

ADL International Report...

The Gaza Strip: An Age-Old Problem

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automatically apply to workers from the administered areas. Strict guidelines were established to protect Palestinians from exploitation, requiring Israeli employers to contribute to a national fund providing severance pay; accident insurance; holiday and sick leave; health services inside Israel and medical insurance and facilities within the administered areas. As a final guarantee against on-the-job discrimination, all salaries and benefits were to be dispersed through a special fund managed by the Labor Ministry.

As Dayan had hoped, his plan resulted in unprecedented economic growth to all concerned and the quality of life was vastly improved on both sides of the Green Line. Due to Israel's efforts, unemployment dropped from 48% in 1967 to 0.4% in 1983. Similarly, government-built health facilities and medical technology transferred from Israel into the area, resulted in a significant decline in the infant mortality rate, dropping from 87 per 1,000 in 1968 to 41 per 1,000 in 1983. Productivity too has skyrocketed since 1967; today, agriculture and small trade have replaced smuggling and terror as the main forms of employment in Gaza.

These gains notwithstanding, Dayan's system began to show cracks in May 1972 when Israel opened its borders to all residents of the territories entering the country between the hours of 5:00 and 1:00 A.M. With the new regulations in place, the army cancelled its policy of checking all work and travel permits at the borders.

No longer dependent on Labor Ministry permits to pass the military roadblocks, increasing numbers of Palestinians began working as independent day laborers. The fact that day laborers were paid in cash and could evade income tax and health insurance deductions proved enticing to the refugees, many of whom, for nationalistic reasons, had already rejected the benefits offered them by Israel. Suddenly, a pool of illegal, unprotected workers emerged as easy prey for exploitation by greedy employers.

This stated, recent comparisons between the exploitation of illegal Palestinian workers and the South African government's policy of discrimination against black laborers are belied by the facts. Unlike South Africa, where blacks have little redress in the work place, the illegal Gazan or West Bank day laborer may apply to Israel's National Insurance Institute if injured on the job. Although many Palestinians refuse this compensation, those who have filed claims have

been reimbursed in full. Additionally, the illegal workers who pay no income tax and make no contribution to the National Insurance Fund are still entitled by law to receive all cost-of-living increases as well as other benefits gained in collective agreements. Should an employer fail to increase the illegal worker's wages, that worker has the right to request the Labor Ministry or the Histadrut (Israel's trade union) to intervene, and, if necessary, take the employer to court.

Israel's efforts to improve the quality of economic and personal life in Gaza has met with considerable praise in some quarters of the world and with resounding condemnation in others — the latter being particularly true within the Arab world itself. For example, among the most controversial of steps taken to improve life in Gaza was Israel's decision to offer new housing as an alternative to the densely packed camps which have served as home to two-thirds of the refugees since 1949.

During the 1970s, Israel, in cooperation with eight international organizations, purchased state land to build low-cost homes for the camps' inhabitants. However, like other rehabilitation programs initiated by Israel, the rehousing project has been denounced by Arab and PLO leaders who claim that the refugees should remain in the camps until an independent Palestinian state is established. At first, Arab government opposition and PLO intimidation

prevented the program's implementation. But today, the real needs of the refugees have begun to outweigh external opposition to the program and thousands of Palestinians have left the camps for modern facilities built by Israel. Sadly, despite its obvious benefits to the refugees, the rehousing project is still criticized by Arab and PLO leaders. They argue that only by staying in the camps can the Palestinians keep world attention focused on their cause.

Conclusion

As Gaza's most recent administrator, Israel has done more to improve life for its residents than any of its predecessors. What is missing for Gazans' now as in the past, is hope for an independent political future.

Israel has repeatedly stated its willingness to enter talks and negotiate the future of the territories. But, in the 20 years since the Six-Day War, no Arab state has responded in kind. Egypt, moreover, virtually abandoned Gaza during Camp David and has no interest in regaining control of the area. Jordan's attention has largely been focused on the West Bank and it has expressed little interest in helping the Strip's troubled population by negotiating Gaza's fate.

Thus the current impasse. As long as Arab leaders and the PLO refuse to accept her existence, Israel will have no partner with which to talk peace and chances for Palestinian political representation will remain tragically dim.

Soviets Allowing Jews Mutual Visits Between Israel & USSR

(JTA) — Soviet emigration officials are allowing Soviet Jews to apply for tourist visas to visit Israel and have eased restrictions on Israelis wishing to visit relatives in Moscow, the Israeli daily Maariv reported Tuesday.

Maariv quoted reports from Moscow saying that an announcement was posted on the doors of the OVIR emigration agency there last week, announcing that "those wishing to visit Israel may now apply to do so."

Israelis wishing to visit relatives in Moscow, meanwhile, may now apply to Moscow via the diplomatic missions of Eastern European countries, who pass on the entry tourist visas.

Previously, such requests for visas to visit the Soviet Union had to be made through Rakah, the Israeli Communist party. The new procedures have been confirmed by the Israeli Public Council for Soviet Jewry, which also says that the number of mutual visits has increased recently.

Maariv quoted a Soviet resident now visiting his family in Israel as saying that when he applied to OVIR for a tourist visa he was told, "No problem. Make an application."

He was granted permission for the visa after a three-month wait and a payment of 200 rubles, he said. The visa itself arrived two weeks later through the Dutch Embassy in Moscow, which looks after Israel's diplomatic interests in the Soviet Union.

Soviet Jewry activists in the United States said that the eased restrictions are related to

diplomatic strategies initiated by the Soviets this summer, when Soviet emigres in the United States were granted brief visas to visit relatives in the Soviet Union.

"For the Russians, there are a lot of advantages" in easing restrictions on tourists, said Jerry Goodman, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. Goodman said the new procedures provide the Soviets with improved public relations, a new source for bringing hard currency into the Soviet Union and what he calls a "low risk, non-political way of having ties with Israel."

In addition, said Goodman, by allowing separated families to visit one another, the Soviets are hoping to "take the edge off" of the desire of Soviet Jews to leave the Soviet Union.

Echoing Goodman's views was Micah Naftalin, executive director of the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, who said in a telephone interview, "The Soviets must feel that this might weaken the pressure by emigres who keep pushing for appropriate emigration levels.

"For instance," he said, "some Soviet Jews in this country are reluctant to do anything that might jeopardize their chances of getting a visa to visit their families in the Soviet Union."

Naftalin added that the Soviets have been sending "mixed messages" to the United States since the days leading up to the superpower summit meeting between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Prior to the summit, OVIR had seemed to be loosening up requirements that Soviet Jews applying for exit visas must have first-degree relatives in Israel. But recently, Naftalin said, those same officials have announced that after the first of the year, having first-degree relatives will again be required for application. It is as if to say, "the summit is over now," he said.

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