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## **A Campaign to Challenge Israeli Apartheid**

### **Targeting Jewish National Fund (JNF) Charitable Status in Canada to be Launched on Land Day**

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On 30 March 1976, thousands of indigenous Palestinians occupied by Israel in 1948 participated in a mass strike against systematic discrimination triggered by the government's plans to expropriate 5,500 acres of Arab-owned land. The villages of Arraba, Sakhnin, Deir Hanna and other smaller communities in the Galilee – a region of northern Israel with a Palestinian majority – were particularly targeted. The Israeli police responded to the demonstrations with violence, killing six unarmed Palestinian youths, wounding another hundred activists and arresting over three-hundred people.

In the intervening years, these events have become consecrated in Palestinian memory as Land Day and are celebrated on both sides of the 'Green Line' (i.e. the 1949 Armistice Line that separates 'Israel' from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). Just as the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 served to galvanize a whole generation of anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, the killings of Raja Abu Rayya, Khader Khalayla, Khadija Shawahneh, Khair Yassin, Mohsen Taha and Ra'fat Zuheiri on 30 March 1976 mobilized a sense of community among Palestinians in opposition to the systematic racism they faced within the Israeli state. The demonstrations were an important moment in the re-invigoration of community activism through organizations like the Communist Party and younger groupings of Palestinian activists such as the Abna-l-Balaad movement (or Sons of the Land).

The massacre also highlighted the Israeli government's strategy of *yehud ha-galil*, the project of 'Judaizing' the Galilee, which remained a clandestine program until 1976 when it was openly adopted as a slogan of the Israeli Housing Ministry. The rationale for this policy was provided by Israel Koenig - the head of the Israeli Interior Ministry's Galilee Division - in a report drafted for then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. This report was leaked in 1976. It claimed that the Palestinian citizens of Israel were "a cancer in the Jewish body that had to be curbed and contained" and argued for a policy of "terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population." The Koenig report led to a brutal wave of land confiscations and the establishment of Jewish settlements known as *mitzpim* ('lookouts' in Hebrew) in the Galilee, culminating eventually with the general strikes and protests of Land Day.

Uri Davis' recent book *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within* (2004) helps to underline the on-going colonial and racist nature of the Israeli state itself. Davis' book argues that a central component of Israel's colonization project continues to be the so-called 'redemption of the land' – read: the forcible expropriation of Palestinian livelihood for the purposes of Jewish-only settlement. The slogan of 'redeeming' land was used by early Zionists to highlight one of the central goals of the Zionist movement, which was to acquire lands in Palestine for Jewish-only settlement. This slogan was first adopted by early Zionists and entrusted as a task to the *Keren Kayemet LeYesrae'l* or Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), which was established during the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 as an executive arm of the Congress. Since then the JNF has continued to acquire lands for Jewish-only settlement, often establishing new communities or 'natural reserves' over destroyed Palestinian villages.

This land-grab has traditionally focused on areas whose demographic composition remained predominantly Palestinian after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 – known to Palestinians as the Nakba (Catastrophe) during which 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed, 220,000 individuals were internally displaced, at least 1,000 civilians killed, over 530 villages and 11 towns were destroyed and millions of acres of land were expropriated. The 'internal' colonization that followed this bloody chapter in the establishment of the state of Israel has translated into forcible attempts to 'Judaize' the Galilee and the Naqab, in southern Israel, and the further expropriation of roughly another one-million acres of Palestinian land. While prior to 1948 Palestinians owned 94% of the land in what became the Israeli state of today, this number was reduced to 3% of all lands in this polity as a result of successive waves of systematic land-confiscation. By 1993, 80% of the lands that had remained in Palestinian hands after the Nakba were now in the hands of new Jewish settlements or the Israeli state itself.

