CHAPTER 6

Solidarity with Palestinian People

JERUSALEM AND BEYOND

Jerusalem is a city that has borne witness to significant eras of human history as a holy city to three Abrahamic religions. This ancient city, for which people of various religions have contended for centuries, is particularly important to Muslims as their first qiblah (direction of prayer). Following Prophet Muhammad’s passing, Muslim caliphs decided to conquer Jerusalem to incorporate it into the lands of Islam. Ultimately in 637, upon the entrance of Muslim forces to the city, Patriarch Sophronius surrendered Jerusalem with no bloodshed to Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab, who was recognized for his sense of justice. With this conquest, the renowned document Omar’s (Umar’s) Assurance of Safety was signed, guaranteeing people of all faiths in the city the safeguarding of their rights, property, and whatever they held sacred.

The arrival of the Caliph marked the beginning of a new and memorable era of safety, peace, stability, security, and progress in the relations among followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (El-Awaisi 2012). Thus, in the Islamic Jerusalem period, the political and social structure of the city was shaped on the axis of peace. In fact, as multiple sources in the literature confirm, the tolerance for which the city was recognized in historic times was primarily due to the spirit of Islam and its universal attitude toward “the people of the Book,” i.e., Jews and Christians, and also to the reverence of Islam for the city of Jerusalem. Islam held the ancient prophets and their messages in high esteem (Asali 1994).
However, the Crusade in 1099 committed mass murder against Jerusalem’s Muslim and Jewish populations and left the city devastated. Historians speak with abhorrence of the sheer size of the unprecedented massacre (Demirkent 2002). This dark era under the rule of the crusaders was ended in 1187 by Saladin (Salahuddin) Al-Ayyubi, who conquered Jerusalem and re-established the previous interreligious social harmony in the city. Thanks to the tolerance created by the Muslim repossession, Jews, who were not allowed to live in Jerusalem during the Crusade rule, returned to the city (Asali 1994).

The Islamic tolerance and peace that recommenced in Jerusalem with the reign of the Ayyubids continued during the rule by various Turkish states who adopted policies prioritizing stability and service in the holy lands. Well known among these is the Ottoman Empire. After conquering Jerusalem in 1516, Selim I swiftly engaged in endeavors to further restore and develop the city. These efforts, which conserved social unity and justice, reached their pinnacle at the time of Suleiman the Magnificent. Bab al-Khalil (Jaffa), one of the gates of Jerusalem, which was built in his era, carries the symbol of the Ottoman policy of respect and peace: The inscription, carved upon the Sultan’s order into the wall across the gate, states “Abraham is the friend of God” in Arabic, and serves as proof of this universal policy encouraging solidarity and respect among the followers of the three Abrahamic religions.

The literature on the Ottoman times in Jerusalem highlights the practical aspects of social life for Jews, in particular. Nazmi Al-Jubeh (2013) affirms that the Jews residing in the city during this period enjoyed remarkable freedom in their religious practices and schools, as well as in the management of their affairs. According to the study, Jews also held many administrative positions in Ottoman Jerusalem and all trades were open to them without restriction. Likewise, the judicial system ensured respect for the rights of all inhabitants, without distinction of religion—those rights were guaranteed by Islamic law, and particularly the rights of the weakest and most vulnerable subjects. In fact, the Ottoman Empire’s positive attitude toward Jews was nothing new. As history documents, the Jews who fled the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth century were welcomed by the Ottoman Emperor Bayezid II, no one else. Over the course of time, Jewish immigrants from Europe settled in various parts of the empire, including Jerusalem (Besalel 2013). McCarthy (1990) notes that a small Jewish community continued to exist in Palestine throughout the centuries, and their numbers grew under
Ottoman rule, increased by refugees from Spain, who found haven in Palestine, as elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire.

The stable and peaceful setting sustained during the Ottoman reign certainly increased the flow of Jews to Jerusalem, which intensified during the era of Abdulhamid II. A causative factor behind this move was the anti-Semitic riots that had escalated in Russia and Europe in the 1880s. In these years Jews around the world proceeded to settle in the Palestine territories, and the first Zionist Congress held in Basel in 1897 accelerated this move. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, both internal and external motives laid the ground for the migration of Jews to Palestine, which they called Aliyah, meaning ascent (Karahan 2019).

