

Forced Migration Review

Forced Migration Review provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information and ideas between researchers, refugees and internally displaced people, and those who work with them. It is published in English, Spanish, Arabic and French by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

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Front cover photo:

The eight-metre-high concrete Wall surrounds the West Bank town of Qalqilya.
Paul Jeffrey/ACT International

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from the editors

This issue of FMR was planned long before the humanitarian crisis which has displaced 20% of the Lebanese population. Articles look beyond the current events to what most international observers regard as the root causes of conflict and displacement in the Middle East. The protracted nature of the displacement, the complexity of the means used to dispossess Palestinians and the apparent double standards of the international community do indeed make this a case apart.

From high points in the West Bank it is possible to see across Israel/Palestine – from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. The articles in this issue discuss how displacement from this tiny sliver of land has had and continues to have far-reaching global consequences. The great majority of the seven million Palestinian refugees still live within 100km of the borders of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip where their homes of origin are located. They are refugees because Israel – committed to a permanent Jewish majority and granting citizenship to any member of the Jewish diaspora – denies Palestinians their basic human right to return to their homes of origin. Palestinians may be the world's largest refugee population, yet hardly any of them register on the global refugee tally kept by UNHCR as their initial displacement predates the 1951 Geneva Convention and the establishment of the refugee agency.

The fact that the Palestinian refugee crisis continues to fester represents perhaps the gravest failure of the UN since its foundation. The international community has not exerted sufficient political will to advance durable solutions consistent with international law and Security Council resolutions requiring Israel to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory. Durable solutions for displaced Palestinians have been discussed without reference to the legal norms applied in other refugee cases. Refugee rights, entitlements to compensation or restitution and the rights to protection of those Palestinians living under continued military occupation were not central to the now-moribund Oslo peace process – nor are they part of the subsequent US-sponsored 'Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution'. In the absence of progress towards a durable solution, creeping annexation continues unchecked. Upon completion of Israel's Wall, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will be restricted to a series of non-contiguous enclaves which constitute an eighth of the area of historic Palestine. Despite pro-democracy rhetoric, Western response to the internationally-validated Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 has sparked a politically-induced crisis and crippled the Palestinian economy. Ordinary Palestinians are suffering as donors freeze funding required to maintain humanitarian assistance and development programmes.

It has been considerably harder than usual to raise funds for this FMR – even before the Lebanon emergency. We are therefore all the more grateful for financial support from the A M Qattan Foundation, DanChurchAid, Interpal, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Save the Children (UK), the Sir Joseph Hotung Programme on Law, Human Rights and Peace Building in the Middle East, the Sultan of Oman, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the Welfare Association.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all the authors, especially those who found time to write for us and consider our editing suggestions whilst responding to humanitarian crises in Gaza and Lebanon. This issue – and the funding which has enabled us to get this copy to you – would not have been possible without assistance from Jennifer Loewenstein, Abbas Shiblak, Angela Godfrey-Goldstein and Elizabeth Cabal.

The theme of the next issue of FMR – to be published in English in November – will be 'Sexual violence in conflict and beyond'. The April 2007 issue will include a feature section on 'Strengthening Southern protection and assistance capacity'. See www.fmreview.org/forthcoming.htm. We would welcome articles on Lebanon.

Some of you may be receiving FMR for the first time. We publish in English, Arabic, Spanish and French. If you would like to receive future issues – or to receive more copies – please contact us (using details opposite or the form on the back cover).

With our best wishes

Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris
Editors, Forced Migration Review

