

The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel

In 1948, only about 150,000 Palestinian Arabs remained in the area that became the state of Israel. They were granted Israeli citizenship and the right to vote. But in many respects they were and remain second-class citizens, since Israel defines itself as the state of the Jewish people and Palestinians are non-Jews. Until 1966 most of them were subject to a military government that restricted their movement and other rights (to speech, association and so on). Arabs were not permitted to become full members of the Israeli trade union federation, the *Histadrut*, until 1965. About 40 percent of their lands were confiscated by the state and used for development projects that benefited Jews primarily or exclusively. All of Israel's governments have discriminated against the Arab population by allocating far fewer resources for education, health care, public works, municipal government and economic development to the Arab sector.

Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel have had a difficult struggle to maintain their cultural and political identity in a state that officially regards expression of Palestinian or Arab national sentiment as subversive. Until 1967, they were entirely isolated from the Arab world and were often regarded by other Arabs as traitors for living in Israel. Since 1967, many have become more aware of their identity as Palestinians. One important expression of this identity was the organization of a general strike on March 30, 1976, designated as Land Day, to protest the continuing confiscation of Arab lands. The Israeli security forces killed six Arab citizens on that day. It is now commemorated as a national day by all Palestinians.

Many Palestinian Arabs have also come to understand that their political status as Israeli citizens and their protracted contact with Israeli society has differentiated them from other Palestinians. Although most of them support the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, few would pursue the possibility of relocating there if such a state comes into existence.