" (which is in turn divided into the "northern camp" and the "southern camp") surrounds the "old camp".

The "old camp" houses almost 6.000 people and covers an area of 39.000 m². Most of the residents are refugees from 1948/1949 and their descendants.

The infrastructure is poor in comparison with the "new camp". Some of the original mud homes still stand.

Although there is a central sewage system, some houses are not linked up to it, and consequently sewage sludge flows into some narrow alleyways. Many of the narrow side streets are unpaved.

The "new camp" houses over 5.000 people and covers an area of 69.000 m². It was established in 1967. Most of its inhabitants fled to this area following the Six-Day War in 1967.

Over half of the Palestinians in the province of Dera'a live in the countryside in villages such as Muzerieb, Jilien, Tseel, Al-Ajamie, Abdin and Sahm Al-Jolan (all of these villages lie to the west of the town of Dera'a).

The region has a high unemployment rate. Most work in the countryside is found in farming. Many of the camp's inhabitants work as farm labourers. Some Palestinians lease a section of land, but few seem to own their own farmland. In the town of Dera'a, work is found mainly in the services sector (education) and in commerce. Around 5% of Palestinians work in the construction industry.

The camps have crèches for approximately 80 children. There are six UNRWA schools in the camps. There are also six UNRWA schools in the countryside: four in Muzerieb and two in Jilien. There are six public secondary schools in Dera'a and one in Muzerieb. There are also two Syrian teacher-training colleges in Dera'a; between 40 and 50% of their students are Palestinian. There is no university in the province of Dera'a. Between 30 and 40% of Palestinian refugees in this area are illiterate (this affects older people and rural residents in particular).

Classes are provided for around 60 children in an UNRWA centre for handicapped children (the "Community Rehabilitation Centre"). There is also a Women's Programme Centre offering classes in embroidery, ceramics, hairdressing and computing.

There are two UNRWA health centres in the region, one in the town of Dera'a and one in Muzerieb. Dera'a also has a state hospital and three private clinics.

There is a Syrian sports and cultural centre in Dera'a which is open to Palestinian refugees. There is also a public library.

Province of Aleppo

There are around 27.500 Palestinians in this region, including over 20.000 who live in camps and some 6.000 who reside in the town of Aleppo.

The region has a high unemployment rate. Most work is found in the services sector (education) and in the textile and clothing industry. Some people find work as day labourers in the construction industry.

There are two camps in the province of Aleppo - one official UNRWA camp in Naireb, 15 km southeast of the town of Aleppo, and one unofficial camp in Ain Tell, 13 km northeast of the town.

Naireb

With over 17.000 Palestinians in an area of 148.000 m², Naireb is the largest and most densely populated official UNRWA camp in Syria.

Naireb is located in a farming area near the town of Aleppo. Some 15.000 - 20.000 Syrians live in the surrounding villages. The residents of the camp, which was established in 1948, are housed in old French army barracks, which are in a poor state of repair. Many houses suffer from damp, mould and vermin. Around 1.000 families live in these barracks.

There are six UNRWA schools inside the camp and two public secondary schools outside the camp. The camp has an UNRWA crèche and a Women's Programme Centre offering courses in sewing, embroidery, hairdressing and computing.

There is an UNRWA health centre in the camp.

Ain Tell

Ain Tell houses around 3.500 people. It covers an area of 450.000 m² (three times as large as the camp at Naireb). The camp, which was established in 1961/1962, also houses Syrian families and is not connected to the sewage system.

There are two UNRWA schools in the camp. There is a public secondary school in the town of Aleppo. There is a government crèche outside the camp.

The camp has a Women's Programme Centre offering courses in sewing, embroidery, hairdressing and computing.

There is an UNRWA health centre in the camp.

Central Syria

There are around 34.000 Palestinians in this area. Of that number, half live in Homs, while a total of over 16.000 live in Hama and Lattakia. Homs and Hama both have official UNRWA Palestinian refugee camps. Lattakia has an unofficial camp.

