

‘The fourth generation remembers’: Nakba commemorated in shadow of Gaza war

Monday 20 May 2024, by [BISHARAT Ghousoon](#), [ZOUBI Baker](#) (Date first published: 14 May 2024).

Thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel joined the annual March of Return, with many making connections to the violent displacement in Gaza.

In the shadow of what many Palestinians are describing as a second Nakba in Gaza, around 15,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel participated in the 27th annual March of Return on Tuesday. After gathering in the northern city of Shefa-Amr, participants marched to the site of [Hawsha](#) and [Al-Kasair](#), Palestinian villages that were forcibly depopulated during the Nakba of 1948 and subsequently destroyed.

Although Nakba Day is officially marked on May 15, the March of Return is held every year on Israel’s Independence Day, under the slogan “Their independence is our Nakba.” In recent years, the march has become the central mobilizing event for Palestinian citizens of Israel, uniting all groups and political forces. It is organized by the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Israel, which selects one of the [more than 600](#) Palestinian localities uprooted by Zionist or Israeli militias in 1947-49 as the march’s destination.

The number of Palestinians who were expelled or forced to flee from their homes in those years and prevented from returning was around 750,000; the number displaced in Gaza since October 7 exceeds [1.9 million](#).

“Without a doubt, this year’s march is different from all its predecessors, although marches took place in the past under difficult circumstances for the Palestinian people,” said journalist and activist Makhbula Nassar, a member of the organizing committee. “As we march to emphasize our commitment to the UN-recognized Right of Return, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians — the children and grandchildren of those displaced in 1948 — are living once again through mass displacement.”

Commemorating the Nakba under the present circumstances, Nassar explained, is “a real challenge, but we are not compromising on continuing our activity, which has been going on for years. Its value has grown in recent years as a unifying event that speaks to all members of Arab society, although this year, the accompanying feelings are much more difficult.”

A protester holds a sign at the 27th annual March of Return in the depopulated villages of Hawsha and Al-Kasair, northern Israel, May 14, 2024. (Ahmad Al-Bazz)

In addition to the ongoing assault on Gaza, this year’s march took place under the oppressive weight of an extreme-right Israeli government. Since coming to power a year and a half ago, this government has slashed budgets for Palestinian communities; continued to neglect the spiraling problem of [organized crime](#) and violence; and ramped up house demolitions — most recently with the [razing of an entire Bedouin village](#) in the Naqab/Negev last week in order to expand a highway.

Following these demolitions, the [High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens](#) — the non-governmental body regarded as the national representative of Israel's 2 million Palestinian citizens — called on the entire Palestinian public in Israel to participate in the March of Return, even describing their mass participation as a “national test.”

‘I see myself as a child in the eyes of every girl in Gaza’

As with [every act of protest](#) initiated by Palestinian citizens of Israel since October 7, the Israeli police impeded organization of the march, although they did not prevent it from taking place. “The police and other official bodies, such as the Fire Authority and Magen David Adom [Israel's emergency medical service], have made many demands — including that we not to use ‘inciting slogans,’ according to their definition,” Mosa Sagher, a member of the organizing committee whose family was displaced from the village of Hawsha, told +972.

For months, the police [criminalized all anti-war demonstrations](#). In early November, they prohibited a protest organized by the High Follow-Up Committee in Nazareth, and arrested and interrogated several of its leaders. Only recently have any demonstrations been granted permits, including the [Land Day](#) commemorations that took place at the end of March.

Protesters wave Palestinian flags during the 27th annual March of Return in the depopulated villages of Hawsha and Al-Kasair, northern Israel, May 14, 2024. (Ahmad Al-Bazz)

“There has been a kind of fear in recent months among the public, and maybe some people are still a little concerned,” Sagher continued. “But in general, we feel that the sense of alarm has diminished. This year, in addition to the traditional slogans of the March of Return, our main demand was to end the war. The fact that the march was routed far from residential areas also reduced the possibility of tension.”

Salwa Copty, a board member of the organizing committee who was herself expelled from the village of [Ma'alul](#) during the Nakba, described the parallels between her own experience and what Palestinians in Gaza are facing today at the hands of the Israeli military. “The children who suddenly find themselves without homes, without families, the scenes of mass displacement — [it all] reminds me of my childhood,” she told +972.

Before Copty was born, she said, Zionist forces killed her father when he went out to buy food. Her mother was in the advanced months of pregnancy when they were uprooted in 1948. “They hid the location of my father's grave from us and prevented us from going there for more than 70 years, and now we see it all coming back in Gaza,” she said. “It is Nakba in the full sense of the word.

“For years I have been saying that the Nakba and I are twins — it has accompanied me throughout my life,” Copty continued. “And now the sight of Gaza burns me, reminding me of my tragedy. I see myself as a child in the eyes of every girl in Gaza. This pain has motivated me to participate in the march and call for an immediate end to the war.

Protesters gather in front of the stage during the 27th annual March of Return in the depopulated villages of Hawsha and Al-Kasair, northern Israel, May 14, 2024. (Ahmad Al-Bazz)

“After the Nakba, there are [Israelis] who say they entered a country empty of people, so we insist on organizing the March of Return to remind the world that we do not forget the Nakba or the hundreds of villages that were uprooted,” Copty added. “In the current circumstances, the march carries even greater importance.”

After making an appearance at the commemorations, Palestinian rapper and actor Tamer Nafar told +972: "Performing today at the March of Return affirmed our solidarity with Gaza and made a clear link between what has been happening for over seven months and the Nakba of 1948. Since October 7, the authorities, this fascist dictatorship, have tried to silence us all. But you cannot separate Gaza from the settlements in the West Bank, crime and violence among Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the Nakba. It's all connected.

"The crowd was a mix of young and old, men and women, babies and teenagers," Nafar continued. "This in itself is a source of light that will fill me with hope for some time. It's very moving to see Palestinian kids at the march singing Palestinian national songs. A long time ago, Israeli leaders thought the third generation of the Nakba will forget. This is the fourth generation and they still remember."

Baker Zoubi and Ghousoon Bisharat

P.S.

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<https://www.972mag.com/nakba-march-of-return-gaza/>

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

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- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment – but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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