In this process, the demography in the Palestinian land began to change gradually. In an effort to gain an understanding of the demographic structure of the period, 1880 is a good starting point, where 87 percent of the population was composed of Muslims, followed by Christians (10 percent) and Jews (3 percent), respectively. Data from McCarthy (1990) show that the number of Muslims in the population decreased to 83 percent in 1914. The ultimate spark of Jewish colonialism can be traced to the Balfour Declaration, signed during the World War I, though. The letter sent by the UK Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lord Balfour, to Zionist leader Baron Rothschild in November 1917, paved the way for the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine and officially initiated the fight against the Turks who ruled the Palestinian land. The declaration’s most striking part stated:

His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object…. (Fordham 2020)

The immoral and illegal nature of the Balfour Declaration is best described by the late British author Arthur Koestler’s well-known words in his book Promise and Fulfillment: “The appearance of the movement of Zionism on the political scene culminated in the famous Balfour Declaration, one of the most improbable political documents of all time. In this document, one nation solemnly promised to a second nation the country of a third” (Koestler 1949). The fact that the Ottomans were still ruling the Palestinian lands at that time, further adds to the complexity of the situation. The Balfour Declaration is deemed the turning point in the destruction of the centuries-long peace enjoyed by all in Palestine.
When Western forces invaded the region, never-ending chaos began in Palestine and other regions of the Middle East. The key target for the British was Jerusalem (Afyoncu 2018). Eventually, once the Ottomans had lost the ancient lands in late 1917, the seeds of the long-lasting Arab–Jewish conflict were planted. According to the mandate system that was put into effect by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, Britain was entrusted with the temporary administration of Palestine, followed by a dramatic increase in the Jewish population, along with instances of violence (History 2018).

In 1939, the British government published a white paper restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine, but it was rejected by the Zionists, who then launched a bloody campaign against the British and Palestinians (Abu Dheer 2011). The best-known of these attacks is Irgun’s bombing of the King David Hotel in July 1946 (Aljazeera 2008). This act of terror, which killed 91 people, including 41 Arabs, 28 British, and 17 Jews, was organized by Menachem Begin, a future Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Prime Minister of Israel. Begin, who headed the Irgun organization and coordinated the Jewish military resistance overall, aimed to establish a Zionist state by driving out both the British and the Palestinians. The attacks ultimately achieved the goal in 1947, when the UK turned the Palestine problem over to the UN and relinquished the mandate, leading to the partitioning of Palestine into two independent states, one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish (UN, n.d.).

The creation of the State of Israel in May 1948, was a milestone for the Arabs of Palestine, called Nakba (catastrophe), when the former vigorously intensified its ethnic violence. Abu Dheer (2011) documented the tragedy experienced by the Palestinians within the scope of Nakba, with testimonies of eyewitnesses. During this process, about two-thirds of the Palestinians fled or were expelled from Palestine as it came under Jewish control.

Israel’s policies of settler colonialism fueled tensions in the Middle East; these entered a new phase after the Six-Day War in June 1967, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The war brought about a second exodus of Palestinians, estimated at half a million. While condemning Israel’s occupations in that same year, the UN Security Council (UNSC) formulated, in Resolution 242, the principles of a just and lasting peace, including a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the conflict, a just settlement of the refugee problem, and the termination of all claims or states of belligerency
Israel opposed the resolution and continued its policy by also annexing East Jerusalem in 1980.

The invasion of the West Bank that began in 1967 has continued with Israel’s establishing new illegal settlements on the territories where Palestinians reside. The number of these settlements has increased steadily and fueled the never-ending conflicts in the region. Israel has deprived Palestinians of their basic human rights for decades as a way to continue its policy of ethnic violence or transferring Palestinians from Palestine (AMP 2012). Within the scope of these policies, countless Palestinian families in the West Bank are reported to have been subjected to various forms of persecution, in addition to being forced to leave their land to Israeli settlers. This harassment, which is now a part of the Palestinians’ daily lives, ranges from random arrests to killings.

Children are also extraordinarily vulnerable in this environment. The Palestine section of the Defence for Children International (DCIP) reports that Israel prosecutes between 500 and 700 Palestinian children in military courts each year. Children typically arrive at the interrogation bound, blindfolded, frightened, and sleep-deprived. From testimonies of 739 Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces from the occupied West Bank between 2013 and 2018, DCIP found that 73 percent experienced physical violence following arrest. This kind of treatment has no similar comparison, as Israel is the only country in the world that automatically and systematically prosecutes children in military courts that lack the fundamental rights and protections of a fair trial (DCIP 2020).

As the Israeli policies that aspire to a radical demographic change in the West Bank and East Jerusalem reached a disgracefully inhumane level, the issue was reintroduced for debate at the UNSC in December 2016. Subsequently, “condemning all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions,” UNSC Resolution 2334 reaffirmed that “the establishment by Israel of settlements had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation under international humanitarian law and a major obstacle to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.” In this regard, the UNSC reiterated its demand that “Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem,
and that it fully respect all its legal obligations in this regard” (UNSC 2016). However, Israel has consistently ignored all the UN directives to date and has continued its invasive and violent expansion. According to UNCTAD (2019), routine violence by settlers increased in 2018, and was at its highest level since 2014, causing death and damage to Palestinian property.