Homs

The Palestinian refugee camp in Homs is the third largest camp in Syria with over 13.000 residents. It was established in 1948 and covers an area of 150.000 m². As in the Naireb camp, residents are housed in old French army barracks, some of which are in a bad state of repair. 5.000 Palestinians reside outside the camp in the town of Homs or in the surrounding area.

The camp has six UNRWA schools catering for over 2.500 pupils. The Women's Programme Centre offers basic courses in hairdressing, embroidery and computing. In addition to private crèches, the Women's Programme Centre provides its own crèche. The camp has a centre for the handicapped.

There is an UNRWA health clinic in the camp. There is also a PRCS hospital. There are two state hospitals and a private hospital close to the camp. A local charitable organisation provides needy families in the camp with financial assistance, medical care and teaching materials.

The unemployment rate is estimated at 30%. Most employment is found in the services sector (education and the civil service). Some refugees work as farm labourers or in factories. There are also one or two private firms.

Hama

Over 7.000 Palestinians live in the camp at Hama, which was established in 1952 and covers an area of 60.000 m². Although the infrastructure of the camp's facilities is adequate, there is a high population density.

The camp at Hama is relatively poor. The unemployment rate in this camp is estimated at 70%.

The camp has four UNRWA schools catering for over 1.300 pupils. There are two public secondary schools near the camp. There is a Women's Programme Centre with facilities for handicapped children. There is no crèche.

UNRWA runs a health centre in the camp. PRCS has a small day-care centre with two rooms for the treatment of clinical complaints. There are no dental facilities in the camp. The nearest hospital is 50 km away in Homs.

Lattakia

Around 8.000 Palestinians live in this region; of that number, almost 7.000 live in the Lattakia camp and its direct vicinity, while others reside in the towns of Tartus and Banias. The camp has a high unemployment rate. Work is found in the construction and fishing industries.

There are four UNRWA schools with around 1.500 pupils, and a public secondary school. There is a Women's Programme Centre offering a variety of courses. There is also a crèche providing language classes for women.

Lattakia is not an official UNRWA camp. UNRWA does not provide any services there in the form of health care or road maintenance. The infrastructure is badly affected by the high humidity from the sea.

8. Palestinian groups

Palestinian political organisations have a relatively high degree of freedom of movement. For example, representatives of such organisations do not experience any problems in connection with travelling, holding meetings or maintaining contacts with foreign diplomatic representations. Some representatives and/or leaders of Palestinian groups are in regular high-level contact with the Syrian authorities. Palestinian groups are given logistical support by the Syrian Government. The Syrian authorities are also thought to provide financial and/or military support.

Palestinian groups may publish their own newspapers (DFLP: "Al-Houriyya" ¹, PFLP: "Al-Hadaf" ², PFLP/GC: "Ila Amam" ³ and Fatah Intifada: "Filastin Al-Thawra" ⁴). They can organise meetings without difficulty.

The Palestinian community in Syria feels very much affected by the uprising which took place in the Palestinian Territories in the autumn of 2000 (the "Al-Aqsa Intifadah"). Their solidarity has manifested itself in various ways, some more peaceful than others. For example, various demonstrations have been organised in Damascus by Palestinian political groups since the outbreak of the Intifadah. Those demonstrations had been given the go-ahead by the Syrian authorities. Within the Palestinian community in Syria, collections have been made for victims of the Al-Aqsa Intifadah and their families in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

There are indications that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) was involved in the weapons shipment intercepted by Israel on its way to the Gaza Strip at the end of April 2001.

Partly as a result of the PLO's role in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991), relations between the Syrian authorities and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) have been characterised by mutual distrust, although things have improved somewhat since 1991. In March 1991, Syria released the last 300 Arafat loyalists held in its jails. As far as is known, there are no longer any PLO members imprisoned in Syria.

In August 2001, Mahmud Abbas (better known as Abu Mazen), a prominent member of the PLO Executive Committee, visited Syria at the invitation of the Syrian authorities. Talks were held with the Syrian Vice-President, Abdel Halim Khaddam, the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Farouk Al-Shara'a, and a number of Palestinian representatives based in Syria.

