

**1948: Independence or Catastrophe?  
Document Analysis**

**Document A** provides two perspectives—Zionist and Palestinian—of what happened in 1948. Read the document carefully and answer the following questions thoroughly on binder paper.

1. How can the same historical event be known as a War of Independence and a Catastrophe?
2. What are the main differences between the historical narratives recounted by each side?
3. List 3–5 established facts that are verified in both narratives.
4. How did the actions of the Hagana and the Jewish community affect the Palestinians and neighboring Arab countries? Give a specific example.
5. How did the actions of the Arab armies and the Palestinian community affect the Jewish population? Give a specific example.
6. What lasting outcomes did this war create? Give 5 specific examples.

**Document B: The Deir Yassin Massacre**

1. What happened at Deir Yassin?
2. What do you think was the goal of the Deir Yassin Massacre?
3. What impact did massacres like this one have on the success of the establishment of the state of Israel?

**Document C: The Israeli Declaration of Independence**

1. Why was Palestine chosen as the location to establish the Jewish state of Israel? Explain the Jewish historical and religious roots in this land.
2. What historical event made it urgent that Jews have a national homeland of their own where they could feel safe?
3. The Israeli Declaration of Independence states: “Accordingly, We, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called Israel.”  
What does this statement mean?  
How do the authors justify creating a state in Palestine?
4. Who can immigrate to Israel?
5. What are the founding principles of the country? How are they similar to the founding principles of the United States?
6. How does the declaration characterize Arabs?

**Document D: Palestinian Refugees**

1. What do you notice in the four pictures of Palestinians leaving their homes? Include specific details
2. What do you notice about the refugee camps? Include specific details.
3. Look at the maps. What do they illustrate?
4. What do the Palestinian refugees who are quoted have to say about their experiences?

**Document E: Jewish Immigration to Israel**

1. What do you notice about the Jewish immigrants arriving at the ports in Israel? Be specific.
2. How do you think these people felt about getting to come to Israel?
3. How many Holocaust survivors lived in Israel in 2008? (The 60-year of Israeli independence was marked in 2008.) How many Holocaust survivors originally came to Israel?
4. How did Holocaust survivors integrate themselves into Israel? How did they contribute to the country's development?

### Israeli Perspective: The War of Independence

In 1947, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 181 (the Partition Plan) calling for two independent states to be established. Members of the Jewish community danced in the streets to celebrate the creation of a Jewish state. But, shortly afterward, Palestinian Arabs and volunteers from Arab countries that rejected the partition plan attacked, and the war began. This war is known as the War of Independence because it resulted in the state of Israel.

Local Arab troops and volunteers attacked isolated Jewish communities, Jews in cities with mixed populations, and Jews on the roads. They also employed terror tactics—all Jewish people, settlements, and property were considered legitimate targets. The most serious terror attacks were against Haifa oil refineries, where 39 Jews were murdered in December 1947.

Before Britain withdrew from the country, the Israeli leadership decided it had to change its tactics from defensive to offensive and prepared Plan Daled. The purpose was to secure control of the areas the U.N. Partition Plan had said were part of the Jewish State.

In the beginning of the war, Arab residents started leaving their communities in the land of Israel. Most of the Jews welcomed the flight of the Arabs. Using Plan Daled, Israeli forces also began to deport Arabs. However, not all Arabs were deported and there were no high-level political orders to do so. Most Arabs fled because of their own fears, not in response to the actions of Israelis. During the course of the war about 370 Arab villages were destroyed.

On May 14, 1948, the Jewish leaders met to announce the establishment of the State of Israel. At midnight that night Arab armies invaded the new state. The various defensive forces that later united into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) tried to block the invading Arab armies. After a month of fighting all sides were exhausted and accepted the U.N. call for a one-month cease-fire. After the cease-fire ended, fighting started again for 10 days before another cease-fire was signed. In October 1948, the IDF launched another attack.

### Palestinian Perspective: *Al-Nakba* (The Catastrophe)

In 1947, the U.N. General Assembly passed resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish. This was the start to the countdown for the establishment of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948, and the 1948 Catastrophe, which uprooted and dispersed the Palestinian people.

The Catastrophe was: 1. the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1948 Palestine war; 2. their acceptance of the truce; 3. the displacement of most the Palestinian people from their cities and villages; and 4. the emergence of the Palestinian refugee problem.

Britain bears most of the responsibility for the defeat of the Palestinian people in 1948. During the time it controlled Palestine, from 1917-1948, Britain did all it could to suppress the Palestinian people and to arrest and deport their leaders. The British did not allow Palestinians to exercise their right to defend themselves and their land against the Zionist movement.

