

Part II

VII) The Right of Return

A right is never lost as long as there is someone to claim it.

(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

The Right of Return

I. Insistence on the Right of Return

We expect, by holding this workshop, that our leaderships and other countries will hear our demands and rights, and work on achieving this legitimate right: the right of return to the houses we were forced to leave 56 years ago. (Participant, Worker's meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I. Insistence on the Right of Return

The Right of Return is under significant threat at this stage because of the decline of the institutions of the PLO, the retreat of the priorities of the struggle, and the international pressures that aim to harm the Right of Return. We are therefore obliged, as refugees, to make our voice heard to preserve the right to return to our country, specifically to 1948 territories, and not just to 1967 territories as it is suggested now. *(Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs ('A'ideen) camp, Syria)*

I have heard so many demands from people here tonight, and we spent three hours searching for what we want. All we want, and I hope we all can testify to this, is to clarify that all we want is to go back to Palestine, and we want no one to manipulate this truth. Anyone can use this testimony to solve the refugee problem, they made the problem for us, and we need to solve it. All we need is to go back to Palestine, and we want no one to manipulate our demands to go back. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)*

Is there transparency in dealing with the PLO, and in what direction? There are no new interpretations on the right of return. The Palestinian issue is not summarized only by the right of return and compensation; it is also about liberating all the Palestinian lands from the Israeli occupation. Also, we, as Palestinians, have a common nation, and a common cause. Every year, a new project appears about the right of return, like the Geneva initiative. The Palestinian communities in Berlin and all over Germany are trying to make these meetings and this conference successful, but unfortunately, some wonder, do they want to get rich at the expense of the Palestinian people? *(Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)*

Of course the one and only representative on the national level is the PLO, and it is certainly the representative at the local level. As we can all see, there are associations that work to meet Palestinian aspirations, be it in terms of heritage, or national issues and problems. But as mentioned by those who spoke before me, there is work missing that specialises in the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)*

I demand to return to Palestine, if there is a chance. I also demand to have a passport to enable us to move around, and I don't care whether the passport is a Palestinian one or not, just give us something. *(Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)*

We, the Palestinians, are considered refugees, no matter what country we go to. We are Palestinians who live in *Al-Shatat* and who demand the right of return. The right of return can't be discussed nor renounced, regardless of the conditions, justifications and pressures. We will not renounce Jerusalem because it is the eternal and historical capital of the Palestinian people. *(Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)*

I think the right of return is the most important need we have. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)*

The Right of Return is a sacred right, and you won't find a Palestinian who would renounce this right. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Koge-Olby, Denmark)*

I personally think that no Palestinian exists who would renounce the Right of Return. *(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)*

The most pressing need for us is the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)*

The Right of Return is a sacred issue that is above discussion. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)*

Good afternoon. In our discussion here, the issue of the Right of Return seems to have taken many turns and widened, and it seems as if we are going to discuss all the aspects of the Palestinian cause, and I think that we are recycling and repeating the same talk. The Right of Return is a genuine right which is established and incorporated into UN Resolution 194, and it can't be negotiated. *(Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)*

Take me back and I will set up a tent on the beach and live in it, I don't want a house to live in, I will set up a tent and live, but let them take me back. *(Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)*

Everyday I dream of visiting Palestine, though I have never been there. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

I have a right to my homeland, and I should go back to my homeland. Why not? *(Participant, Public Meeting, Vlaardigen, the Netherlands)*

If you want to get me out of this country and that would be a renunciation on my part, and I am positive that this is to pressure us to give up and renounce our rights. We are forced to renounce our rights under any conditions so that I can eat, or my son can eat, or that I can solve my problems. They purposefully force us to reach that level, in cooperation with the host countries. The host countries could have made things easier for us, so that I can stay awake, but the host countries takes those benefits away so that I can surrender quickly and God willing we will never kneel or surrender. *(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)*

I want to get to know my country and visit it. I am deprived from visiting my country. *(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)*

Any Jewish person in the world can go back to Falastin and live, not like the sister that had to renew her visa every two months and she was born there, you know. *(Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)*

Though I may be absent from my country as a Palestinian, whether I am absent or not, I mustn't ignore my country. I was forced to leave my country; me and our parents and grandparents. *(Participant, Women's meeting, Amman, Jordan)*

2. Components of the Rights of Return

I want to go to Palestine as a Palestinian citizen who has rights, and who knows that she has a land with people around her who feel her pain. I don't want to be a stranger in Palestine. This is an important issue. I want to go there as a Palestinian citizen recognized by everyone. I don't want to face problems with the Authority treating me like a third-class citizen. I don't want to face cultural problems with internal Palestinian society. I have had enough with the special status thing. I don't want to have special status. I want to be a normal citizen in my country who exercises her rights there. *(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)*

When Resolution 194, which was passed in 1948, says that every Palestinian that has been forced to leave his land and his home is to go back, Israel then refused, and it is still refusing, although the Resolution annually renews the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees to their home. Moreover, the Resolution calls for the Right of