¹ Arabic for "Freedom".

² Arabic for "The Purpose".

³ Arabic for "Forwards".

⁴ Arabic for "Palestine - The Revolution".

Damascus also served as an important meeting place for the Palestinian opposition to the Middle East peace process (the "Coalition of Ten"). This coalition used to operate from Syria, but as far as is known it is no longer active. The affiliated organisations were as one in their opposition to the policy of PLO leader Arafat in the Oslo peace process, and included both groups which formally belonged to the PLO (DFLP, PFLP, PSF and PLF) and other Palestinian groups (PCRP, PFLP-GC, Fatah-RC, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Saiqa).

The Palestinian political groups ¹ represented in Syria are as follows:

- **Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**

The DFLP came into being in 1969 as a splinter group of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and until 1974 was known as the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The headquarters of this Marxist-Maoist movement are in Damascus. The DFLP is led by Nayef Hawatmeh (Abou Nouf).

During the conflict between Arafat's PLO and Syria (1983-1985), which partly coincided with the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991), the DFLP and the PFLP adopted a neutral position. Together with the Jordanian Communist Party and the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the DFLP formed the Democratic Coalition. The DFLP played an important role in the Palestinian Territories during the first Intifadah in 1987/1988.

The DFLP split at the beginning of the 1990s, with one branch continuing as the Palestine Democratic Union (PDU) under the leadership of Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Palestine Authority's Minister for Information. The PDU opted for Arafat at a time when the leadership of the DFLP had a critical attitude towards the peace process. Since 1993 the DFLP and PFLP have been engaged in discussions to establish a joint leadership.

¹ The sources consulted for this chapter ("Dictionary of Palestinian Political Terms", Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) (Jerusalem, 2000); "Historical Dictionary of Palestine", Nafez Y. Nazal and Laila A. Nazal, Asian/Oceanian Historical Dictionaries, No 23, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham (London, 1997)) are not always entirely unambiguous as regards the years of establishment of the relevant Palestinian political groups. It is possible that certain sources will quote different years.

- **Palestine Democratic Union (PDU)**

The PDU (also known as the DPU or FIDA ¹) was established in 1990 as a splinter group of the DFLP. It is not known whether this group, led by Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Palestine Authority's Minister for Information and Arafat's right-hand man, still exists as such.

- **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)**

The PFLP, a Marxist-Leninist organisation, was established in 1967 by George Habash. The PFLP's headquarters are in Damascus. It publishes a monthly newsletter entitled "Democratic Palestine".

The PFLP has always been considered to be the radical wing of the PLO, and has used guerrilla activities and terrorism as instruments for political purposes. It is the largest Palestinian movement after Al-Fatah.

At the beginning of October 2001, hardliner Ahmed Saadat was appointed as the new Secretary-General of the PFLP. He succeeded Abu Ali Mustafa, who was killed in a rocket attack by the Israeli army in Ramallah on 27 August 2001 ².

- **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) ³**

This group split away from the PFLP at the end of 1968. The organisation is led by Ahmad Jibril, a former Syrian army officer.

In addition to its headquarters in Damascus, the PFLP-GC also has an office in Iran.

The PFLP-GC is suspected of involvement in various terrorist attacks.

¹ It is not known what the abbreviation FIDA stands for.

² On 17 October 2001 the Israeli Minister for Tourism, Rehavam Ze'evi, who was also the leader of the extreme-right National Union, was killed in an attack in Jerusalem. The PFLP claimed responsibility for the attack.

³ In Arabic: "Al-Jabha Al-Sha'biyya li Tahrir Falastin-Al-Qiyada Al-'Amma".

- **Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)**

The PLF was established in 1977 under the leadership of Tal'at Ya'qub (who died in 1988) as a splinter group of the PFLP-GC. In 1984 the PLF broke up into several loose factions. In 1987 it was reunited under the leadership of Mahmoud Zaydan (Abou Abbas).

The PLF is now divided into two factions, one of which is led by Mahmoud Zaydan.