The Gaza Strip constitutes another painful region of the Palestinian lands. After a period of invasion, Israel used closure tactics in Gaza on a regular basis from 1993 onwards, and, in 1995, it built an electronic fence and concrete wall around the Gaza Strip, furthering a collapse in interactions between the split Palestinian territories. The region has been struggling to survive under the Israeli blockade, which has been in place since June 2007, when Israel imposed an impenetrable land, sea, and air blockade on the area (Aljazeera 2017). The civilian settlements of the Gaza Strip are frequently bombed by Israel, which also constantly tortures and interrogates civilians, including children. As Milton-Edwards (2018) states, many in the international community are unaware of the urgent humanitarian crisis that has brought the Gaza Strip to a dire tipping point. Gaza, under siege by Israel since 2007, is described as the world’s largest open-air prison, with nearly two million Palestinians locked in it under unlivable conditions, 84 percent of whom need humanitarian aid. Gazans are often deprived of clean and drinkable water and are also frequently refused medical treatment outside Gaza, as their applications are declined or delayed (NRC 2018).

All these severe human rights abuses in Gaza simply address the failure of the international community to take concrete actions to prevent this decades-long humanitarian disaster on the Palestinian lands. The UN’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process declared in 2019 that in Gaza the health system has nearly collapsed, and essential medicines have been depleted (UN 2019). In a report published in 2019, the Human Rights Watch pointed to the Israeli government’s severe restrictions of the Palestinians’ movements and human rights in general, as well as the unlawful transfer of its own citizens to settlements in the West Bank (HRW 2019).

Thus, Israel’s unlawful activities in Palestine, which started during World War I, have expanded throughout a century, leading to an increasingly violent crisis in the Middle East. Over decades, Palestinians have been displaced, tortured, imprisoned, bombed, killed, and, most importantly, left deprived of basic human dignity.
“One Minute”

With regard to the ongoing injustice in these ancient lands, Ilan Pappé, a notable scholar recognized for his studies on Palestine, describes the situation as follows: “For one thing, it is a paradox that the story of Palestine from the beginning until today is a simple one of colonialism and dispossession, yet the world treats it as a multifaceted and complex one, which is hard to understand and even harder to solve. The desire to turn the mixed ethnic Palestine into a pure ethnic space was and is at the heart of the conflict that has raged since 1882. In this respect, the connection between Zionist ideology and the movement’s policies in the past and Israeli policies in the present: both aim to establish a Jewish state by taking over as much of historical Palestine as possible and leaving in it as few Palestinians as possible” (Pappé 2015). Therefore, the Israeli policies, watched by a world that did nothing, led to a massive expulsion of Palestinians from their land and the destruction of hundreds of settlements. According to Pappé, all these constitute crimes, and insistence on describing what happened to the Palestinians in 1948 and ever since “as a crime and not just as a tragedy or even a catastrophe” is essential if past evils are to be rectified (Pappé 2015).

Emeritus Professor Avi Shlaim, another renowned Israeli historian, states that Israel has become a rogue state that habitually violates international law with “an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders” (Shlaim 2009). In his article, he also touches on how Israel’s propaganda machine has persistently spread the notion that the Palestinians are terrorists, that they reject coexistence and that Islam is incompatible with democracy, while the simple truth is that the Palestinians are just normal people with normal aspirations, which can be defined simply as a piece of land to call their own on which to live in freedom and dignity (Shlaim 2009).

Thus, for decades, it has indeed been a collective humanitarian responsibility for the international community to protect the rights of Palestine, in accordance with legal norms. This kind of cooperation was once demonstrated by Muslim countries after the arson attack by an Australian Jewish extremist against the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in August 1969. Upon the attack, the heads of state of the Islamic world gathered in September in Rabat, for the first Islamic Summit Conference. At this first meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), member countries “affirmed their full support to the Palestinian people for the restitution of their rights, which were usurped, and in their struggle for national liberation” (OIC 1969).
Called the Organization of Islamic Cooperation since 2011, the OIC since its inception has shown full solidarity with Palestine, but has also been criticized for not being sufficiently influential in leading to concrete outcomes. After the AK Party’s rise to power in the early 2000s, Turkey, who is a member of the OIC, started to stress the need for both the OIC and the UN to take an active stance beyond rhetoric in the issue of Palestine.

Obviously, Turkey and Palestine share a long history and common values. On the other hand, Turkey has for centuries had a friendly approach with regard to the Jews. Therefore, Turkey supports a negotiated settlement to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the basis of the relevant UNSC Resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map that would ensure two states living side by side within secure and recognized borders (MFA, n.d.).

In this regard, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Turkish Prime Minister, attached particular importance to finding a peaceful solution to this historical humanitarian problem, for which he endeavored to raise global awareness as a leader. The Turkish nation has supported his reactions to the unlawful and violent invasion of Palestine, which are increasingly echoed in world public opinion. A principal point of departure for Turkey’s advocacy for the Palestinians has been the humanitarian aspect. At this point, it is hard not to recall the moving words of Rachel Corrie, who was a 23-year-old American peace activist, crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in March, 2003, while taking part in a nonviolent demonstration to protect the home of a Palestinian family from demolition. In an email to her mother in February, 2003, she said:

I should at least mention that I am also discovering a degree of strength and of basic ability for humans to remain human in the direst of circumstances—which I also have not seen before. I think the Word is dignity. I wish you could meet these people. (RCF, n.d.)