Return and the compensation. This means we have a right to return to our country, and to get compensation for the years of deprivation we had experienced in the refugee camps, and for the harm we suffered. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark).*

I have never been to Palestine but I really look forward to going there just to get a sense of the power and justice. For me, it is outrageous that people are in a rush to settle the Right of Return. So it must be said, my government that is in charge at any point and time, must very clearly state what it means by the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).*

I see that all of us are with the right of return. The right of return is the heart of the Palestinian cause, and if we solved it we would solve the issue. As Palestinian refugees, this right is clear to us, but we are worried that this right is not clear to the Palestinian Authority. Five months ago, we saw Abu Mazen, and he said that he is not against settling Palestinians in Lebanon or giving them Lebanese nationality. The fear is that if there are secret negotiations with Israel, which has a clear project in terms of the Palestinians, that this is also the project of the PA. With the construction of the wall, and when this wall is complete, the Israelis will withdraw and give the Palestinians the eastern area of the wall while they take the western area. Sharon intends to solve the Palestinian cause while having a clear idea in his mind in the secret negotiations with the [Palestinian] National Authority about the absence of the PLO. With a border-crossing agreement with Jordan and other countries; they would allow people to pass because, as we fear; this ambiguity of the refugees' problem would lead to the gradual elimination of this right. There is something in the Right of

Return, the Right of Return is an individual right according to international law. Meaning, that even if the National Authority renounced this right, this doesn't mean that international law renounced it too because it is an individual right.

The definition of the Palestinian refugee should be changed, because the Palestinian refugee of the 48 territories is different from the refugee of 67 or 2000 or 2005. Those who were refugees are not any more in the European countries because they became invested in Europe. Therefore statistics should be done again and restudied, because there are about 5 million in Palestine of whom only 500,000 get out, and how would things be when they return while they can't now even feed the 5 million? The Right of Return needs a deep study to define who the refugees are and where do they live and do they accept to return or not? When the Authority was established in 1993, everyone left the Palestinian arena, and all the federations of the 1970s and 1980s that were active, why were they cancelled? Because people were depressed by the Authority. I am not happy with its performance and efficacy, but I am completely happy with the PLO. Thank you very much and I hope that you maintain the communication and discussion between you. *(Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)*

By God's will, and however long exile lasts, we will return. We hope that the Authority will help and support us to give us a chance to return to our country again and live with our families. We've been raised in exile for 35 years. We hope that the Authority can offer us the right to return to our country and traditions so that kids can be raised with their families. We don't want our children to go through what we suffered. A grain of sand in our country is better than a 100 palaces abroad. *(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)*

The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return

I insist that the Right of Return is a sacred right like the faith inside us.
(Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return a. An Individual and Collective Right

We think that the Right of Return is an individual and collective right which is guaranteed by international law, and which belongs to the set of Palestinian people's rights, and which is solid and can't be manipulated or subjected to referendums. Any referendum results can't change anything from its legal and ethical strength, regardless of the referendum's purpose. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

a. An Individual and Collective Right

The right of return is a sacred right which no one can manipulate. It is a right which we determine. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

I think that everyone talked about the right of return for all the Palestinians, whether those in Canada or in *Al-Shatat*, in the exile countries in Europe, Australia, the refugee camps in Arab countries like Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and in other Arab countries or those who live in the occupied land. The Right of Return is one of the main issues we are discussing, and this project covers all Palestinians. Our decision is that the right of return is something we will not renounce, because it is our legitimate right as Palestinians, whether in Beirut, Amman, Damascus, Montreal or any European country. This project should include all the Palestinians in Palestine because they live in camps too and they are deprived from returning to their lands and properties. This project hasn't mentioned the refugees in the occupied Palestinian lands. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

Palestinians everywhere want to return. Palestinians in countries other than Lebanon enjoy civil rights, particularly in Jordan where they have Jordanian nationality, and the Jordanian passport. This brother says that he lives comfortably in Denmark and let's support Palestinians in Lebanon. They all consider this as the main obstacle: If only Sharon would agree to the return of Lebanese Palestinians, because the Palestinians in other countries live comfortably and they don't want to return. I agree with the right of five million Palestinians to return to their country. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark).

I must have the right to return to my land any time I want, regardless of where I live now. It's not about whether I return now or not to return at all, I am totally free to go to the United States, or Canada, but I must have the right to return to my land whenever I want to. (Participant, Public meeting, Vlaardigen, Netherlands)

I want to tell you about the right of return. The right of return is a right for everyone, isn't it? We are not talking about Palestine's conditions when we say give us this right. After that, whether I want to return or not, I'm free. Meaning, you have the right to return to your

And even if someone has citizenship, or even if we don't represent the Palestinian refugees abroad, because most of us have German nationalities, do you think he is willing to renounce his rights? I don't think that there is a Palestinian who doesn't think of the day he will return to Palestine. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany).

town. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

And even if we are living a comfortable life in Canada, and although we have the Canadian nationality, yet according to the Resolution 194, we are refugees.... We are Palestinian refugees here in Canada like all the others. Our number here is about fifty thousand, but we have rights like all the other Palestinian refugees all over the world. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

I just want to go back to the issue of the Right of Return. I want to stress upon the fact that the

Right of Return is an individual and communal right, and this is a very important point. What I mean by communal is that it is a right at the level of organizations like the PLO, and at the level of the national structures in which Palestinians live. But we are in a critical situation. And it must be stressed that it is an individual right, which means that the right of the individual will not be cancelled regardless of the decision on the communal right.