The British allowed the Zionist movement to have its own armed brigade attached to the British Army. This brigade took part in battles during World War II and acquired training and experience in the techniques of war. Because of this, the Jewish military was superior to the Palestinian army during the 1948 war. The fighting that began in 1948 quickly turned into an unequal conflict. Zionist forces were organized, armed, and trained—superior to armies from Palestine and other Arab countries.

The results of the Catastrophe, from which Palestinians still suffer, are not simple at all. The word “catastrophe” (*nakba*) actually expresses what happened to this nation: the assassination of rights, murder of the land, and uprooting of human beings. This did not occur by chance.

The destruction of 418 Palestinian villages is the best evidence for the brutality to which Palestinians were exposed. Some 1,400,000 people inhabited Palestine in 1948. After the Catastrophe, about 750,000 Palestinians were left homeless. Families were separated.

The first election of the Israeli parliament in January 1949 set the state of Israel well on its way to becoming an independent and democratic country. The U.N. mediated the armistice agreements that were signed by Israel and the Arab countries. The agreements meant the end of direct fighting, but did not bring peace to the area. Israel achieved its independence thanks to its organizational ability and the remarkable mobilization of the entire Jewish population: tens of thousands of citizens and soldiers participating in the fighting.

Suddenly they found themselves exiled from their homes in an alien world that regarded them as a different kind of frightening human being—refugees! Instead of investigating the reasons for the forced migration and displacement of the Palestinian people and working to find a solution to the problem, all the international community did was provide them with humanitarian assistance.

Article 11 of UN Resolution 194 (December 1948) states that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live peacefully should be allowed to do so as soon as possible, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those who decide not to return. Despite these recommendations, Palestinians continue to suffer in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and elsewhere around the world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adwan, Sami, Dan Bar-On, and Eyal Naveh. 2012. Peace Research Institute in the Middle East. *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel/Palestine*. The New Press.



**Deir Yassin Massacre (1948)**

Early in the morning of April 9, 1948, commandos of the Irgun (headed by Menachem Begin) and the Stern Gang attacked Deir Yassin, a village with about 750 Palestinian residents. The village lay outside the area assigned by the United Nations to the Jewish State; it had a peaceful reputation. But it was located on high ground in the corridor between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Deir Yassin was slated for occupation under Plan Dalet. The mainstream Jewish defense force, the Hagana, authorized the irregular terrorist forces of the Irgun and the Stern Gang to perform the takeover. In all over 100 men, women, and children were systematically murdered. Fifty-three orphaned children were literally dumped along the wall of the Old City, where they were found by Miss Hind Hussein and brought behind the American Colony Hotel to her home, which was to become the Dar El-Tifl El-Arabi orphanage. (source: deiryassin.org)

Natan Yellin-Mor (Jewish) responded to the massacre:

*When I remember what led to the massacre of my mother, sister and other members of my family, I can't accept this massacre. I know that in the heat of battle such things happen, and I know that the people who do these things don't start out with such things in mind. They kill because their own comrades have being killed and wounded, and they want their revenge at that very moment. But who tells them to be proud of such deeds?  
(From Eyal Naveh and Eli bar-Navi, Modern Times, part 2, page 228)*

One of the young men of the Deir Yassin village reported what he has been told by his mother:

*My mother escaped with my two small brothers, 1-year old and 2-years old. My aunts and their small children were also with her. When the Jews met them on the road, they wanted to kill my small brothers and my aunts' children. My mother and my aunts started to beg them and said: 'We will give you all the gold and money we have, but do not kill our children.' The Jews did not respond to them and they killed my brothers and my cousins. They said: 'Now, go away and tell everyone what you have seen.'*<sup>2</sup>

The behavior of the Zionist gangs was meant to spread terror and fear among Arabs and to force them to leave their villages. When Zionist gangs attacked the village of Zir'in on the night of April 20, 1948, as they charged they screamed: "Kadima, kadima (go ahead, go ahead) Deir Yassin, Deir Yassin."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nihad Zeitawi, edited by: Sharif Kana'a, *Destroyed Palestinian villages*, Series No. (4): Deir Yassin, Bir Zeit University – Documents and Research center, 1987, p.57

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Mari'I, edited by Shrif Kana'na *Destroyed Palestinian Villages*, Series No. (16). The Village of Zir'in Bir Ziet University, Documents and Research Center, 1994. *An interview conducted with Mustafa Ali Al-Jaber (23-6-1986)*, p.146.

# Israeli Declaration of Independence

**Issued at Tel Aviv on May 14, 1948 (5th of Iyar, 5708)**

The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious, and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

Exiled from Palestine, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom.

Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood. In recent decades they returned in masses. They reclaimed the wilderness, revived their language, built cities and villages and established a vigorous and ever-growing community with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace yet were ever prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessing of progress to all inhabitants of the country.

In the year 1897 the First Zionist Congress, inspired by Theodor Herzl's vision of the Jewish State, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country.

This right was acknowledged by the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and re-affirmed by the Mandate of the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.

The Nazi Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish state, which would solve the problem of Jewish homelessness by opening the gates to all Jews and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations.

The survivors of the European catastrophe, as well as Jews from other lands, proclaiming their right to a life of dignity, freedom and labor, and undeterred by hazards, hardships and obstacles, have tried unceasingly to enter Palestine.

In the Second World War the Jewish people in Palestine made a full contribution in the struggle of the freedom-loving nations against the Nazi evil. The sacrifices of their soldiers and the efforts of their workers gained them title to rank with the peoples who founded the United Nations.

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution for the establishment of an independent Jewish State in Palestine, and called upon the inhabitants of the country to take such steps as may be necessary on their part to put the plan into effect.

This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent State may not be revoked. It is, moreover, the self-evident right of the Jewish people to be a nation, as all other nations, in its own sovereign State.

ACCORDINGLY, WE, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, met together in solemn assembly today, the day of the

## Document C

termination of the British mandate for Palestine, by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish and of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations,

HEREBY PROCLAIM the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called ISRAEL.

WE HEREBY DECLARE that as from the termination of the Mandate at midnight, this night of the 14th and 15th May, 1948, and until the setting up of the duly elected bodies of the State in accordance with a Constitution, to be drawn up by a Constituent Assembly not later than the first day of October, 1948, the present National Council shall act as the provisional administration, shall constitute the Provisional Government of the State of Israel.

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion; will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew Prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of the shrines and Holy Places of all religions; and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be ready to cooperate with the organs and representatives of the United Nations in the implementation of the resolution of the Assembly of Nov. 29, 1947, and will take steps to bring about the Economic Union over the whole of Palestine.

We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building of its State and to admit Israel into the family of nations.

In the midst of wanton aggression, we yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to return to the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, with full and equal citizenship and due representation in its bodies and institutions—provisional or permanent.

We offer peace and unity to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all.

Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations—the redemption of Israel.

With trust in Almighty God, we set our hand to this Declaration, at this Session of the Provisional State Council, in the city of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the fifth of Iyar, 5708, the 14th day of May, 1948.

Source: fmep.org

**Document D: Palestinian Refugees**



Palestinian Refugee Displacement from Ramle in 1948 (Source: Red Cross)



Palestinian Refugee Camp, 1949 (Source: Red Cross)