As part of Turkey’s strong criticism against the killing and torture of Palestinians, a memorable incident took place at the 2009 Davos Conference, an incident remembered as “One Minute.” The panel on Palestine was held on January 29th, at which Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres were among the speakers. There was a heated debate concerning “Operation Cast Lead,” Israel’s deadly operation in Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009. Criticizing the humanitarian
disaster that this operation created, Erdoğan requested extra time saying, “One minute,” and continued, “I know very well how you killed children on the (Gaza) beaches. I condemn those who applaud what you said. You killed people, which is a crime against humanity that cannot be applauded.” When the moderator refused to allow him to speak further, he walked off the stage (Hürriyet 2009). The incident, which received widespread news coverage, sparked debate around the world (WEF 2009).

The theme of the panel was “Gaza: The Case for Middle East Peace.” What the Turkish Prime Minister was drawing attention to, was in fact the impossibility of a peaceful future, while Israel’s attacks continued. During the Gaza War that he referred to, which started on December 27, 2008, with a devastating bombing campaign code-named “Operation Cast Lead,” and ended on January 18, 2009, some 1400 Palestinians were killed, including some 300 children and hundreds of other unarmed civilians. In those twenty-two days, large areas of Gaza had been razed to the ground, leaving many thousands homeless and the already dire economy in ruins (Amnesty International 2009). Unfortunately, as Table 6.1 shows, this barbarism continued in the years that followed, and the attacks of 2014 under Israel’s “Operation Protective Edge” inflicted the greatest humanitarian toll on the Gazans: 2251 civilian deaths, 38 percent of whom were children and women, in addition to 11,231 injuries.

Turkey raised objections on many occasions against the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and called on the international community to implement concrete actions to bring peace to the region. Among these calls, those made at the UN are well known for showing Turkey’s clear stance on the issue of Palestine.

Today, the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation have become one of the places on earth where injustice prevails the most. In addition to

| Operations | Palestinian | Israeli |
|------------|-------------|---------|
| 2008–2009  | 1385        | 4       |
| 2012       | 168         | 4       |
| 2014       | 2251        | 6       |

*Source* OCHA (n.d.)
the murders, the current Israeli administration disregards all human values beyond the international and humanitarian law through acts of aggression such as the inhuman blockade in Gaza, illegal settlements and attacks against the historical and legal status of Jerusalem…..The immediate establishment of an independent and homogeneous Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital is the solution. Any other peace plan apart from this has no chance of being fair, accepted, and implemented. Now, I am asking from the rostrum of the United Nations General Assembly; where are the borders of the State of Israel? Is it the 1948 borders, the 1967 borders, or is there any other border? How can the Golan Heights and the West Bank settlements be seized, just like other occupied Palestinian territories, before the eyes of the world if they are not within the borders of this State. (TCCB 2019)

In this address to the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019, the Turkish President called on all actors of the international community to provide concrete support to the Palestinian people beyond mere promises. It is highly controversial that, despite the many condemnations it has received from the UN, Israel has not been subject to any sanctions for its humanitarian abuses and violations. During the speech at the General Assembly, Erdoğan exhibited the changing maps of the Palestinian territory over time, since 1948, which clearly show the unlawful invasions. His speech created a trend on social media, with the hashtag #OurVoiceErdogan, referring to Turkey’s courage in advocating for oppressed people around the world.

**Economic Outlook in Palestine**

While the government of Turkey, within the scope of its humanitarian diplomacy, defends the rights of the Palestinians on all fronts and strongly encourages peace in Palestine, it also lends a helping hand to the occupied lands. In addition to the prohibitions and mistreatment that the Palestinians face, the economic problems that these people suffer due to the prevailing conditions also form a humanitarian dimension that Turkey cares about. Comparing the vision and reality of Israel’s claims behind its policies by looking at the inside story of Israeli rule in East Jerusalem in the twentieth century, Cheshin et al. (1999) state that, Israel has presented itself to the world as an enlightened ruler of a troubled city, but the city’s non-Jewish residents in reality have suffered greatly. As they rightly point out, the startling evidence of Israeli policy is obvious to anyone who drives through East Jerusalem, and it is borne out by
The statistics on the comparative well-being of Jewish and Arab residents. It is a well-known fact that the Palestinian economy was promising and productive before the occupation. However, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip all face poverty and harsh living conditions today, as the cumulative result of a number of restrictions imposed by Israeli forces. The increasingly harsh and asymmetric power in the Palestinian territories does not only block any economic development, since it impedes trade and investment, but also restricts people’s access to basic services.