To understand this idea is very important in this stage, because if we don't trust our representative and the governments that will represent us, or the organizations that already represent us, it must be stressed that our right, as an individual right, will not be cancelled, and it is the right of every person, and what I mean by every person is all the Palestinians, whether the ones who left Palestine, or those who were born in it or abroad. This is a very important thing. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

The Right of Return, historically and according to Resolution 194, is to the 1948 territories. (Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark)

b. Restitution and Compensation

The first right and the primary need for the Palestinian refugees is to restore their lands and to return to them. This is the first legitimate right, which was guaranteed by the international community through its many resolutions starting from the Resolution 194. Although these laws have been manipulated, it is still the first legitimate right and the primary need for the Palestinian refugees. The second civil right is to feel secure and safe, and to not suffer killing and destruction and displacement in the camps in which they live. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return b. Restitution and Compensation

We will never renounce the right to return to our land and houses. And I present in this file about twelve real estate certificates; a piece of land that belongs to me, and my house certificate which was bought by my father for 50 Palestinian pounds, with the sum written on each, and which have the complete stamps. We won't renounce this land and we won't accept compensation at all. And this is what I'm saying in my testimony. The last certificate that we bought was one year after the immigration, in 1949, on the basis that we will return. *(Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)*

On the other hand, we hear some Palestinian voices, and from the Palestinian leaderships, and the Palestinian leadership's right, is working on more than one option. For example, the "Geneva document" has emerged, and also the "Abu Mazen-Beilin" agreement, and the "Nusseibah-Ayalon" agreement. In my opinion, all these agreements and documents are not in accord with the internationally legitimate resolutions, nor with international law. And all countries in the world are bound by these resolutions which "even if a country was built on the remains of another country", in other words and in our case, a country called Israel had been built on the remains of Palestinian society! We didn't have a Palestinian country; it was just a province within the Ottoman State's, which was followed by the "mandate". And even if this country was built on the remains of this province, the Palestinian citizen, whether he is inside or outside the country, who is registered as a resident of this land, has the right to regain his properties, because this is individual property which is considered an untouchable sacred issue under international law. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)*

What concerns us more at present is to return to our country, our nation, and to our properties and homes, as Resolution 194 guarantees. And even if this generation can't return, it must insist upon the Right of Return. Perhaps our children or grandchildren would be able to return some day. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)*

The PLO is my only legitimate representative and national shield. There is no doubt about that, and it can't be substituted. I hope that the Right of Return Committee will convey our voice loudly to the international organisations. I will never renounce my mother's house in Haifa, nor my father's house and our properties in Yafa. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

I want to reiterate everything people have said, but in terms of priority, we should be surveying every centimetre [of Palestine], what's happened to it, who holds title to it now, how they got that title, and to begin to strategize on how to get that land back. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)*

The issue is not only about the refugees' Right of Return. On the contrary, you know that a lot of other issues and tragedies followed which affected generations of refugees. They must be legally forced to admit their guilt, especially Britain, and assume the responsibility for this disaster that hit the whole nation. And the issue is not only about the Right of Return, there is also the issue of compensation as some of the brothers said earlier. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)*

There is that part of the resolution that is related to return and compensation, not in the form that is now being promoted in the media, which is return or compensation, as if the refugee should choose between them. The other point, which

was much discussed, is the right of return which was voted thirty five times by consensus, except by Israel. There is also the Moscow agreement. What is strange though is the lack of clarity in Oslo as a result of American objections. This matter is dubious. *(Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)*

We affirm that the right of return is a sacred right that cannot be renounced. And we should not discuss the Resolution after all these years. We will not accept compensation alone, we want the right of return and compensation for our suffering. Even if some Arab Leaders abandoned us, we are not supposed to surrender, whatever the price. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark)*

Our problem lies in the Right of Return. We want the Right of Return. We are not interested in the compensation, but rather in having a home to go back to. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)*

c. Return to Original Homes

I want to return to my country and to my city whether alive or a corpse. I want to return to Haifa. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

We address all the relevant entities, including the Palestinian State, UNRWA and the host country, to search for us to see our conditions. We have the right to live in dignity and to return to our original town not to Gaza. It is true that we were raised in Gaza, but our ancestral home town is Yubna. We will not renounce it for any reason. Therefore I implore the relevant entities to do what is necessary for every Palestinian refugee wherever he might be, whether Egypt, Syria or any foreign country. This is what every Palestinian refugee in Egypt hopes for. *(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)*

The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return c. Return to Original Homes

They now took Gaza back. Let us go there and I would live in one room with my grandson. *(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)*

