

What is the Palestine Liberation Organization?

(Editor's note: Israel has invaded southern Lebanon in an apparent effort to eliminate the PLO.)

Palestine is a country unique in many respects. It is an ancient land where much of mankind's earliest history unfolded. It is a holy land revered by the world's three great monotheistic religions — Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

But Palestine is also unique in a third and tragic sense. It is the only country in modern times to be colonized just when the age of colonialism was at an end, and whose people were illegally deprived of all national rights when self-determination had become the rule for the rest of the world.

Yet Palestine remains a country in the minds of people around the globe. The Palestinians, although exiled, dispersed and living under harsh Israeli rule, endure as a people with clear national goals.

With the Palestinian homeland completely taken over by Israel, many Palestinians live under harsh military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, while many others have been displaced.

There are more than 4 million Palestinians. The majority still reside in the Middle East, either in occupied Palestine or in the neighboring Arab states.

A homeland for the Jews

At the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine was inhabited by Palestinians of all three faiths. Palestine, like most of the other Arab countries, had been under continuous Ottoman rule since 1517. During World War I, the people of Palestine and of other Arab countries rose against the Ottoman rulers to achieve independence. But in 1916, the British and French concluded the secret Sykes-Picot agreement, dividing the Middle East into spheres of influence. The agreement gave the French control over Syria and Lebanon. Trans-Jordan and Palestine were reserved for Britain. Following the victory of the Allies, some of the former subject peoples of the Ottoman empire, particularly the Arabs, found themselves under new foreign rulers who imposed their will through the Mandate system of the League of Nations. The aim of the mandates was to provide administrative assistance and advice to the newly liberated people to prepare them for independence.

The Zionists, led by Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, persuaded the British that the way to save the "Jewish people" from persecution was to establish a national and independent homeland for them in Palestine. In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour secured a British promise of assistance for the Zionists in their effort to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, in spite of the fact that the country was already inhabited.

The State of Israel

For the indigenous population of Palestine, the sudden and dramatic flow of immigrants before and during the Second World War brought undue hardship and cultural strain as their land was taken over by foreigners. The Palestinians revolted, unable to accept the perverse logic that they should be dispossessed to compensate for crimes that Europeans had committed against European Jews. The Zionists, determined to take over Palestine, used their paramilitary force, known as the Haganah, as well as the Irgun and Stern gangs, in large-scale terrorist attacks against Palestinians.

Palestine, the Holy Land, and Jerusalem, the City of Peace, became a battleground. In February of 1947, the British government turned the Palestine issue over to the United Nations.

The United Nations adopted a partition plan on November 29, 1947, creating two states — one Arab and one Jewish. They were to achieve sovereignty and independence on May 15, 1948.

Although the Arab population of Palestine was 68.3 per cent in 1947, the Arabs received less than half the land area for their state (42.9 per cent). The Jews constituted less than a third of the population but were allocated 56.4 per cent of the land. The remaining 7 per cent was reserved for Jerusalem.

The Palestinians themselves strongly opposed the partition of their homeland. Furthermore, the resolution did not take into account



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the expansionist nature of Zionism and ignored the principle of self-determination. The Palestinians could not approve of the semi-religious basis of the Israeli state and continue to point out the resolution is a recommendation only and thus not obligatory.

On May 14, 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence. The next day, the Arab states sent military forces into Palestine to prevent massacres of Palestinian civilians. Israel took control over large areas of territory allotted to the Arabs and expelled the population. They occupied the western half of Jerusalem.

The wars

The 1967 war marked a turning point in the on-going conflict. Israel occupied what was left of Palestine — Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It also seized the Golan Heights from Syria and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. Israeli military rule was established in all the occupied territories.

The fourth Arab-Israeli war in 1973 did not change the situation. The Palestinians, under their representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization, continue to struggle to regain their lost homeland and to exercise their inalienable rights. They are backed by a stream of U.N. resolutions affirming the Palestinian right to self-determination and calling on Israel to allow the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes in Palestine, to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and to cease interference with the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In July 1980, the Emergency Special Session on the Question of Palestine unanimously affirmed in a resolution the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes and property in Palestine, the right to self-determination without external interference, to national independence and sovereignty in Palestine, and the right to establish their own independent, sovereign state in Palestine.