Assessing the economic costs of the occupation for Palestinians, the UN (2016) calls attention to the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements and warns about the detrimental consequences that are engrained in the daily lives of the Palestinian people. It turns out that policies and measures imposed since the onset of the invasion have set the country’s economy on a debilitating path of dependence and inflicted on the Palestinian people enormous costs. Similarly, UNDP (2016) draws attention to the lack of self-sufficiency in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, pointing to their economic dependence, as well as to the Israeli policies of economic strangulation that they are all subject to. Within the climate of occupation, where uncertainty and transaction costs in the economy are high, investments are undermined, thereby worsening the dependent nature of the economy (UNCTAD 2019). The Ministry of National Economy of the State of Palestine explains the poor economic performance of the occupied territories by four main factors: dependency, closures, withholding of tax revenues and labor flow reductions to Israel (MNE 2004).

Closures refer to the Israeli obstruction of Palestinian mobility both within and outside of residence areas. For example, the 705 permanent barriers across the West Bank, that have been identified by OCHA (2018a), constantly control and limit Palestinian vehicles and pedestrians. In fact, the adverse factors identified by the Ministry of National Economy aggravate each other in an integrated way. The obstacles imposed by Israel isolate the Palestinian economy from the outside world, rendering its dependency on the occupier inevitable. As the UN (2016) explains, an important component of this unacceptable situation is the 1994 Paris Protocol on Economic Relations. The protocol, which forms a quasicustoms union between the Palestinian and Israeli economies has caused considerable damage to the former by limiting the policy space available to Palestinian policymakers for over twenty-five years.
Another serious problem for Palestine’s economy is the detention of tax revenues. That is to say, Israel is able to seize Palestinian tax revenues as it wishes. A striking example of this behavior has been the financial shock in 2019 caused by Israel’s decision to deduct 11.5 million USD monthly (equivalent to 138 USD million annually) from clearance revenues of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Considering that the clearance revenue accounts for 65 percent of total revenues, the decision has caused a serious fiscal challenge for the PNA. In light of the foregoing, statistics also exhibit a weakening picture for a number of economic indicators. Accordingly, the sources of growth in the Palestinian economy are disappearing, while the constraints imposed by prolonged occupation persist and worsen. In 2018 and 2019, the performance of the Palestinian economy and humanitarian conditions reached an all-time low (UNCTAD 2019).

According to the latest data published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS 2017), the rate of poverty in Palestine overall was 29.2 percent in 2017, and 53 percent in Gaza. In the 2018 and 2019 data to be released, seeing an increase in these rates would not be surprising, along with the increasingly deteriorating conditions. In Gaza, where every second person lives below the poverty line, the unemployment rate in the total labor force and youth are 53 and 70 percent, respectively. Along with the worsening consequences from the blockade, Gaza’s economy was in free fall in 2018 (World Bank 2018). According to the World Bank, the blockade in Gaza and the ongoing restrictions in the West Bank continue to hollow out the productive sector in Palestine.

The dire economic situation in the country is further aggravated by Israel’s restrictive policies on basic commodities and means of livelihood. A striking example is the banning of fishing in Gaza in 2019, which deprived Palestinians not only of a critical source of income but also an essential food source. Gaza’s economic troubles are compounded by continued chronic shortages in electricity, water and fuel supplies (UNDP 2016). Power shortages in the region have further deteriorated since 2014, with the destruction of Gaza’s major power plant by Israeli military attacks. The crisis was tragically highlighted in 2016 when three young children were killed after the candle they were using caused a fire (Oxfam 2018). Another unacceptable aspect of energy-related issues is that Israel does not allow Palestine to use the natural gas and oil resources located in their own territory, depriving the Palestinians of basic energy and of the considerable potential income these resources would generate.
In an environment where multidimensional poverty is escalating, healthcare also presents itself as a critical issue in Gaza. Because of the nearly total lack of healthcare capacity in the region, the Gazans have no choice but to seek medical services at the hospitals of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. However, to be able to receive treatment at those hospitals, they are required to obtain Israeli permission to exit the open-air prison in which they live. The procedure, for which approval rates and conditions vary, has so far prevented many patients and wounded people from accessing hospitals.

In 2018, further restrictions by the Israeli authorities led to an increase in the processing time for exit permits and in the number of denials (OCHA 2018b). Furthermore, the health outlook worsened in 2018, after the deadly attacks by the Israeli Occupation Forces on civilians who were protesting. Between March 30 and November 19, 158 adults and 31 children were killed and 5800 were wounded by Israel’s live fire. HRW (2019) reports that, pursuant to expansive open-fire orders that contravened international human rights law, Israeli forces repeatedly fired on protesters who posed no imminent threat to life. As a result of this ruthless violation of human rights, there was a serious need to transfer the wounded to hospitals outside Gaza, but to a large extent this was stalled by Israel. For example, of the applications that the Israeli authorities received from injured demonstrators in the month of April, only a meager 17 percent were approved (OCHA 2019).