If I were to choose between staying here and returning to my original country (Yafa), or if my father were to choose, we certainly won't refuse. Maybe I am more hesitant because I married an Egyptian man and my kids are now Egyptians, so it is difficult for me to return. But if I were married to a Palestinian man, I would certainly choose to return to my country. When they ask my father whether he wants to return to Gaza, he refuses, saying that he wants to return to Yafa, where he was born, and his home and land are. *(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)*

This is what we should hold on to; that the right of return is a sacred and individual right which no one, regardless of his status, can manipulate. This right is an unalterable right according to the Return Resolution [194]. The Gaza Strip is 360 km², and the West Bank is 5000 Km², so I wonder where should we exercise the Right to Return; in Palestine, or in the West Bank, or in Gaza? Where should we return? *(Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark).*

I am a member of the Right of Return committees in Denmark. As for the refugee issue, there is international law concerning this issue, and there are internationally legitimate resolutions which form the cornerstones or frameworks for solving the refugee problem! The internationally-legitimate Resolution 194 which proclaims "the right of the refugee to return to his house and properties and land, not his return to his country". There is a new twisting of the law concerning this Palestinian right, to mean that he can return to his country in the West Bank

and Gaza, but not the returning of every refugee to his land and properties and house. This is an attempt to twist this resolution. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)*

I want to say that we, as a Palestinian people who live in camps, have the right to return on the basis of a fair and comprehensive peace which guarantees the right of return and Jerusalem for the Palestinians. This can't be achieved without establishing two equal countries. The Palestinian State by itself is not enough. We want the right of return of the '48 refugees and a peaceful coexistence. *(Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)*

First, I think that there is no Palestinian who renounces the Right of Return, whether he was asked or not. Both the leadership and the people are committed to it. Whoever renounces this right is a traitor. *(Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)*

People are fed up with talking. They are desperate. This is our reality. News only reaches us from satellite television channels, where we hear that Abu Mazen is demanding the '67 lands only. The right of the refugees of the '67 is legitimate, but what about the '48 refugees? Yasser Arafat refused, in the Oslo agreement, to renounce the '48 territories. This is good and this is our reality. But when Abbas demanded the '67 lands, does that mean that he cancelled the '48 lands? Then there are no '48 lands, and this means that he cancelled the Right of Return which is the right of every honest Palestinian. If you have cancelled the Right of Return, why don't you offer me an alternative? What alternatives do you have that are better than the reality in which we live? *(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za'araniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).*

As a Palestinian, I want to go back to the village of al-Hamama. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

What are your ambitions as a Palestinian, what do you want as a Palestinian refugee?

We have so many ambitions, and we have been refugees since 1948. We have been living in Al-Shatat for tens of years; in Syria and Lebanon. We want to return to our homeland. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

The basic and most important right for a Palestinian is the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)*

Exile imposes great pressures on the refugees' lives. Return is a legal and legitimate demand. We will not accept anything other than returning to our lands and properties. I refuse to return to '67 territories because I will return then as a refugee. *(Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)*

I have the right to return to my country now, but I can't do that. Yet that doesn't mean that I renounced my Right of Return. The Right of Return is different from the land; when you tell me that you are from Yafa, I can assure you that you can't return to it now, but the question is: do you have the right to return to Yafa? This is what all the guys here fight and tire and move from one place to the next for and work hard for; God bless them, they work till the late hours in the night. The struggle now is for the right of return. We are not demanding to return to Yafa right now: but we are demanding to return to our homes. *(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)*

3. On Compromise and Negotiations

And I think that the ultimate goal for every Palestinian refugee who lives in exile and in the camps is the right of return; it is a solid right for every Palestinian refugee and it can't be negotiated or minimized. The Palestinian Authority has no right to discuss it in the final solution negotiations, because it is a right for every Palestinian on the individual level and the Authority has no right to discuss it. The Authority has no right either to negotiate or discuss international Resolution 194 related to the return of the Palestinian refugees. *(Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)*

As for the Palestinian communities and organisations abroad participating in this project, I am saying that this project should be implemented in coordination with the PLO, not the Palestinian Authority. I have a simple question: what is the Palestinian National Authority concerned with? Is it concerned with conveying the voice of the Palestinian right of return to the world? I am worried that this voice is seen as a problem by the PNA. What does the PNA want from the peace negotiations with Sharon and other Israelis? Are we 100% sure that the PNA insists upon the right of the Palestinian people to return? Or is it possible that our project is an obstacle for the PNA in its negotiations with the Israelis? *(Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)*

I think that it is very important to raise the issue of the Right of Return as guaranteed by the Resolution 194 because it is indisputable and I hope that this is one of the main goals of the project. This committee or this project or initiative that we are discussing now aim to take away the right of return from the negotiation table, because it is indisputable for us. This is what I wanted to affirm. *(Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)*

As for the Geneva Initiative, and its spear headers, we know that this initiative and the directors are people who work in the [Palestinian] Authority and who are members in the [Palestinian] National Council. What I understood is that there soon will be elections for the Legislative Council and elections for the Fateh movement. What we are asking from Fateh movement is to fire all the "Geneva Initiative's" spear headers, because renouncing the right of return is a betrayal. In addition, we ask the Palestinian people inside Palestine not to vote for the Geneva Initiative's spear headers at all. *(Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)*