The PLO
Although geographically scattered the Palestinians are united politically under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The PLO is now widely recognized, in Western Europe as well as in the Third World, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The PLO has been accorded observer status at the United Nations, granted membership in many international organizations and maintains offices in several world capitals.

The PLO was established as a direct result of Israel's refusal to abide by international law and its rejection of all UN resolutions on Palestinian rights. In the early stages of their struggle, the Palestinians relied on UN Resolution 194 which called for repatriation and/or compensation by Israel. When it was clear that the Jewish state would not comply, the Palestinians began to organize.

Soon after the 1956 Suez War, the Palestine National Liberation Movement (FATAH) and other Palestinian groups emerged and began to develop a political philosophy. The idea of armed struggle, safeguarded by the UN Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights, gained ground, leading to the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964 and a Palestinian army.

the PLO provided leadership and direction to the struggle of the

Palestinians. More important, it organized national and political institutions to articulate the intense national consciousness and aspirations of the Palestinians. The PLO rapidly established its status as the "functional representative" of Palestine, in the forced absence of a homeland where normal democracy could be practiced.

Government in exile

Following the 1967 war, PLO leaders coordinated policies with activists and commando groups and encouraged the institutional development of the PLO itself.

The Palestine National Council passed resolutions separating the legislative and executive branches and providing for the election of the Executive Committee, which in turn elected the Chairman. In February, 1969, Yasser Arafat was elected Chairman.

The 12th Session of the Palestine National Council, the equivalent of a national parliament, is the highest authority within the PLO and is the supreme body formulating policies and programs. Its members are nominated by a committee of the preceding Council, after consultation with the political, labor and professional organizations and leading individuals. The Council membership mirrors the broad spectrum of Palestinian thought and opinion, seeking to represent as wide a distribution of Palestinian parties and individuals as possible. Term of office is restricted to two years. The Council meets regularly in ordinary session upon the request of the Executive Committee or one-fourth of its members. Two-thirds of the members form a quorum and decisions are taken by simple majority.

The Central Council, with members drawn from the National Council, follows up and implements its resolutions. The PLO Executive Committee, which serves as the

Cabinet, derives its memberships from selections made by the National Council. It is in permanent session and its members work on a full-time basis. The Committee represents the Palestinian people officially and supervises the various bodies of the PLO (foreign affairs, information, culture, defense, etc.). It issues directives, draws up programs and makes decisions on the organization. It executes the financial policy and prepares the budget.

What is a man worth
If he has no homeland
And he has no flag
And no address?
What good is a man?

-Mahmoud Darweesh

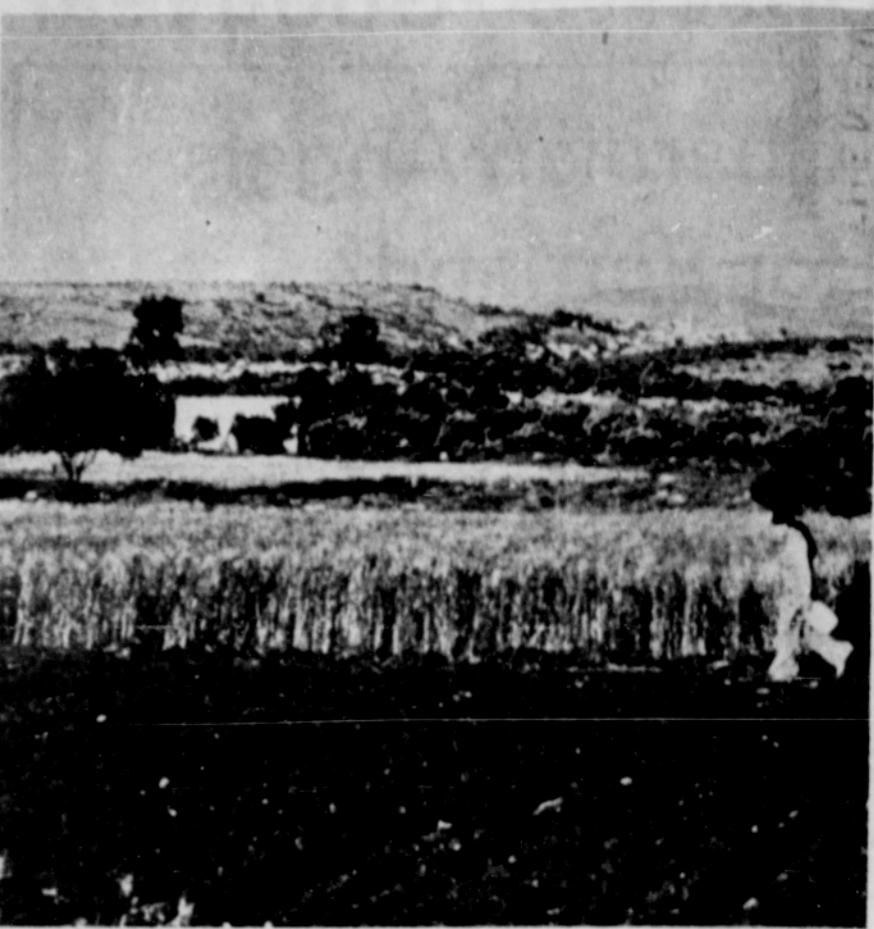
The Palestine National Fund coordinates revenue and provides a budget for social, educational and humanitarian needs of all Palestinians, whether they live under occupation or elsewhere in the world.

