

“We Have No Rights and No Future”

The world has finally begun to turn its attention towards the suffering in Palestinian refugee camps.

In Lebanon's dusty, overcrowded Palestinian refugee camps people live in abject poverty, with many families surviving on food rations and handouts from the UN, in what was once temporary housing.

In the teeming streets of the refugee camp, the scene of a notorious civil war massacre, malnourished children play in little more than rags between crumbling bullet riddled buildings and amidst open sewage.

"We have no rights and no future. We have a lot of problems; We can't work freely, we cannot own a house, we cannot move around. We are treated as if we are not human," said 20-year-old Samar, from the camp.

"There is never any electricity, last year we went nearly six months without electricity, we had to use candles at night and those who could afford to bought electricity from people with generators," said Samar.

She described how every winter the rain floods the camps and open sewage is washed into people's houses. "It's the worst in winter, when the floods come. Sometimes there is a metre of water in the street, you need a car just to cross."

Palestinian refugees first arrived in 1948, mainly in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa valley, when they were greeted sympathetically by a population that thought

their stay would be temporary. Since then generations have grown up with little more than a symbolic hope that they would return to a Palestinian homeland.

A fresh wave arrived in the wake of the 1967 war after being deported from the occupied territories. Now, according to the UN relief and works agency (UNRWA) there are around 212,000 refugees in the camps and a further 188,000 outside. Some Palestinians claim that the figure may be lower, while some Lebanese authorities place it higher.

Initially, they lived in tents that were slowly replaced with primitive breeze block structures with zinc roofs. Now conditions in many of the "camps" have deteriorated while their populations have multiplied.

"The borders of the camp are fixed and it is illegal for us to build on the edge of the camp," explains 30-year-old Rabieh from Ain al Hilweh, Lebanon's largest camp. "The areas were very small to begin with but as the population has increased over time, people have been forced to live closer and closer together."

The refugees do not enjoy citizenship and are restricted in the work they can do and where they can live, as they are not entitled to buy property. A government ordinance stretching back to 1982 prohibits them from work in many of the main professions and, as a result, unemployment is high.



"In terms of living conditions, Lebanon is the worst place for Palestinians outside Gaza and the West Bank," said a western diplomat. "They are better off in Syria."

The Lebanese authorities are sensitive to allegations that they treat the Palestinians poorly. Some members of the government cling to the belief that, even after nearly three decades, the Palestinians will return south of the border and, if they were to integrate them, they would be finally accepting defeat.

Such poor conditions and so few opportunities make the camps a fertile breeding ground for militant groups who argue that patience and acceptance have achieved nothing.

Adapted article by Clancy Chassay and Duncan Campbell, The Guardian, 2007

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The Tasks
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Inquiry Question:

What is it like to live inside a refugee camp?

1) *Comprehension*

- a) Find and write down three reasons that the authors say make life in a refugee camp hard.
- b) What is particularly hard about life in the camps in winter?
- c) How many refugees live inside the camp? How many refugees are camped outside?
- d) Why are people forced to live 'closer and closer together'?
- e) The refugees do not have citizenship. What does this mean they cannot do?
- f) Why won't the Lebanese government integrate the Palestinian refugees?

2) *Analysis*

- a) Copy out the following quotation into your book:

'In Lebanon's dusty, overcrowded Palestinian refugee camps people live in abject poverty'.

Explain how the author has chosen specific words to make refugee camps appear difficult to live in.

- b) Find a quotation that shows how a refugee camp isn't a nice place to grow up. Explain what words have been used by the author to communicate this.
- c) Find a quotation that shows that the condition of the homes are poor. Explain what words have been used by the author to communicate this.