



**al majdal** aims to raise public awareness and support for a just solution to Palestinian residency and refugee issues

## Palestinian REFUGEES and the *Final Status Negotiations*

### The RIGHT of RETURN is Sacred, Non-Negotiable: Not a Matter of Opinion Polls

Political Statement on the Final Status Negotiations issued by the  
*Union of Youth Activity Centres*/West Bank & Gaza Refugee Camps

The final status negotiations, which reopened in September 1999, will directly confront all those hot and existential issues, which have constituted the Arab-Zionist conflict for the past century. Among these issues, is the one issue central to our people, i.e. the Palestinian refugees. As the negotiations commence, we are confronted with the same old, rigid positions, which - upheld by all Israeli governments in the past and present - make up the Israeli consensus on Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, water, and sovereignty. According to this consensus, these issues, as if a matter of the holy Torah, are treated as non-negotiable. We are to accept this consensus as sacred and we are not supposed to challenge it. The Israeli position - rigid to the bones - is supported, moreover, by the current balance of forces, including the shameful US alliance.

Given the difficult climate under which the final status negotiations are to take place, we find some Arab friends and brothers here and there, who volunteer their own opinion to the media and take the role of the refugees themselves. They are ready to sit at the negotiation table and speak on behalf of the refugees: as if citizenship would cancel our identity and our commitment to the land and the people; as if the passport of an exile or host country would cancel our original birth certificates; as if being in exile, in the refugee camps, would cancel our ancestors' ownership right over the land.

Convinced of the justice of our cause and our right to defend it, we would like to present our analysis and opinion to the above-mentioned friends and brothers, in order to save them from thinking on our behalf, and to prevent them from disregarding our rights. We do so before misunderstandings turn into misconceptions, and before mistakes turn into sins. Along this line, we, the *Union of Youth Activity Centres* in the Refugee Camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, wish to announce and emphasize the following basic points:

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