

**Where is the Hope?**  
**(A report from Nahr al-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp, Lebanon.)**  
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Situated on a coastal location on the outskirts of Tripoli, with golden sands and an expansive view of the Mediterranean Sea, the Palestinian Refugee Camp of Nahr al-Bared could be a beautiful environment in which to raise a child... It isn't.

The sense of despair is as dark as I have known it during these past three years of visiting and listening to camp residents. The US Government, under the Trump administration, has cut all UNWRA funding to Palestinian Refugee Camps. Palestinian refugees living in refugee camps in Lebanon are not allowed to work, own property or have Lebanese citizenship. It is only from being recognized as refugees and the international law of 'right of return' (resolution-194) that prevents them from being stateless. Although UNWRA funding keeps them trapped in a state of dependency, it is also what keeps them alive. UNWRA heavily supports the funding required for all medical, educational and social care. Without the contribution of the US, the over strained resources in the camps will reach breaking point. (We are already witnessing a slow, calculated genocide taking place in Gaza.) Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States have offered to pick up the short fall left by the loss of the US contribution, but there are conditions.... Conditions that are impossible for Palestinians to accept.

Netanyahu is claiming that there are no longer any Palestinian refugees. It's been stated by Israeli officials that only those Palestinians who were born and fled the 1948 NAKBA

(Catastrophe) qualify as refugees. Under this edict the five generation of descendants born in dismal, impoverished refugee camps, would not, therefore, qualify as refugees. Trump, no doubt persuaded by deep state policy directives, would appear to agree.

'Right of Return' is enshrined in human rights law. This contrived political move to try to take the 'Right of Return' away is not only a violation of international law, it makes a mockery of all that is decent and human. Although UNWRA is mandated to support refugees, without proper funding its services are calculated to collapse.

As was stated by one of the Palestinian elders at Nahr al-Bared;

“All this flies in the face of human rights. This is a fake deal made to bring about our destruction. They keep us busy just trying to survive so there is no time to plan around the crucial matters. Are we to become a non-people, who, not by any fault of our own, are to be cast out of the human race without rights or the means to protect the lives of our children?”

Already medical services have been cut so that besides the limited availability of drugs and medical supplies, a single doctor is responsible for around 5,000 patients. In the UK the ration is less than 400, and in other European countries the ratio is significantly lower. With poor nutrition and salty, undrinkable tap water the strain on doctors is likely to be even more demanding.

UNWRA was never set up to be a permanent source of funding but with political intransigency with regard to the recognition of human rights law, Palestinians have been trapped in limbo for over seventy years. It's only been the hope of returning to their homeland that has sustained them. 'Right of return' is the corner stone of the Palestinian Struggle - Sumud. The US supported by the UK and France, along with (Saudi Arabia aka Israel) and the Gulf States, are likely to herald any refusal on the part of Palestinians to give up 'hope of return' as a refusal to negotiate peace. The authors of this Machiavellian manoeuvre will know this to be a lie but in this current Orwellian climate of political correctness, lies are often heralded as truth. With truth thrown into the trash bin of fake news, the message of fault on the part of Palestinians may be widely believed. The convenient label of Palestinian terrorists by subservient 'mainstream' journalists, allow those who actually do initiate terror to act with an impunity that defies credible belief. Any criticism by right thinking people that Israel is actually the aggressor here, is labelled as anti-semitic.

Palestinian leaders fear for the youth in the camp. Deprived of a future they are vulnerable to outside corruption or worse.

“We are trapped by circumstances. We don't want to be used to support anyone's terrorism.”

The elders fears are fully justified. In 2007 the terrorist group Fatah Al Islam fled into Nahr al-Bared after robbing a bank and were pursued by the Lebanese Army. The resulting conflict resulted in a number of deaths and forced Palestinians to flee the camp. Their homes and what little they did possess was bombed to rubble. The evidence of the widespread bombing is still present today. At the time Seymour Hersh reported that the funding for the group had originated from the US through Saudi Arabia and had Lebanese

connections through Saad Hariri. However other sources consider that funding came from groups in Syria or Al Qaeda. Why they chose to flee to Nahr al-Bared does raise interesting questions. Nahr al-Bared was the refugee camp where the PLO financial centre was located. Whether it has any relevance it is also situated on prime real estate. Whatever the truth behind Fatah Al Islam, Palestinians remain anxious about such groups ever gaining any kind of foothold in the camps among their dispossessed youth.

Today the camp is slowly being re-built and around two-thirds of the population have been able to return. Compared to many of the other camps the roads are wide, the sky is visible and fresh air is able to enter. However it was pointed out that the roads are wide so that tanks can enter. Notwithstanding the impact of visual space there is in reality little room for family expansion. It's not allowed, by the Lebanese authorities, to built beyond four floors and moving out horizontally is also prohibited. Some of the bombed buildings of 2007 have yet to be cleared. With families moving into their fifth and sometimes the sixth generation, crowding is a serious problem. This has been compounded by part of the camp being allocated to Palestinian refugees fleeing terror groups in Syria.

Security around entering the camp is high. For foreigners, passports have to be submitted well in advance so that the intelligence services can check out everyone who wishes to enter. Does this make Palestinians safer? It's debatable. While it might keep the likes of terror groups like 'Fatah Al Islam' out, it also keeps Palestinians in a 'prison camp' like environment. One only has to remember how Israeli forces surrounded the entrances to Sabra Shatilla in September 1982 and sanctioned the Christian Phalange massacre of over 3,000 undefended Palestinians, to feel a chill at the thought of not being totally free to pass though the entrance unchecked.

Palestinians cannot achieve justice alone. It will require a huge awakening on the part of all people everywhere to recognize that injustice for one is injustice for all of us. To be silent is to be complicit.