The PLF is responsible for a series of spectacular terrorist acts, including the hijacking of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro in 1985 and an attack on the Israeli coast in 1990.

- **(Palestine) Popular Struggle Front ((P)PSF)**

The (P)PSF, which is small in terms of both size and influence, was established in Jordan in 1968. Since 1974 it has been led by Dr Samir Ghosheh.

- **Fatah-Revolutionary Council (Fatah-RC)**

Fatah-RC is better known as the Abu Nidal group¹ (named after the pseudonym of its leader, Sabri Khalil Al-Banna). This secret organisation split off from Al-Fatah in 1973. Fatah-RC was originally established with the assistance of Iraq. Fatah-RC has long regarded the PLO as treacherous, and the PLO is therefore seen as a legitimate target for attacks. In 1987, Fatah-RC's Damascus office was closed. Its headquarters are thought to be in Libya or Iraq.

- **Al-Saiqa²**

This pro-Syrian Palestinian Baath party, also known by its English name of Vanguard of the Popular Liberation War, is led by Issam Al-Qadi. The group was established in 1968 by the Syrian Baath party, and broke off relations with the PLO in 1983.

- **Palestine Communist Revolution Party (PRCP)**

The PCRP was established in 1992 under the leadership of Arabi Awad (Abu Al-Fahd). Its headquarters are in Damascus.

¹ This organisation has also carried out activities under the name "Black September".

² Arabic for "Thunderbolt".

- **Hamas**

Hamas, whose name is derived from the Arabic Harakat Al-Mouqawama Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), is a Sunni fundamentalist organisation which was established in January 1988 during the first Intifadah.

Hamas has proclaimed a holy war against Israel and is fighting for the establishment of a fundamentalist-Islamic Palestinian state in the former mandated territory of Palestine.

Hamas has particularly strong support in the Palestinian Territories and is primarily active in the Gaza Strip. The organisation is led by Sheik Ahmad Isma'il Yasin, who was released from an Israeli prison in October 1999. Hamas has an office in Damascus. Its representative there is Khaled Mishal. Hamas' office in Amman was closed on 31 August 1999.

Because of Syria's dislike of fundamentalist movements, Hamas' freedom of movement in Syria is restricted.

- **Al-Jihad Al-Islami (Islamic Jihad)**

Al-Jihad Al-Islami came into being in the mid-1980s. It was founded by Sheik Abdul Al-Aziz Odeh and Fathi Shiqaqi, both Palestinians from Gaza. Sheik Abdul Al-Aziz Odeh was banished from the Palestinian Territories in 1987. Fathi Shiqaqi was murdered in Malta in 1995 and replaced by Ramadan Abdallah Shallah, who is the movement's Secretary-General.

Al-Jihad Al-Islami is a small, ultra-extremist organisation with a cellular structure, and is supported by Iran.

Al-Jihad Al-Islami is thought to collaborate with the PFLP-GC.

9. Detention ¹

Since the 1960s, many Palestinians have been held in Syrian prisons for political reasons, or have disappeared there during their imprisonment ². During the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and the confrontation between Syria and the PLO in Lebanon in the 1980s in particular, Palestinians were arrested by the Syrian authorities or by Palestinian groups in Syria.

The Palestinians in question were often detained without charge or trial ³. Others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment after summary trials held in secret.

Families of persons who have disappeared have made repeated individual requests to the Syrian authorities for information about the fate of their relatives. The Syrian Government has never responded to those requests ⁴. However, many Palestinians were released on a collective basis in accordance with successive presidential decrees on amnesty issued in 1991/1992.

During a wave of arrests in December 1999 and January 2000 ⁵, a number of Palestinians were arrested for protesting against Syria's resumption of discussions with Israel. It is not known how many people are involved, or whether they include Palestinians. There have been no known cases of Palestinians from Syria being deported to neighbouring countries at that time.

¹ See also subsection 3.2.6 of the general situation report on Syria/general of 6 December 2000.

² Amnesty International, Report entitled "Syria, caught in a regional conflict: Lebanese, Palestinian and Jordanian political detainees and disappearances in Syria", AI Index: MDE 24/03/99, 27 January 1999; Freedom in the World 1999-2000: Syria.