Thank you all. Before talking about the Right of Return, we need to discuss the outcomes of the Right of Return. Is it an inalienable right or something that can be negotiated? This is something that we should understand before talking about the Right of Return. Is it as clear as the UN resolutions and the PLO resolutions say, or is it a right which can be negotiated in the same way that happened years ago? There are cases which are moderate, like returning 100,000 refugees and compensating some of them etc. I will say my opinion, but I and the brothers here think that it is not heard. *(Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)*

As Palestinians, we should have the full right to this land and this nation and the Right to Return to them. *(Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)*

Let's go back to the referendum issue. This is also a dangerous issue. I am a Palestinian refugee who can't determine his fate, or the fate of his children, grand children, or his offspring! I don't have the right to ask for a few hundred dollars, for example, in exchange of renouncing my properties and the right of return. I owe it to my children and grandchildren to protect this right

for them! For I don't know what they will decide, I don't decide for them. Legally, under international law, it isn't possible to renounce it because it is an individual right as well as a communal right. And this right can't be cashed! I shouldn't assign a representative to speak in my name, so as to say that the PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian community which represents me on the political level and which is authorized to speak in my name. If I take this decision, then it's all over; this shouldn't be the case, according to the international legal point of view. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)*

We must insist upon the Right of Return, or leave it to the future generations, because Palestine will return only by force. Palestine must be freed and it is a big mistake to renounce it. Who renounces his land is like the one who renounces his religion. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Koge-Olby, Denmark)*

The thing is that I am one of those who recognize the PLO in its present form and its officials as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people wherever he is, whether at home or in *Al-Shatat*. And whoever represents me should restore my full rights to me! It is not only my right as a person, but the right of every Palestinian person whether at home or in *Al-Shatat*. And not in terms of the document that was presented to the grocery man from the 48 territories asking him to renounce his land, however he refused and said that this right isn't only his right, but the right of every Palestinian, whether young, infant, or old.

Palestine is an Islamically-endowed [waqf] land; it is owned by all Muslims; it is a land that shouldn't be renounced whatever the reasons are, even if it is indeed small, it shouldn't be renounced. This is his right, because he is a Muslim, and Islamic law indicates that Palestine should not be renounced!

We will not renounce the Right of Return whatever it costs and under any condition. It is true that I am a Palestinian refugee, and that my children were born outside Palestine, but I raised my children to love Palestine and to draw Palestine's map in their hearts so that they will never forget it. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The Right of Return

4. On Resettlement

The Right of Return is a collective and individual right, and no one has the right to renounce it, and we refuse all the alternative solutions to it. It is a practical right, and we insist upon Resolution 194. We also refuse that the Authority limits it. I'm from Al-Shajara village and I insist upon returning to it. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs ('A'ideen) camp, Syria)

And I don't accept that anyone can renounce this Right. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

There are two essential points we don't want to discuss. First is that the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and second is that the Right of Return is a communal and individual sacred right which can't be renounced. (Participant, Worker's meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

In order not to repeat ourselves, I say that there is no way that we would renounce or argue the right of return at any time. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I think that there is a consensus in the Palestinian street and on the level of the Palestinian people with all its categories that the Right of Return is a right no one can renounce. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

No one wants to renounce the Right of Return; otherwise he will be considered a traitor. We are not represented by Abed-Rabbu, Nusseibah, or the [Palestinian] Authority. The PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people, and no one can cancel my Right to Return, not even a traitor. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs ('A'ideen) camp, Syria)

What's more important is to reiterate again and again that the Right of Return is inalienable, so nobody can touch it; no body can even negotiate it, because it's both an individual and collective right no body wants to give it away from the refugee community. The purpose of these meetings behind closed doors is to sign for a state that has no worth to anybody. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

Any person would definitely support the right of return, regardless of who in the world they are addressing. But some people, even some refugees, consider that the PLO could easily give up this right. I think that we, as Palestinian communities and assemblies, form the strongest foundation for the Right of Return. (Participant, Youth Meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

As a Palestinian, no one can renounce my right on my behalf. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

My right, as a Palestinian, is to return to Palestine without facing troubles upon returning. It is my right to return as a Palestinian citizen to my land and to my village and country. For us, or for me personally, the Right of Return is a sacred right that can't be touched in any way. I can understand what is called the 'tactic of stages' but it is impossible to renounce anything related to Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

You have the right, as a refugee, to be able to enter to your country, and this is a right you should not renounce. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

I came here to affirm my right, even if I don't have any document; I still have the Right to return. I came here to ensure that my desire to return is guaranteed and I will preserve it and fight for it, and I want to make sure that my voice is conveyed. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The Right of Return is not guaranteed; no one can sign it off, and no one can renounce it. No one can sign off the Right of Return: to return to

my city, Yafa, and your city, Yafa. No one can with UN resolutions sign off on the Right of Return. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

4. On Resettlement

I want to say that we do not emphasize the Right of Return which is our legitimate right. Every Palestinian has the right to exercise the Right of Return. Currently it is said that the Palestinians in Al-Shatat, especially those who live in the European countries, are financially comfortable, so they wonder why would they want to return, and why don't they just settle in the countries that they are living in. We have the Right of Return, and we want to exercise it and return to our country, lands and properties. No one can prevent us from this right, not the United States, or the United Nations, or Europe. I can't forget my country, neither will my children. I want from the United Nations and Israel to respect my rights as a human being and give me back my right from which I have been deprived for so many years.