Turkey’s Solidarity with Palestinians

Turkey has attached special importance to the increasingly worsening humanitarian situation in Palestine and has played an active role in assisting Palestinians. This process essentially began in December 2003, when the Turkish government announced a comprehensive action plan for Palestine. In this framework, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) began development and humanitarian assistance in the country. TIKA’s first program coordination office, inaugurated by then Prime Minister Erdoğan in Ramallah in 2005, was later followed by those in Jerusalem and Gaza, with the goal of facilitating on-the-ground activities. In addition to this, since 2008, the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) has continuously provided humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, through its offices in Jerusalem and Gaza. Turkish people traditionally make considerable financial contributions to Kızılay’s
campaigns for Palestine, which is one of the locations where Turkish NGOs work actively as well.

As for TİKA, since 2005 the agency has carried out over 600 projects in Palestine, 200 of which were added to its agenda after 2015. TİKA’s strategy of cooperation has been based on the economic and social needs of specific regions in Palestine. As Israel’s operations over the years have resulted in massive damage to the infrastructure and facilities of the Gaza Strip, where poverty is also widespread, TİKA has focused on a comprehensive plan for this area. A prestigious project designed for Gaza in this framework is a housing complex for the families who lost their homes during the attacks in 2014, which was completed in 2017. In line with the instructions of President Erdoğan, 320 houses were constructed to meet the needs of 2250 people, primarily war victims and the disabled. Another area of cooperation in Gaza has provided solutions to the power shortage problems they experience, which also cause fires and children’s deaths. Turkey contributed to a campaign run by an association under the office of the Governor of Gaza, which provided lighting systems to many families. In addition, in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, solar energy panels were installed on the roofs of public institutions, including schools and hospitals in the Gaza Strip (TİKA 2018a). In an interview, Mufid al-Hassaina, Palestine’s Minister of Public Works and Housing in the Unity Government, emphasized that the solar energy panels are crucial for local people suffering from Israeli power cuts and said, “A lot of people were saved in operating rooms, thanks to TİKA” (AA 2017).

Within the scope of cooperation in healthcare, Turkey continues its strong support for the treatment of Palestinians injured in war and associated violence, by supplying both medication and medical equipment. Moreover, an important step in effectively caring for the isolated Gazans’ health-related needs has been the Gaza Turkey-Palestine Friendship Hospital. As Palestine’s largest and most modern health facility, with a 180-bed capacity, the hospital became operational in early 2020 during the coronavirus epidemic (AA 2020). Turkey also lends a helping hand to other hospitals in the region, and supplies their needs for equipment and devices. Furthermore, in an effort to mitigate the lack of access to clean water resulting from the blockade, TİKA has been developing projects in

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1 Details without any specific reference were obtained from TİKA database and interviews with TİKA officials.
Gaza. One of them is the installation of water treatment systems in Gaza El-Ezher University, which hosts 16,000 students and 650 personnel.

Turkey’s development cooperation in Palestine also includes income-generating economic projects. The olive oil plant built by TİKA in Abasan al-Kabira, a town in the Gaza Strip, helps further economic self-sufficiency significantly in the region. As the UN Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL 2006) notes, it is not possible to overestimate the importance of the olive industry to the Palestinian economy. Olives are the single biggest crop in what remains a largely agricultural economy. However, it is also a reality that Israeli forces and settlers have uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive trees on the Palestinian lands. The Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem estimates that about 2.5 million trees have been uprooted by Israel between 1967 and 2010. Besides causing an irreparable loss to the Palestinian lands, Israel’s policy of tree uprooting also creates a grave economic damage to the Palestinian people. The total forgone value-added is estimated to be USD 138 million per year (MNE 2011). In addition to their economic importance, olive trees hold a symbolic value of peace, which has also been uprooted by the attacks. Unfortunately, the attacks on olive groves never stop, particularly in the West Bank, where Israeli settlements continue to expand (Ibrahim 2019). A local farmer sadly describes his multidimensional loss after the attacks: “Olive trees with 300 to 500 years of age had been hacked down, as well as the newly planted trees… All the trees that we have inherited from our ancestors have been lost” (MEE 2019).

Within the scope of economic support to Palestine, Turkey’s initiatives are also seen in the West Bank, where TİKA established an egg and poultry facility in Al-Khalil and a sapling production facility in Jenin (TİKA 2018b). In the West Bank, energy and healthcare cooperation continues as well. Solar energy systems provided for families in Bethlehem, and the Turkish Hospital built in Tubas are noteworthy examples. Completed in 2015, the Tubas Hospital offers health services to 40,000 patients every year (TİKA 2015).

Turkey endeavors to reach out to all regions where Palestinians live, and in this context, extends its assistance also to Jerusalem, where people face economic and social challenges. TİKA concentrates mainly on improving the social infrastructure and educational facilities in Jerusalem. In addition, conservation of the historical heritage in the ancient city is another area of cooperation.
All the initiatives mentioned above reflect Turkey’s cooperation approach toward Palestine, particularly since the early 2000s. The Turkish governments during the Erdoğan era have taken a strong stance in support of Palestine, voicing concerns over the humanitarian and unlawful aspect of the Palestine question, and have lent a friendly helping hand to the Palestinian people. At all pertinent international platforms, Turkey has been supporting a two-state solution to the conflict, which would bring “permanent peace” to the ancient lands of olive trees. All these sincere efforts have naturally created a strong affection for Turkey and President Erdoğan on the part of the Palestinians, something Turkish people visiting Jerusalem frequently observe and cite.