³ In the past, Amnesty International has regularly drawn attention in various reports to Palestinian prisoners who have been imprisoned for long periods of time without any form of trial or following an unfair trial ("Syria: Torture by the Security Forces" - AI Index: MDE 24/09/87, October 1987; "Syria: Indefinite Political Imprisonment: long-term detention and torture of political prisoners", AI Index: MDE 24/12/92, July 1992; "Syria: Repression and Impunity: the forgotten victims", AI Index: MDE 24/02/95, April 1995).

⁴ Human Rights Watch, Syria - human rights developments, world report 1999.

⁵ US Department of State, 2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 5 September 2000, p. 3.

10. Documents

UNRWA identity card

The vast majority of Palestinians in Syria are registered with UNRWA and have their own UNRWA identity cards with a corresponding registration number. The registration number may be assumed to be known. If an individual says he does not know his or her UNRWA registration number, he or she can obtain it without difficulty from UNRWA either in person or via relatives. The UNRWA registration number consists of eight digits from which the geographical place of registration can be ascertained.

Syrian-Palestinian refugee document

Many Palestinians in Syria are also registered with GAPAR. They are allocated an individual Syrian registration number from the register of births, deaths and marriages maintained by GAPAR. This unique number¹ appears on the Syrian-Palestinian refugee documents which are issued by the Palestinian Division of the Syrian Ministry of Internal Affairs to Palestinians registered with GAPAR. The registration number may be accessed.

Up to the age of fifteen years, Palestinians in Syria are registered on their parents' documents. They are then eligible to apply for their own Syrian-Palestinian refugee documents. Most Palestinians in Syria have such a document. The document is valid for five years. Unlike voluntary registration with UNRWA, registration with GAPAR is obligatory. It is not known whether penalties are imposed for failing to register. Persons who are not registered with GAPAR cannot obtain an exit visa.

¹ See also the general situation report on Syria/identity numbers of 21 December 2001 (ref. No. DVP/AM-746495).

Syrian-Palestinian travel document

Palestinians who are registered with GAPAR may apply for a special travel document. Applications for such a document may be submitted to the Immigration and Passport Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Palestinian section) from the age of fourteen years. Applications must be accompanied by passport photos, an extract from the GAPAR register and a certificate of good conduct ("non-conviction certificate"). Adult men must provide evidence that they either have completed or are exempt from military service. Married women may either request to be included in their husbands' travel documents or apply for their own travel documents.

In January 2002 the travel document cost 1.200 Syrian pounds. It must be applied for and collected in person. It is not possible for a person to authorise relatives, friends or acquaintances to act on his behalf.

The travel document is valid for six years. In the case of students, its validity depends on the expected duration of studies abroad.

Exit visa

In principle, a holder of a Syrian-Palestinian refugee document may leave Syria only if he or she is not the subject of an alert issued by the migration service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the various Syrian security forces. In addition, since 1983 Palestinians have had to obtain permission from the Palestinian division of the military intelligence service for each journey made outside the country. Provided they obtain an exit visa on that basis, they may leave the country legally and then re-enter Syria. Pursuant to Article 10 of Law No 1311 of 2 October 1963, Palestinians who are registered with GAPAR may in principle return to Syria without an entry visa.

Like Syrian nationals, Palestinians in Syria may renew or alter documents outside the country via the intermediary of a Syrian diplomatic representation.

Holders of Syrian-Palestinian refugee documents often find that travel to other Arab countries is in practice problematic and dependent on political considerations, *inter alia* the internal political situation in Syria and relations between the Arab countries. For example, it is difficult for Palestinians to travel from Syria to Lebanon. Such a journey requires an invitation, and even then it may be months before the Syrian authorities grant permission. Journeys to Jordan and Egypt may also cause problems.

11. Re-entry

Palestinian refugees who are registered with GAPAR may re-enter Syria from other countries¹. Whether or not they have any relatives in Syria is apparently of little - or no - relevance in that connection.