I don't belong to any country except mine, and I don't belong to Canada even if I have Canadian nationality. I am a Palestinian in the first place. Who is responsible for forcing us out of our land should assume the responsibility of our returning. Unfortunately our leadership tries to forget and delay and renounce the Right of Return, as if we don't have any presence as Palestinian refugees. It is also said that the Palestinians are extremists who refuse the peaceful solution and that they threaten the lives of the Jews and that they are terrorists, despite the fact that the Palestinian people are being killed and face death every day by the occupation soldiers. We are not responsible for offering solutions to the Israelis. We want our Right

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to Return to our country, lands, and properties. Israel is responsible for the failure of a peaceful solution by refusing our return to our lands and properties. *(Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)*

I would like to say to the people seeking to implement the Right of Return that in addition to it being an individual right, it is also one that people don't want to renounce. If you asked any five-year old Palestinian child in Dubai or London where he is from, he will say that he is from Subur Ni'ya or Kfar 'Ana, or from Palestine. The child is born with Palestine's image in his mind, and they can't eliminate five million refugees.

The settlement issue is not practical, because there is no Arab country that would accept the refugees and consider them citizens, because this would disturb their demographic structure. And immigrating people to Canada or Australia is not likely, so they want to cancel this Right and leave people lost. Thank you. *(Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)*

We don't want alternatives to the Right of Return. I don't want to live in any country other than Palestine. *(Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)*

There is no alternative to the Right of Return. *(Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)*

Whoever wants to immigrate, of course that doesn't cancel the Right of Return or Palestine, on the contrary, but until when will the people inside remain occupied and the people outside suffer? *(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)*

The idea is that even if I have another country's passport, I can define my own belonging. *(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)*

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Before solving the issue of the Right of Return, we want solutions for our problems in our daily life, which can lead to solving this issue. *(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)*

For the sake of the right of return, everyone should have the prerequisites for steadfastness. The most important thing is to be able to live decently in a house, and to be able to have good food and clean water. One should even have the right to watch their child live their childhood. These basic human rights are reaffirmed by humanity as a whole. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)*

We have the Right to Return and the right to live in our land like all the nations in the world. We all know that, and if I want to talk about the Right of Return, I can only say, "what was taken by force is returned only by force." *(Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)*

There are Islamic, cultural, and social associations. I suggest holding a national Palestinian conference dedicated to the Right of Return, and through which we can form a special committee to pursue this issue nationally with different areas in Sweden. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)*

It is good if we, within the frameworks of these associations and clubs, display some kind of specialization about this Right. We must focus on the legal and political side to this Right. I think that this committee I am inviting you to form as a specialization must coordinate with any of the Right of Return committees which exist in Sweden. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)*

Of course, all of these ways are good, but it's too early to implement them. What matters in the end is to activate or form committees. There must be, of course, a specialized committee dedicated to the Right of Return. And when that happens, there will be broader discussions. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)*

But I stress upon forming a committee now, which is dedicated to the Right of Return, and which doesn't belong to any ideological, political, or intellectual class; it must only belong to my right as a Palestinian to return. Of course, it must be supported on the Arab level from all the Arab communities. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)*

The Right of Return is unquestionable, but I want to hear from you how it is to be implemented. At present, it is difficult to implement Resolution 194, because America and Israel are the strongest on the international scene, and since they have the power, they won't allow five million Palestinians to go back to Haifa, Yafa, and Akka. *(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)*

The Right of Return issue has been covered in dust, and in order to wipe the dust, we must be well-armed in order to assert the Right of Return, we cannot renounce it. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)*

Since the first Palestinian catastrophe in 1948 to the beginning of the Palestinian Revolution in 1965, the Right of Return issue has been falling and rising, like stock markets, mainly according to international conditions, and according to the way our Palestinian people deal with it, since it is the foundation, and if he doesn't insist upon his right, he will not find anyone to support his right. This is a critical point. So, when the PLO possessed

I affirm, and 95% of our people also affirm, that we will not accept any settlement in any country other than Palestine. We will return to our country no matter how long it will take. By the way, this is what my father asked me to do; he is 90 years old and a dying man, he asked me to take his bones back to Palestine if we ever returned or if our children did, and I made sure to inform my children to do so. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

