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Thursday, July 12, 2001 Letters to the Editor

Collective amnesia

Your paper is to be commended and encouraged for informing the Jewish Israeli public about the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, with due consideration for facts and rights. For half of a century, the Israelis have been lulled into a collective amnesia, and when events overtake them, they appear confused and hostile.

Israelis should know that Palestinians were expelled from 531 towns and villages and have suffered for 53 years in exile. They should know that 85 percent of the Palestinians living on the land that became Israel have become homeless and their property has been confiscated. They should know that the international community including the U.S., intermittently since Oslo, has affirmed their right of return 135 times.

The article quotes incorrect numbers. (The 1948 refugees totaled 935,000. The quoted figure, 730,000, refers to 1945 statistics and omits Be'er Sheva. The present number of refugees is 5.25 million. The figure quoted, 3.7 million, refers only to registered refugees). But the exact numbers are irrelevant. They neither eliminate the problem nor diminish the rights of the refugees.

If Israelis have nothing to say when it comes to objecting to the return other than what is stated in the article, then the Palestinians would win their case squarely. The objections mentioned are:

= Israel was not the aggressor. This is irrelevant. The right of return is valid regardless of the cause of exodus.

= The implementation is not feasible. Serious demographic, geographical, water, agriculture and economic studies have shown this is perfectly feasible, even desirable. In any case, rights are not ruled out because of alleged difficulties.

= UN resolutions are not binding. The same could be said of Israel's membership in the UN, which is conditional upon complying with Resolutions 194 and 181.

= The real obstacle to peace is Israel's racist laws. All Israel has to do is to remove the exclusive nature of the Law of Return.

The simple fact is that for Palestinians, the right of return is sacred, legal and possible. There is no way they will give it up. Only with the return of the refugees can permanent peace prevail. Collective amnesia about the Palestinians may be enjoyable, but will prolong suffering and will not bring peace.

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