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Danish National ID Centre

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Palestine: Death registration and issuance of death certificates

Introduction

The following note describes the procedure for death registration and issuance of death certificates in the West Bank and Gaza.

The note contains a short description of the Palestinian civil registry, the procedure for registration of a death and the issuance procedure for the death certificate. Furthermore, it describes late registration of a death.

The note is primarily based on interviews with Palestinian authorities and international organisations in Jerusalem and Ramallah in September 2019 and is one out of several notes published by the Danish National ID Centre focusing on Palestinian documents.

The Palestinian civil registry

In connection with the Oslo Accords in 1995, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) took over the administration of the Palestinian civil registry from Israel. In the beginning, the PA could only make changes in the registry, but since 2000, the PA has been allowed to register births and deaths and issue ID documents to Palestinians who are registered in the civil registry. Israel keeps a copy of the Palestinian registry and they receive information about updates in the Palestinian system. The PA cannot approve family reunifications or issue ID documents to persons who are not in the Palestinian civil registry, with exception of the 00-passport and ID cards to persons without a national number.¹

A Palestinian citizen receives an ID number when he/she is birth registered. The ID number is written on the ID card and on all other ID documents issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Interior.²

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² November 2022

¹ Migrationsverket, Lifos, 15 October 2019, p. 22-33.

² Ministry of Interior, October 2019.

The Palestinian civil registry contains personal information such as: first name, last name, name of father, name of mother, name of grandfather on the father's side, date of birth, sex, religion, place and date of issuance of ID card, address, civil status, name and ID number of spouse and children.³

Palestinians are either registered as residents in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or Gaza. Registrations cannot be changed to another area without Israeli approval.⁴

Civil law in the West Bank and Gaza

Due to the Egyptian control of Gaza in the period 1948-1967, the Egyptian Law of Family Rights (1954) is applied in cases regarding matters of family law for the Muslim population in Gaza. Similarly, due to Jordanian control of the West Bank in the period 1948-1967, the Jordanian Law of Personal Status (1976) is applied in cases regarding matters of family law for the Muslim population in the West Bank. Recognised ecclesiastical societies have their own set of family law.⁵

Administrative structure in the West Bank and Gaza

There are 14 local directorates under the Ministry of Interior in the West Bank plus a central civil registration unit in Ramallah.⁶ Hence, in Ramallah exist both the central civil registration unit and the local directorate of Ramallah. There are five local directorates in Gaza. Every local directorate is divided into six departments: civil status affairs, passports, administrative affairs, NGO and public affairs, policy and tribal law.⁷

All of the local civil status departments in the West Bank and Gaza have access to a digital database. Before 2007, there was one database, but after the administrative split between the West Bank and Gaza in 2007, the database was separated into two separate systems; one in Gaza and one in the West Bank. There is no link between the two systems. Information stored in the database before 2007 appears in both databases, but information stored after 2007 is only stored locally in either the West Bank or Gaza.⁸

³ Migrationsverket, Lifos, 15 October 2019, p. 22.

⁴ Migrationsverket, Lifos 15 October 2019, p. 22.

⁵ Migrationsverket, Lifos 15 October 2009, p. 19.

⁶ The 14 directorates in the West Bank are: Jenin, Qalqilya, Tulkarm, Nablus, Tubas, Salfit, Ramallah, Ram, Jericho, Abu Dis, Bethlehem, North Hebron/Halhoul, Hebron, South Hebron/Dora.

⁷ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁸ Ministry of Interior, December 2019.

Death registration

According to the Civil Status Law (1999, amended in 2009) death registration is mandatory. The death should be registered within one week. If the death is registered within one week, a death certificate issued is issued free of charge. After seven and up until 30 days the penalty fee for late registration is two Jordanian dinars, from 31 to 90 days the penalty fee is five dinars and from 91 days up until one year the fee is ten dinars. After one year, the penalty fee is 20 Jordanian dinars. In

Registration procedure

The procedure of registering a death is the following: A responsible person from the family of the deceased brings a stamped death notification from the hospital where the death occurred together with a burial permission from the Ministry of Health to a local civil registration office in the area of where the person died.¹² The responsible person needs to bring a copy of his/her ID card.¹³

The responsible person furthermore needs to bring the ID card from the deceased person. If the ID card is missing, the responsible person needs to swear an oath in front of the court that the ID card is missing and bring a note from the court to the registration office.¹⁴

Persons entitled to register the birth

The person responsible for registration of a death can according to the law be the mother, father, son, daughter, grandparents and spouse.¹⁵

In the absence of any of the above mentioned family members, the following can register a death:

- One of the relatives of the deceased who witnessed the death.
- Alternatively, those who lived with the deceased in the same housing and who is not a relative (in case the death occurred in the residence).
- In the absence of any of the aforementioned; hospital administrators, prison directors or schools (in case the death occurred any of these places).¹⁶

⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁰ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹¹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹² Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹³ Ministry of Interior, December 2019.