In order to re-enter Syria, the person concerned must be in possession of a Syrian-Palestinian refugee document². Persons without such a document (e.g. the estimated 40.000-50.000 Palestinian refugees in Syria who are not registered with GAPAR) may not re-enter Syria under any circumstances.

Palestinian refugees who are suspected of having visited the West Bank or Gaza Strip may experience problems when re-entering Syria. The same applies to Palestinian refugees who leave the country without an exit visa in their Syrian-Palestinian refugee document. However, it is possible for a person who has left the country without such an exit visa to re-enter Syria. In such cases, the person concerned can expect to have his identity and background investigated by the Syrian security forces when he lands at the airport in Syria.

¹ Pursuant to Article 10 of Law No 1311 of 2 October 1963; see Chapter 10.

² See Chapter 10.

12. Policies of other Western European countries

Germany

Asylum applications submitted by stateless persons of Palestinian identity are registered by the German authorities under the heading "nationality unknown", with no indication of the country of origin. It is not known how many asylum applications are received from Palestinians from Syria, or how many decisions on asylum are taken with regard to such persons. Stateless persons of Palestinian identity are not deported to Syria because the Syrian authorities have hitherto been found to be unwilling to issue the necessary travel documents.

Germany takes the basic view that Palestinians in Syria are generally able to live without fear of persecution. Moreover, the subsistence level of such persons is assumed to be assured. However, this does not preclude the possibility of a justified fear of persecution being established in an individual case on the basis of specific circumstances.

France

As far as can be established, no applications were submitted by stateless asylum seekers of Palestinian identity from Syria in 2000. There is therefore no question of asylum seekers belonging to that group being deported to Syria once they have exhausted all remedies.

Sweden

Asylum applications from Palestinians from Syria are treated in the same way as asylum applications from Syrian nationals. Membership of a Palestinian organisation is not considered to constitute a basis for asylum in Sweden. Sweden does accord special attention to the handling of asylum applications from members of Al-Fatah, but most such applications are refused. The deportation policy with respect to asylum seekers of Palestinian identity from Syria does not differ in any way from that which applies to Syrian nationals. Asylum seekers who have exhausted all remedies are returned to Syria, except on humanitarian or other grounds (e.g. links with Sweden).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom does not have any fixed policy as regards asylum applications submitted by Palestinians from Syria. When assessing and accepting such applications, it is mainly concerned with establishing that the persons concerned are not nationals of another country. Nor should such persons have a "country of habitual residence" to which they could reasonably be expected to return. Each asylum application must be assessed on its own merits. Decisions on deportation are taken on the basis of individual circumstances.

Belgium

Belgium does not have any fixed policy as regards asylum applications submitted by persons of Palestinian identity from Syria. According to the Belgian authorities, Palestinians in Syria are generally able to live without fear of persecution. In recent years, no applications have been received from asylum seekers of Palestinian identity from Syria.

13. Summary

An estimated 500.000 Palestinians reside in Syria, of whom about a quarter live in one of the refugee camps. At 30 June 2001, 391.651 Palestinians were registered with UNRWA/Syria. They have their own UNRWA cards and registration numbers which they can use to obtain services such as education, medical care and social assistance, all provided under UNRWA auspices. Many Palestinians, and in particular those living in refugee camps, rely on UNRWA assistance.

There are around 40.000-50.000 Palestinians in Syria who are not registered with either the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) or UNRWA; such persons possess neither Syrian identity cards nor UNRWA documents.

The policies of the Syrian authorities are based on a resistance to the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Syria. In Syria's view, such settlement could undermine the right of Palestinians to repatriation.

In order to avoid hampering any possible future return of Palestinians to their country of origin, the Syrian Government maintains a policy whereby - in principle - Palestinians in Syria are not permitted to acquire Syrian nationality. Consequently, the Syrian authorities are opposed to any permanent settlement of Palestinians in Syria. This policy also forms the basis of GAPAR's aid projects.

