

## Palestinians

### Profile

There are around three million Palestinians in Jordan, located overwhelmingly in the north-western part of the country, principally in the environs of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid.

### Historical context

A portion of the Palestinian population found themselves in Transjordan in 1946, when the country annexed part of Palestine. The vast majority are of 1948 refugee origin, and Palestinians' attitudes toward Jordan have been ambivalent from the outset, since, although Jordan defended the West Bank in 1948, it had also already reached a secret understanding with the Zionists on incorporation of this area.

Following the loss of the West Bank in 1967 (and the influx of another 300,000 displaced, most of whom were already refugees), Palestinians flocked to the guerrilla *fedayeen* movement. In 1970, fearing the collapse of his authority, King Hussein sent his troops against strongholds of the Syrian-backed guerrilla movement, principally in Amman and Irbid. Palestinians were ruthlessly suppressed and suspected militants expelled. It has left a permanent scar on relations.

In 1974 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was recognized as sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and Hussein immediately reduced Palestinian participation in the administration of the state. Pressure on Palestinians to choose between two identities has always been a problem, but it intensified during the first *intifada* (see Palestine) when Jordan relinquished its formal ties with the West Bank in 1988.

Jordan was dependent on remittances from (overwhelmingly Palestinian) migrants in the Gulf, until their 1991 expulsion from Kuwait and some other Gulf States. This led to an influx of over 250,000 returnees and resulted in 30 per cent unemployment.

Citizenship for Palestinians in Jordan is a complicated issue. Although most Palestinians have Jordanian citizenship and many have integrated, Jordan still considers them refugees with a right of return to Palestine. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported in 2006 that over 1.8 million Palestinians were registered as refugees and displaced persons in Jordan. Around 150,000 Palestinians, mostly from Gaza but also those who remained in the West Bank after 1967 and only later came to Jordan, are denied citizenship. The government issues temporary passports to these Palestinians unless they already have travel documents from the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinians have been underrepresented in government, and not just due to matters of citizenship. The government, which maintains concerns about political and religious radicalism among Palestinians, designed voting districts for the Chamber of Deputies in the 1993 election law in such a way as to dilute urban and thus Palestinian representation. Islamist parties, and their largely Palestinian constituents, boycotted 1997 elections in protest against the skewed apportionment of seats to the monarchy's rural

base of (non-Palestinian) supporters.

It is too early to say whether a resolution of the Palestine-Israel dispute will resolve Palestinian ambivalence toward Jordan. While many Palestinians, particularly wealthier ones, have settled down successfully and happily as Jordanians, in refugee camps and low-income areas, ambivalence and discontent are greatest. According to UNRWA, as of December 2006, 65 per cent of 1.8 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan were still living in ten official and three unofficial camps.

## **Current issues**

Although Palestinians constitute around half of the population, they remain vastly under-represented in Jordanian government. Nine of the 55 Senators appointed by the king are Palestinian, and in the 110-seat Chamber of Deputies, Palestinians have only 18 seats. Of Jordan's 12 governates, none are led by Palestinians.

Discrimination against Palestinians in private and state-sector employment remains common and a quota system limits the number of university admissions for Palestinian youth.

Government security operations disproportionately target Palestinians, especially operations conducted in the name of fighting terror. Amnesty International reported in July 2006 that Jordanian security services were more likely to torture detainees if they were Palestinian.