¹⁴ Ministry of Interior, December 2019.

¹⁵ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁶ Ministry of Interior, December 2019.

Death notification

If the death occurred at home, a licensed doctor by the Ministry of Health declares the death and writes a death notification and stamps it. This notification is brought by the responsible person to the local registration office.¹⁷

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Image 1: Sample of the death notification form. Sample issued by the Ministry of Interior, Ramallah September 2019 (NIDC reference material).

 $^{^{17}}$ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

Registration place

Under normal circumstances, a death should be registered in the same directorate where the death occurs, but special cases can be handled at the Ministry of Interior. For instance, if a person from Jericho dies in Ramallah his death can be registered in Ramallah.¹⁸

Verification of data and issuance of the death certificate

The officer receiving the death notification form and documents at the civil registration office authenticates the identity of the responsible person, and the information from the death notification by comparing the received documents and death data with the electronic civil register.¹⁹

Each office has a list of licensed doctors and a list of stamps in order for them to verify the stamps and signatures at the notification. After this, the registration takes place changing the status of the individual from alive to death in the system. Subsequently, the competent officer issues, signs and stamps the death certificate and gives it to the family.²⁰

Death certificate

Only the official authority, the Ministry of Interior, has the authority to issue a death certificate.²¹

Only the specialised employee who issued the death certificate at the local registration office, the civil status director or the death and birth director in the Ministry of Interior is authorised to sign the death certificate.²²

The layout of the death certificate is uniform across West Bank and Gaza. Before 1998, birth and death certificates were always written by hand, but since 1998, they are written on computer.²³

For Palestinians without an ID number (non-national deaths), the death certificate contains a serial number instead of the ID number in the top left corner and has nine times the asterisk symbol (********) where the nine digit Palestinian ID number normally would be.²⁴

¹⁸ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁰ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²¹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²² Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²³ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁴ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.



Image 2: Sample of the death certificate of a non-national in Arabic. Sample issued by the Ministry of Interior, Ramallah September 2019 (NIDC reference material).

Registration by Israel

An issuing form with personal data in detail is sent by the Ministry of Interior to the Israeli authorities, so they can update their copy of the Palestinian civil registry. There is no link between the Palestinian and the Israeli digital systems.²⁵

Archive

The documents relevant for the registration of death are stored centrally in the electronic system and locally at the archive of each registration office.²⁶

Late registration of a death

Late registration of a death follows the same procedure as described above, but with the added fees according to the timeframe.²⁷

For persons deceased after 1982, they are already registered in the electronic system. For persons deceased before 1982, they are registered in the paper archive. This divide exists, because the Israelis computerised the system in 1982, when the population registry was under Israeli control.²⁸

For persons deceased after 1982, a responsible person according to the law needs to fill out an application form to have the certificate issued. The form is filled with personal data of the deceased. The officer at the civil registration office compares the data to the electronic system. If the data is authentic, then a certificate is issued immediately. If the deceased died before 1982, the officer would compare the submitted information to the paper register.²⁹

Stamps

All official documents issued by the Civil Status Department and the General Directorate of Civil Status is stamped with official stamps bearing the name of the Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Civil Status and the name of the area where the document is issued.³⁰ Every registration office has its own stamp. The Ministry of Interior keeps a central register of the stamps.³¹

Language

The applicant decides whether he wants a certificate in Arabic or English and Arabic issued. The applicant also decides how his name is written in English, and can choose to have the spelling of his/hers name changed. The name in Arabic is the

²⁵ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁶ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁷ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁸ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁰ Ministry of Interior, October 2019.

³¹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

important factor for the registering authority because the name in English could be written in several ways. Names spelled differently at different documents can occur.³²



Image 3: Sample of the death certificate of a Palestinian national in English. Sample issued by the Ministry of Interior, Ramallah September 2019 (NIDC reference material).

³² Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

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