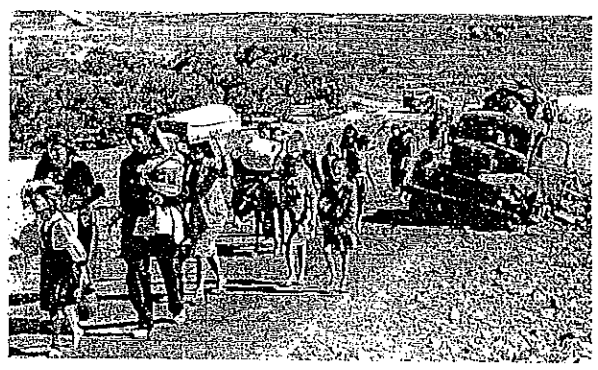


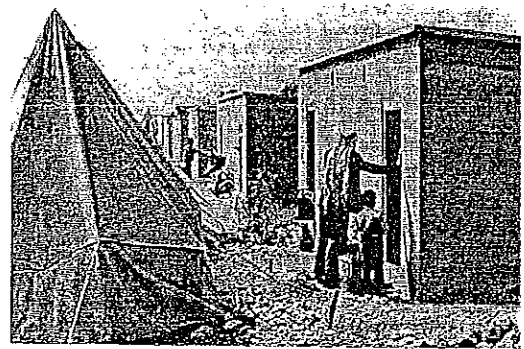
! - surprising ? raises a question

-Obstacles to Arab-Israeli Peace: Palestinian Refugees

In the course of Israel's creation and its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, more than half the Arabs of Palestine have been displaced. Today these Palestinians live in exile from homes and lands that their families have inhabited for generations. For many experts, the fate of the Palestinian refugees remains an open wound, unless there is a Middle East peace deal that acknowledges and makes reparation for what has happened.



Four million Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations' humanitarian workers trace their origins to the 1948 exodus. That makes one of the biggest displaced populations in the world. (Palestinian refugees are the people and their descendants, predominantly Muslim and Arabic-speakers, who fled or were expelled from their homes that became the territory of the State of Israel.) Some displaced Palestinians have resettled in refugee camps in neighboring countries where their situation is often precarious. All are still suffering the legacy of their dispossession- destitution and insecurity.



Palestinian refugee populations:	
Jordan:	1,835,704
Syria:	434,896
West Bank/Gaza:	1,699,025
Lebanon:	405,425

Whatever the rights and wrongs of their cause, the practicality of return or questions of justice, in Mideast diplomacy the refugees' fate continues to be an issue. Israel argues that it is the only Jewish state- the refuge of Jews from around the world- while there are 22 Arab countries where Palestinian refugees could emigrate. An Israeli historian claims, "The Arabs in Palestine were asked to stay and live as citizens in the Jewish state. Instead, they chose to leave, either because they were unwilling to live with the Jews, or because they expected an eventual Arab military victory." Many Israeli leaders argue that the refugees should relinquish any aspirations to return to what is now its territory, and instead be absorbed by Arab host countries or by a future Palestinian state.

Palestinian refugees claim a right of return. Their claim is based on Article 13 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares that "Everyone has the right to leave any country including his own, and to return to his country." Arab nations have also accused Israel of deliberately keeping Palestinian refugees and their descendants out of negotiations on any settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Upon signing the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israel, the European Union and the United States recognized the right of the Palestinian refugees to be governed by themselves. And the parties agreed to negotiate a permanent status of the refugees- possibly an independent nation, known as Palestine. However, the process has been slow and it is unlikely that a future sovereign Palestinian state will become a reality.

BBC News, September 10, 2010