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If the Right of Return is the essence of the struggle, does that mean that the United Nations and the international institutions need to ask us about what we want? The whole world knows what we want, and Resolution 194 has specified our desires, so why are they then asking us this question? We want to return to our country and properties and to be compensated according to Resolution 194. We want to hold a conference and conclude with recommendations and decisions. But to whom should we present these papers? To the United Nations? To the European Union? They know that we want to return, so what's the point of holding all these meetings or a conference? What power do we have to exercise pressures on the international organisations and institutions to implement the right of Return which is the essence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Do we want to hold a conference against the PA or the PLO, or do we want to build a structure of our own? I don't know what to say. (Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

strong political and military powers and was supported by the refugees in Lebanon, and in Jordan formerly, no one dared to even talk about the possibility of negotiating the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmö, Sweden)

What I am saying is that all conscious people insist on the Right of Return, so the great majority of the Palestinian people insist on it. But this right is in danger because of the time factor and because of the powers that work against it, which are not only foreign powers, but also internal and local powers. And as one of the brothers mentioned, there are children who don't know their village, and can't even speak Arabic. Yet there are still generations who lived in Palestine and who still interact with the land of Palestine. There is a lot of important work to be done on this front.

Secondly, I think that this factor should be civil, I mean amongst educated ranks. Let's speak frankly, we can't form committees everywhere, and we don't want to talk in vain. We formed many councils and we achieved nothing. I think if there could be academic work and freedom for academics abroad, this would help. The academics abroad have more freedom in working than those in the Arab world, so let them assume this responsibility and support us. There should also be a memo from a group of academics and known figures on the international level so that it can be trusted. This is the first point related to the Right of Return and insisting upon it. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

From what I heard, the Right of Return is an indisputable issue. Therefore I want to talk about another fact. It is said that we would accept settlement and becoming citizens in this country for a certain amount of money, maybe fifty thousand dollars or some other amount. Some

people began to accept this idea, especially since there are a lot of reasons for that. First, the social and economic situation. Second, the integration of the Palestinian people in the Lebanese society. We now marry from them and they do the same, so the Palestinian people have integrated into the structure of Lebanese society. Third, the Palestinians have no social ties with those in Palestine. We have relatives in Palestine, yet we don't know each other. This means that the Palestinian no longer has a relationship with his extended family to which he belongs in Palestine. Therefore we think that the more appropriate suggestion is to reinforce these ties between the family inside and outside Palestine. We should find a way or a structure to contact them. But the time passes without us doing anything. And those who know elderly relatives in Palestine, his ties get looser every time one of them dies, so the relationship ends. So I stress upon this point; that there should be communication between the Palestinians inside Palestine and those who are outside, so that we will at least have something in common to unite us. Thank you. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

Regardless of what we have said, we should activate our institutions so that we can work correctly and enlighten our people about the Right of Return. It is a good thing that we are demanding it, but is it possible to absorb five million Palestinians now in the West Bank and Gaza? It is very easy to suggest slogans, or when Abu Mazen negotiates on one meter to establish the Palestinian state when we present the issue of the Right of Return, can these demands be easily achieved? I think not.

The issue of the right of Return is not about who wants to return, it is about the UN resolutions. The Right of Return can be implemented, and we suggested a timetable that starts from Lebanon

because of the difficult situation our people who live there, then Syria. Then we can start with the people who suffer more, why should I renounce my right? I remember very well what was suggested in the last Camp David, and Abed-Rabbu in Geneva, not Camp David, solved the issue by suggesting the return of people with humanitarian cases, returning 120,000 Palestinians, and issuing compensation. This is what was suggested and agreed. How can we talk then about the Right of Return, while we have a prominent figure, the president of al-Quds University saying that Right of Return talk is illogical? (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

To come back to this current of "it's unrealistic", or "it's not practical that you want to return" and this is a huge current that we are seeing. We have collaborators coming every week and saying that it's unrealistic, Sari Nusseibah comes to his non-Palestinian audience and he is not even a refugee himself saying that it's ok if refugees don't return and that they have all these centres in Ramallah that get their funding from the EU and others. This current really needs to be combated by the refugees and it would be something for other communities to make sure that when these speakers stand up we make it clear that they are not welcome to come to talk on our behalf. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

As for the Resolution 194, which guarantees the Right of Return, it is the political interpretation of the Right of Return. If pressures are exercised to implement the Right of Return Resolution, it is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because returning to Yafa and Akka and Haifa needs huge, long-term work. This pressure would be a means to pull out, at least, from the whole

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of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Right of Return Resolution was issued in 1948. Doesn't the United Nations know that 1948 Palestinians live in Syria and Lebanon? And does the Right of Return Resolution state only the return to Gaza and the West Bank? The resolution includes everyone, and the return to all the occupied lands of 1948. *(Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)*

In the Madrid conference, and in Oslo in Norway, the Palestinians felt that the United States is neglecting the natural right of the Palestinian refugee to return to his country, village, and properties. When the Palestinians felt that danger; they wanted to express it through taking practical steps; through a Palestinian assemblage that expressed the Right of Return and through the Right of Return committees and centres. These committees started to go wherever the Palestinian refugee might be, whether in the West Bank or Gaza, or the Arab host countries like Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, then in the southern and northern Americas, then in Canada, Australia, and Europe. The feeling of neglecting the right of the Palestinian refugee to return to his country and properties was threatening. This Right is the core of the conflict between the Palestinians and the global Zionist movement and whoever supports it. Yesterday Britain and the United States today, want to offer the Palestinians a partial and weak solution: a self governing region in the West Bank and Gaza provided that the Palestinians renounce three quarters of their country to the Israeli occupation, and three quarters of their people who live in the Diaspora and the Arab asylum countries.