Refugee Camp

Landownership in Palestine and the UN Partition Plan, 1947



Palestinian Villages Depopulated in 1948 and 1967, and Razed by Israel

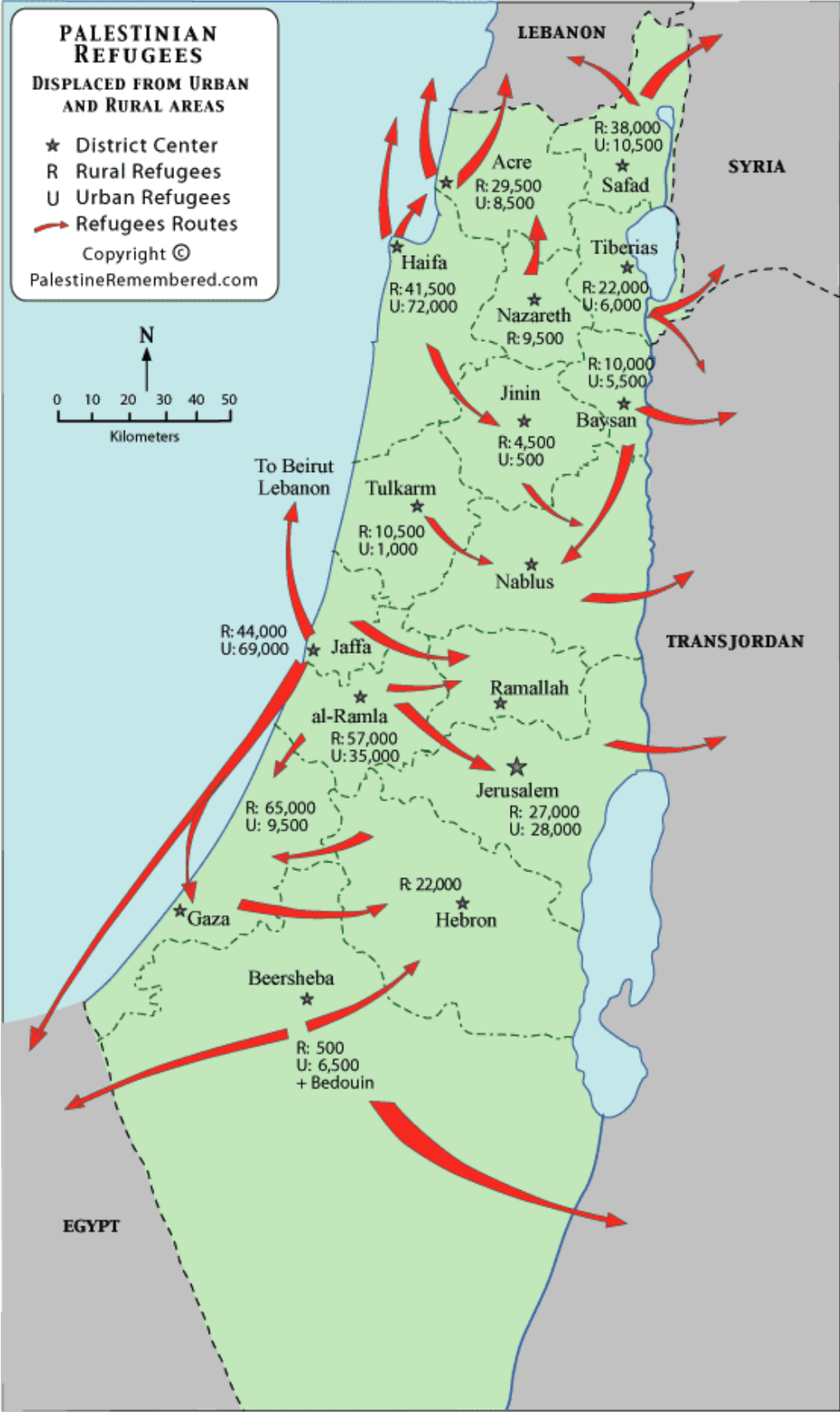


**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)**

“Everyone thought that we were just going for a few days, and then we’d come back. We didn’t take anything with us, just a tiny bit. The people—where can they go? The land must be returned to its people. We have houses and land. Everything we have is there. It’s not only one or two who lost their land, it’s thousands. Our land is so big! A lot of land with oranges, and fruits, and guavas and trees. . . . The sea is there! And the valley. The people who used to have land and harvest everything themselves, now they just sit at home, and are given a little bit of sugar and rice.” - Palestinian refugee

“I remember the homeland. And I still remember the Jews. I remember the Jews started to shoot bullets on the eastern side of one of the fields, towards a group of boys playing. Their parents started shouting and calling them. I remember. Then people fled—riding donkeys and camels. We went to Lid . . . then to Tire. Then to Jimz . . . after that, to Funduq. Then we went to Deir Ghassana. From Deir Ghassana, to Deir Sharaf, From Deir Sharaf, to Balata village. We set up near Jacob’s Well. We started making shacks from burlap sacks.” - Palestinian refugee







Document E: Jewish Immigrants Come to Israel







Approximately 250,000 Holocaust survivors currently live in Israel. This figure represents about half the number of survivors who made their way to that country since it was founded. In the history of immigration, there has been no comparable story. Rarely, if ever, has a group of immigrants made so profound an impact on a society and so fully participated in charting its course.

The concept of choice is a major theme in the lives of the survivors who came to Israel. When World War II ended, most of the survivors chose to rebuild their lives, and chose to do so in the land of Israel, the land they called home. For some, this was too late, and they were unable to rehabilitate themselves. But most discovered vast inner resources to forge new lives for themselves. Their collective story is one of individual victory and the triumph of the human spirit.

They have left their mark in all spheres: building new towns and cities, the military, industry, the economy, law and culture. Survivors in Israel include painters and graphic designers, poets and authors, athletes and dancers, academics and philosophers—most of whom are perceived by the general public as native-born Israelis. Almost from the start, their influence went beyond the personal realm and impacted the daily lives of all Israelis. With their arrival in the country, survivors pursued two different tracks, which may be called the “Israeli track” and the “Holocaust remembrance track.” Along the Israeli track survivors focused on nurturing and reinforcing their clear “Israeliness,” joining those who were

shaping Israeli culture. On the other track they have engaged in the perpetuation of Holocaust remembrance through commemoration and documentation.

1 Prof. Hanna Yablonka