As the inhumane circumstances in the Palestinian territories urgently await solutions directed by the international community, another significant dimension to the criminal treatment of the Palestinians is the deported refugees who must continue their lives in remote camps. Expelled from their lands in 1948 and 1967, the number of Palestinian refugees is in the millions today. This vast population tries to survive in dire conditions away from their home country. In this regard, Jordan, a neighboring country where the Palestinian camps are concentrated, serves as a practical laboratory for a better understanding of this tragedy.

**Palestinian Refugees in Jordan**

The Arab–Israeli conflicts of the twentieth century are at the origin of the tearful stories of many Palestinian refugees living in Jordan today. The *Nakba*, which started with the establishment of Israel and invasion of the Palestinian lands in 1948, forced a vast population from Palestine to migrate from their homeland. In less than two decades, in 1967, the outbreak of the Six-Day War, which is also called the *Naksa* (setback), created yet another tragedy threatening the stability of the Middle East at its core and resulting in a new wave of displacement and suffering.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled to other lands as a result of these wars and invasions have not been able to return home since then. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was founded at the UN General Assembly of December 8, 1949, reports that the number of Palestinian refugees registered in 1950 was 750,000. Today, UNRWA serves as an umbrella to 5.6 million Palestine refugees, which include the fourth generation from the onset of the crisis (UNRWA, n.d.). A majority of this number
gets by in Jordan. As a result of the relatively recent wars in the region, Jordan is host to Syrian and Iraqi people as well, but the largest part of the refugee population in the country remains Palestinian.

The officially recorded 2.3 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan today constitute a considerable portion of the country’s population, and some of them are granted a lower level of social rights. Although most of the immigrants from Israeli-occupied territories were granted the right to Jordanian citizenship in the past, a considerable part of the Palestinian population, especially ex-Gazans, live in the allocated camps without holding any citizenship. For this segment, being a camp dweller generally means holding a so-called passport that has no identification number and no access to most social rights. Even renewing these temporary passports becomes challenging sometimes, for various reasons, like cancelation or high renewal fees.²

Therefore, for camp dwellers lacking Jordanian nationality, life is quite restrictive. These people face constraints not faced by those who are Jordanian nationals, constraints that affect their socioeconomic status, as they are barred from certain categories of employment and property rights, as well as services. Accordingly, statistics confirm that non-citizen Palestinian refugees in Jordan are much more likely to be poor (Tiltnes and Zhang 2013). This group, due to their non-citizen status, is not covered by health insurance schemes, and hence must pay higher prices for health services. As their income is much lower, they cannot afford such services, and are thereby deprived of basic healthcare (Kvittingen et al. 2019).  

The Wihdat Camp (aka Amman New Camp), which is spread over a half square kilometer area in southeastern Amman, is the manifestation of refugee camp life within an urban setting. The camp itself is a part of the city, a wide open space, which does not correspond at all to the “camp” stereotype most people have. The main avenue, which carries the burden of the camp’s overpopulation around the worn-out buildings and substandard infrastructure, provides openings into a completely different world in contrast to the modern city that surrounds it. The poverty-stricken views through the narrow alleyways highlight the profound reality of being a camp household in gleaming Amman. The injustice is not just a matter

² Details regarding the camps without any specific reference are from author’s field trip notes and interviews.
of the dilapidated condition of streets and houses in the camp zone, but also the lack of fundamental rights for some of the residents.

Like most camps in Jordan, the land on which the Wihdat Camp is located is private and was rented by UNRWA in the mid-twentieth century from a family for a period of 99 years. This restricts property ownership and creates an uncertainty about the future for the camp dwellers. The only option for a safe future is buying a house or land outside the camp, which is not easy for most of the refugees under the prevailing conditions.

Within this framework, UNRWA continues its decades-long work on basic standards in the Wihdat Camp and other refugee settlements in the country. For refugees who are not able to benefit from Jordan’s public services, unlike those with nationality, the only option is applying for the services offered by UNRWA, albeit with limited facilities. For example, despite the dense population, there exists only one healthcare center in Wihdat, where some refugees are not covered by health insurance. This center, with neither ideal conditions nor up-to-date equipment, is in stark contrast to the condition of Jordan’s health sector, often referred to as one of the best in the region. In such a setting, camp dwellers, particularly the non-citizens, differ greatly in terms of receiving decent healthcare in the city where they live. Achilli (2015) aptly defines the situation of the Wihdat Camp’s dwellers, by describing it as “between inclusion and exclusion.”