Despite that, Palestinians in Syria are treated in virtually the same way as Syrian nationals as regards residence and employment. In principle they have access to public education and health care facilities. However, they do not have the right to vote or to stand for election, nor are they permitted to buy farmland or own more than one house. On the other hand, they do not need a licence to exercise a profession. They may travel in Syria and settle there without a residence permit.

Many Palestinians have been detained in Syria for political reasons. Some have disappeared. Over the years, Palestinians have been released from detention on the basis of various amnesties.

Palestinians may travel outside Syria only if they are registered with GAPAR; such journeys also require the permission of the military intelligence service. Applications for travel documents may be submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Any person in possession of a Syrian-Palestinian refugee document (with a unique identity number) may apply for an exit visa.

Annex 1 – Protocol

The Council of Foreign Ministers of the Member States,

Recalling the Pact of the League of Arab States and its special Annex Regarding Palestine, the resolutions of the Council of the League of Arab States on the question of Palestine and in particular the resolution concerning the preservation of the Palestinian Entity,

Meeting in Casablanca on 10 September 1965,

Has agreed to the following provisions and has called upon the member states to take the necessary measures for their implementation:

- While keeping their Palestinian nationality, Palestinians presently residing in the territory of ... shall be accorded the same treatment as regards the right to do business (work) and to be employed as if they were nationals.
- When their interests so require, Palestinians presently residing in the territory of ... shall have the right to leave the territory of this state and return to it.
- Palestinians residing in the territory of other Arab states shall have the right to enter and leave the territory ... when their interests so require. Unless otherwise agreed by the competent authorities, this right to enter does not lead to a right of residence, except for the period and purpose specified.
- Palestinians residing at present in the territory of ..., as well as those who previously resided there prior to having emigrated, shall, upon their request, be provided with valid travel documents. The competent authorities, wherever located, shall issue or renew these documents without delay.
- The member states of the Arab League shall accord to the holders of these travel documents the same treatment with respect to visas and residence as is accorded to nationals of Arab League states.

Done at Casablanca, 11 September 1965

The Positions of Arab States on the Casablanca Protocol

- Arab States which have ratified the Protocol without reservations:

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

The Democratic Republic of Sudan

The Iraqi Republic

The Syrian Arab Republic

The United Arab Republic (at the time of ratification comprised of Egypt only)

The Yemen Arab Republic (the former state of North Yemen)

- Arab States which have ratified the Protocol with reservations:

The State of Kuwait

(The State of Kuwait has ratified the Protocol subject to a reservation in respect of its article 1: 'national treatment' in respect of doing business (work) does not extend to self-employment which is subject to Kuwaiti law.).

The Lebanese Republic

(The Lebanese Republic has ratified the Protocol subject to reservations in respect of its first three articles:

Article 1: While keeping their Palestinian nationality and to the extent the social and economic conditions in the Lebanese Republic allow for this, Palestinians presently residing there are accorded the right to do business (work) and be employed as if they were nationals.

Article 2: The following is to be added to this article: 'as if they were Lebanese nationals and in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations'.

Article 3: The following sentence is to be added after the first sentence (ending with the words '....when their interests so require.'): 'The right to enter Lebanese territory is conditional on having obtained an entry visa from the competent Lebanese authorities before.').

The Kingdom of Libya (Libya ratified the Protocol before the revolution of September 1969)
(The Kingdom of Lbya has ratified the Protocol subject to a reservation in respect of article 1: in respect of the right to do business (work) and to be employed Palestinians shall be accorded the same treatment as the other nationals of Arab states.

- Arab States which have not yet ratified the Protocol:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Morocco

- Arab States which joined the Arab League after the Protocol was signed:

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (12 December 1967)

The State of Bahrain (11 September 1971)

The State of Qatar (11 September 1971)

Oman (29 September 1971)

The United Arab Emirates (6 December 1971)

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania (26 November 1973)

The Democratic Republic of Somalia (14 February 1974)

Palestine (9 September 1976)

The Republic of Djibouti (4 September 1977)

The Republic of Tunisia did not attend the Summit Conference during which the Casablanca Protocol was adopted and no information regarding its position on the Protocol is available.

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