This is a great injustice and a historical scandal for those who praise democracy, civilization and the human right of anyone to live in his country and his house. Therefore, the Palestinian revolution

was born, and the Palestinian activists started to work and feed the Palestinian revolution. When the Palestinians realized the threat that aims to neglect the right of the Palestinian people to return to their country, they started to form assemblies and committees in the hope that they will support the rights of the Palestinian people, and that they will advocate based on international legitimacy and laws, supported by the free people of this world, whether Muslims, nationalists, or others, to stand in the face of the biggest crime in human history against the resisting Palestinian people.

We are part of this Palestinian nation, and part of this cause, we feel its pains and suffering, like millions of our fellow citizens. It is our duty to answer this call and to do our best as much as we can.

That's why four years ago, we formed, here in Norway, committees known as the "Right of Return committees" based on those in the Netherlands where the headquarters of the European Union is located. Some brothers were delegated to be the communication link between the Palestinian Right of Return committees and the European Union with all its institutions, from the Parliament to the European council, and in its different countries. In other words, the Palestinian activists who are charged with this historical responsibility meet to jointly express the right of their people to return with their fellow citizens in all fields. *(Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)*

We should work on finding a certain channel to official entities in the Gulf countries, like the Gulf Cooperation Council. We can demand that the Gulf Cooperation Council discusses the right of return during one of its meetings, this is not a usual demand; rather it has strong foundation

and represents the demand of the community members. Other national councils can join and demand the right of the Palestinians to return in the aim of issuing new resolutions that are based on a strong foundation. *(Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)*

Concerning the issue of the Right of Return, there are also two sides. From the external side, the right of return depends on the general regional, local and international situation, and also the attitudes during the negotiations, and our attitudes as Palestinians towards this issue. In general, international conditions will determine if we are going to return or not. At the local level, the embassy can help the community. But the embassy has limited capability. It can help to create job opportunities for the community members. It also can do whatever it can to help us in this country. *(Participant, Public meeting, Sana'a, Yemen)*

What [Participant] said about the bulletin is very important, it is very important to issue a simple bulletin, that focuses on and simplifies Resolution 194 on the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)*

Because this is a critical period, we must focus on one particular thing, which is the Right of Return. This needs a structure. Therefore, I think a body, committee, or a framework must be formed within the assemblies, which will not be an alternative to them, but a part of the community's activity which focuses on the Right of Return. *(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)*

We must all speak on the basis of national responsibility as opposed to sectarianism or ideology. The refugee issue in particular does not require ideology; it requires national adherence to the Right of Return regardless of allegiance to Hamas, Jihad, DFLP, PFLP, Fateh, or any other group. (Participant, Public Meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

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We should not stop demanding our rights. A right shall never be lost if there are people to demand it. As long as you preserve your enthusiasm and demand your rights, you will obtain them.

(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

*What do you want from the PLO?
I want it to give us some benefits.*

like what?
To show us that we have rights, as Palestinians, to return, that we have land and properties.

You mean insisting upon the principles?
Of course, I can tell you that I reached this age, and I'm eager to visit my country, it is a dream for me. I visited the Prophet's grave (May God's blessings and peace be upon him), and now I long to visit my country, like I visited the Prophet. I can still remember its landmarks from when I was a child, and all we can say is Inshallah [God willing].

How do you think you can improve the relationship between you and the PLO?
By sweet talk during meetings

You mean you want to meet with them?
Of course, there must be meetings and communication.

Communication of what sort?
Of every sort. We can't convey anything to the PLO. Yet they must know our opinions, and there must be communication between young men and women and between the PLO. This is our right my son. And God knows what will happen tomorrow, nevertheless, for our country, and whatever happens, we will not forget Palestine. The child will become a man and the father of your children's children will not forget. Don't you ever believe that they will, and the victory is ours by God's will, no matter how long this will take. Everything has a start and an end

What must we do to activate this Palestinian community?

They must meet with each other, my dear. They must hold regular meetings to get to know each other and know each other's pains and needs, in order to be able to benefit each other.

So what are the community's problems?
Actually, I don't meet them very often.

What are the social and psychological problems it suffers from? Problems in general?
It suffers from all these problems

All of them?
Yes, all of them and the main problem are the drugs which they seek to get in any way. We, as Palestinians, must cling to our cause and not drugs, and other things. We claim it as our right, my son, and our right shall never die if God wills.

Moderator: what's your name, Hajja?
Latifa 'Umreen.

Welcome Latifa 'Umreen and I wish you a long life.
May God protect you and bless you and preserve you. And it is with your help that the victory will be achieved, God willing. I pray to God that you will return with your children. It isn't important that we do, but the important thing is that you return.

You will return as well, God willing. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)