With regard to education, another fundamental social right, Palestinian children in camps are able to continue their basic education from grades one through ten at UNRWA schools. However, for high school (grades 11–12), students go to public schools, where books are not provided free, and thus children of poor families have difficulty continuing their education. Moreover, high school graduates face serious difficulties in accessing universities. Palestinian youth with no Jordanian citizenship are considered foreign students and hence are charged high tuition fees. Considering that most families struggle with unemployment and poverty, youth from the camps are less likely to attend a university, excluding those fortunate enough to win one of the limited number of scholarships.

Comparing data from inside and outside the camps, Tiltlnes and Zhang (2013) show that the education attainment gap for those living inside camps is notable, which gives camp refugees a tremendous disadvantage in the modern labor market, thereby rendering escape from poverty nearly impossible. Based on the national poverty line, Wihdat stands out with
its poverty rate of 34 percent, while the overall rate for all Palestinian camps in Jordan is 31 percent. In addition to the significant unemployment, low wages also account for this fact. As mentioned above, data show that the poverty rate for Palestinians lacking Jordanian citizenship is significantly higher, and although they may not suffer from comparatively higher unemployment, their wages are frequently lower. The positive relationship between income and citizenship is seen especially in the case of Jerash Camp, where a great majority of the dwellers are ex-Gazans without a national identity number. With the highest level of poverty among the camps, Jerash has a 53 percent poverty rate based on the national poverty line, also confirmed by Kvittingen et al. (2019).

The camps, most of which were established in the 1950s and 1960s, also bear the physical signs of poverty beyond monetary measures. The tattered structures and miserable streets do not provide proper conditions for the health and well-being of the refugee children. Aged school buildings take their place in this picture as well. Built by UNRWA more than half a century ago, camp schools must run their educational activities in run-down and unsanitary buildings.

Given this context, while UNRWA’s efforts alone are not adequate for providing the refugees with good living standards, the agency’s recent financial crisis has created a new challenge for the camps. Following the sudden end to funding by the US in 2018, UNRWA faced the greatest financial predicament in its history and announced that the resulting shortfall threatens general education and essential primary healthcare for millions of refugees (UNRWA 2018a).

Based on these developments, Turkey has strengthened its cooperation with UNRWA in Jordan, where it has increased its cooperation activities in recent years. In fact, since its inauguration in 2015, one of the main efforts of TİKA’s Amman PCO has been providing support for Palestinian refugees. Having signed a memorandum of understanding with UNRWA in September 2016, TİKA since then has contributed to various projects launched for refugees in Jordan, while maintaining its support during the agency’s fiscally challenging period. A prime example is the provision of medical supplies for the refugee camps at the beginning of 2018. With regard to this assistance, Roger Davies, Director of the UNRWA Operation in Jordan, stressed the significance of TİKA’s support, stating that the donation comes at a challenging time for UNRWA and Palestinian refugees and added: “This contribution represents a key step that
complements the Agency’s efforts towards the recently launched #DignityIsPriceless fundraising campaign.” The ceremony, held in 2018 with the participation of then TİKA President Serdar Çam, also led to new decisions. The two agencies discussed possible future cooperation for educational and health programs in Jordan to be mapped out shortly thereafter (UNRWA 2018b).

In May, 2018, UNRWA reported that Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl was received by the President of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in Ankara, at a time when Palestine refugees were facing dramatic circumstances in the Middle East. Krähenbühl thanked Erdoğan, who reiterated his strong support for the mandate and activities of UNRWA, for Turkey’s historic solidarity and the robust increase of its support for the international agency (UNRWA 2018c). Furthermore, at the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly which was held in September, 2019, Erdoğan again stressed the importance of UNRWA, highlighting Turkey’s cooperation with it:

> It is very important for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue its activities effectively. Turkey will continue to stand by the oppressed people of Palestine, as it has always up to now. (TCCB 2019)

A notable part of these efforts is TİKA’s recent school restoration in Wihdat. After the comprehensive renovation and furnishing work were completed, UNRWA Amman New Camp Preparatory Girls’ School 1 and 2 was inaugurated in September 2019, with a ceremony attended by Turkish Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, TİKA President Serkan Kayalar, and UNRWA Acting Deputy Commissioner-General Christian Saunders. On this occasion, UNRWA reiterated that support extended by partners such as Turkey and TİKA is critical for the agency to provide quality education and healthcare to Palestine refugees, and to send a strong and positive message to the world (UNRWA 2019).

Students and teachers of the Amman New Camp School, which began the 2019–2020 academic year in a fresh and modern school complex, describe the new facility as a real source of motivation for them. On the other hand, just like the former school complex of Wihdat’s girl students, many education and health facilities within the UNRWA camps across Jordan await international attention for more humane conditions. Turkey continues its efforts to improve the living standards of Palestinian
refugees, and thus continues to evaluate further opportunities for cooperation. But a decisive international cooperation remains vital to send a stronger positive message for the future of Palestinians.

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