The practice continues to this day in regions of Israel that are still predominantly inhabited by Palestinians. While international media focuses on the illegal Israeli colonies established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – which are often euphemistically referred to as 'settlements' - the privately-run JNF, in tandem with other Israeli state agencies, continues to lay claim to Palestinian lands within Israel. Most recently, the JNF has begun targeting the Bedouin populations of the Naqab. This is part of a broader process in which the Bedouin population of the state, numbering some 110,000 people has been systematically separated from its land base over the years. Most recently this process has occurred through government fumigation programs, Jewish settlement activity in the Naqab and the IDF's expropriation of lands inhabited by the Bedouin for 'military' purposes (including the creation of firing ranges, closed military areas, etc)

It should be noted that the JNF manages its lands policy through a range of acquisitions coordinated with the Israeli Lands Administration (ILA). The ILA is responsible for the management of all publicly held lands in Israel and is governed by the Basic Law establishing the ILA (1960); the Israel Lands Law (1960); and the Covenant between the State of Israel and the World Zionist Organization (1960). According to the ILA's own data it is responsible for managing 93% of all lands in the state (most of which were formerly owned by Palestinians). The JNF holds half the seats in this institution and thus has an important say in the way these lands are managed. According to the JNF's Memorandum of Association it is responsible for raising funds for Jewish-only settlement.

Despite the racist and colonial nature of the Fund it is nonetheless listed as a charitable organization in most Western countries. In Canada, the JNF raised \$15-million in the early 1970s to establish 'Canada Park' a 'recreational' area built on land-occupied by the Israeli military in 1967 in order to cover-up the destroyed Palestinian villages of Imwas, Yallu, and Beit Nuba. Such a blatant manipulation of historical memory in the name of 'nature conservation' highlights the way in which the JNF and ILA are used in an attempt to erase any signs of the indigenous population of Palestine. According to a 1986 UN report prepared by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories, which dealt, in part, with the situation of those displaced by the hostilities of 1967:

"One particular illustration of this situation is the fate of the inhabitants of Imwas, Beit-Nuba and Yalu, reduced to the state of wandering refugees since their villages were razed by the occupying authorities in 1967. The Special Committee considers it a matter of deep concern that these villagers have persistently been denied the right to return to their land on which Canada Park has been built by the Jewish National Fund of Canada and where the Israeli authorities are reportedly planning to plant a forest instead of allowing the reconstruction of the destroyed villages."

Spurred by Davis' work, in the summer of 2004 activists from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) in Scotland launched a campaign to strip the JNF of its charitable status in Scotland. The demand put forward by PSC activists is one that can be produced in other countries were the JNF

enjoys charitable status. It allows people to begin challenging the racist policies and institutions upon which the Israeli state and the dispossession of the Palestinian people in 1948 was built. In November 2004, the Scottish parliament's Communities Committee agreed to take the PSC's concerns into account in deliberations on the new Charities Bill before the legislature. The successes of the PSC should be built upon in other countries. An international effort to challenge the JNF's charitable status could form an important component in mobilizing a broader international movement against Israeli apartheid. In 2006, people in Palestine will be marking the 30th anniversary of Land Day. 2006 will also mark the year when the world will observe the 30th anniversary of the entry into force of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (on 18 July 1976) – a largely forgotten convention that was never ratified by Israel (or other settler-colonial states like the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand for that matter), but that clearly outlines the illegal nature of the apartheid policies practiced by the Israeli state and its affiliated agencies. The sections of the convention that apply most directly to the JNF and the ILA are worth quoting here at length (although the entire convention, which can be found at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm>, is worth reading). The convention states:

## Article II

For the purpose of the present Convention, the term "the crime of apartheid", which shall include similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as practised in southern Africa, shall apply to the following inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them:

[...] (c) Any legislative measures and other measures calculated to prevent a racial group or groups from participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the country and the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such a group or groups, in particular by denying to members of a racial group or groups basic human rights and freedoms, including [...] the right to leave and to return to their country, [...] the right to freedom of movement and residence [...]

d) Any measures including legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups, [...] the expropriation of landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof;

In Toronto, Palestinians and their allies will be launching a campaign to strip the JNF of its charitable status in Canada this Land Day. We hope that it will be a stepping stone in broadening the international struggle against Israeli apartheid and a means of holding our own governments accountable for their obligations under international law.