

Palestine

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| Response to Information Request Number: | PAL99001.ZCH |
| Date: | December 17, 1998 |
| Subject: | Palestine/Occupied Territories: Information On Passports Issued By The Palestine National Authority |
| From: | INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC |
| Keywords: | Israel / Palestine / Passports / Documents / Freedom Of Movement |

Query:

1. Information on passports issued by the Palestine National Authority.
2. Whether the Immigration and Naturalization Service accepts that Palestine is now a country of citizenship for asylum analysis.

Response:

In accordance with the Oslo agreement signed in Washington on September 13, 1993, the Palestinian self-government began issuing Palestinian Authority Passport/Travel Documents in 1995.

The passport contains the following paragraph, which is signed by the Minister of the Interior or Director General of Civil Registration and Passport Department:

This passport/travel document is issued pursuant to the Palestinian Self Government Agreement according to Oslo Agreement signed in Washington on 13/9/1993.

According to the *Jordan Times*, Arab League Secretary General 'Isamat' Abd-al-Majid received the first copy of the Palestinian passport on March 29, 1995 from Muhammad al-Subayh, executive secretary of the Palestinian National Council. Noting that Hajj pilgrims would be the first to benefit from the new passports when crossing the Jordanian territories on their way to Saudi Arabia, sources at the Ministry of Interior, said the Palestinian Authority would begin issuing passports on Friday, March 31, 1995, to Palestinian residents of the two self-rule areas, Gaza and Jericho (*Jordan Times*, 30-31 Mar. 1995).

Deutsche Presse-Agentur reported that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) started issuing passports to the public in the self-ruling areas of Gaza and Jericho on Sunday, April 2, 1995. The first diplomatic passport, bearing the signature of PNA Chairman Yassir Arafat, was issued on April 1, 1995 to Saeb Erakaat, the minister for local government. "The act bore symbolic importance as a representation of Palestinian national aspirations and the start of the issuing was timed to allow Palestinians to travel to Mecca for the haj (holy pilgrimage) on their own national passports" (DPA, 2 Apr. 1995).

The *Jordan Times* also reported that: "Palestinians claim that donor countries, including the United States, would accept the passport as a 'travel document and not as a nationality.' But Palestinians argue that a passport still remains a 'crucial symbol of nationhood.'" (*Jordan Times*, 25 Jan. 1995).

According to the U.S. Department of State: "The [Palestinian Authority] issues passports and identification cards for Palestinians residing in the West Bank and Gaza. Bearers of

Palestinian passports do not need special exit permits from the PA, but do require reentry permits. They can travel both over the Allenby Bridge to Jordan and via Ben Gurion Airport in Israel.... Palestinians with passports from other countries are required by Israel to exit and enter (either via Ben Gurion or via land crossings) with a Palestinian passport. Israel asserts that the requirement results from the Interim Agreement. Palestinian officials dispute this interpretation and characterize this requirement as harassment. On several occasions in 1997 following terrorist incidents, Israel has restricted foreign travel of all those who hold Palestinian passports. This has sometimes resulted in Palestinians being unable to leave or to enter Israel. At all times, West Bank and Gazan Palestinians require a special permit, issued by Israel, to enter Jerusalem. The PA does not control its borders. All persons entering PA-controlled areas must be granted permission by Israel." (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1489).

The U.S. Department of State has determined that the Palestinian Authority Passport/Travel Document meets the requirements of a passport as defined in Section 101 (a)(30) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and therefore is acceptable for visa issuing purposes and travel to the United States.

However, according to an official at the U.S. Department of State, the United States does not recognize Palestine as a country, and therefore the Palestinian Authority Passport/Travel Document does not confer citizenship.

References:

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997. 1998. United States Department of State. *Washington, DC. United States Government Printing Office.*

Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA). 2 April 1995. "Israel issues permits for further 2,000 Palestinian workers." (NEXIS)

Jordan Times. 30-31 March 1995. "Authorities To Begin Issuing New Passports." (NEXIS)

Jordan Times. 25 January 1995. "Official Says No Palestinian Passports for Citizens." (NEXIS)

Attachments:

Agence France Presse (AFP). 25 April 1995. "Israeli Arab pilgrims head for Mecca after row over passports." (NEXIS)

Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA). 2 April 1995. "Israel issues permits for further 2,000 Palestinian workers." (NEXIS)

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