PLO services

The PLO has established 30 hospitals and 30 clinics, trains health inspectors, provides health education, and provides social services. Medical and social services are available to anyone in need, regardless of nationality or religion. Professional training includes two nursing schools, secretarial, sewing and handicraft schools.

Workshops train orphans as well as produce clothing, blankets, handicrafts, and folk art.

Palestinians place a strong emphasis on education and as a national group, are highly educated. There are numerous educational programs and activities sponsored by the PLO for Palestinian students living outside Palestine. Grants are provided for thousands of students



Green plains of Palestine.

currently studying in Western Europe and the U.S. The Education Department also runs primary, secondary and vocational schools.

A place in the world

In 1974 the UN recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and as a principal party in the Palestinian conflict, and gave the PLO observer status. This enabled the PLO to participate in all international UN agencies.

Today the PLO is recognized by more than 115 countries and maintains political-diplomatic offices in 61 countries including almost all of the African countries, all Islamic countries and the non-aligned countries. Additionally, almost all of the eastern European nations, Spain, Greece, Malta and Yugoslavia recognize the PLO and

France and Belgium have accorded it special status. The PLO is represented in other Western European countries and Japan, and in the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations it is a member of the Coordinating Bureau.

The physical beauty of the Palestinian landscape has a special meaning to Palestinians. Palestine has a unique spiritual significance that extends well beyond its geographical boundaries. Palestine is the Holy Land.

Palestinian history has been filled with pilgrims, some invaders, and even more visitors. In spite of numerous incursions over the centuries as outsiders came and left, Palestinians have remained on their land.

**Excerpts reprinted from "Arab Perspectives."*



Vivian Whitley has a dream. It's Anheuser-Busch's dream, too.

Vivian Whitley has always done good work in her community. Giving people encouragement, helping them to fight for the things they want. But Vivian wanted to do more. She had dreams of being a social worker. She also had four children to raise. And that had to take priority.

But Vivian never forgot her dream. And when three of her four children were in college, Vivian went to college, too. On an Anheuser-Busch/Urban League Community Scholarship. These scholarships are for people like Vivian who had to miss going to college for one reason or another. But they don't have to miss out now. They have a second chance for an education and a career.

Vivian got her degree. She made straight A's, while working at two to three jobs and raising a family. Yet she still found time to use her hard-earned skills to help the people in her community, as president of her PTA, as a teacher in her local church, and as the first woman chairman of the board of the Human Development Corp. Today, Vivian is still going to school, getting her master's degree and the credentials she needs to feel qualified to do the work she always wanted to do.

Vivian's taking her dream and making a future. One we can all share in. And that's our dream. A future we can all live with.

Building a future. Dream by dream.

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