

# **Israël admet avoir secrètement annulé le permis de résidence à 140 000 Palestiniens - Haaretz**

12 mai 2011

Des documents obtenus par le journal Haaretz révèlent qu'entre 1967 et 1994, de nombreux Palestiniens voyageant à l'étranger ont perdu leur permis de résidence sans avoir été prévenus.

Israel has used a covert procedure to cancel the residency status of 140,000 West Bank Palestinians between 1967 and 1994, the legal advisor for the Judea and Samaria Justice Ministry's office admits, in a new document obtained by Haaretz. The document was written after the Center for the Defense of the Individual filed a request under the Freedom of Information Law.

The document states that the procedure was used on Palestinian residents of the West Bank who traveled abroad between 1967 and 1994. From the occupation of the West Bank until the signing of the Oslo Accords, Palestinians who wished to travel abroad via Jordan were ordered to leave their ID cards at the Allenby Bridge border crossing.

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Israeli soldier checks Palestinians' identification.

Photo by : Baz Ratner

They exchanged their ID cards for a card allowing them to cross. The card was valid for three years and could be renewed three times, each time adding another year.

If a Palestinian did not return within six months of the card's expiration, thier documents would be sent to the regional census supervisor. Residents who failed to return on time were registered as NLRs - no longer residents. The document makes no mention of any warning or information that the Palestinians received about the process.

Palestinians could still return in the first six months after their cards expired, or appeal to an exemptions committee.

The Center for the Defense of the Individual said yesterday it knew that a clear procedure was in place, but the details and the number of Palestinians denied their right to return remained classified. A former head of the Civil Administration in the 1990s was surprised to hear of the procedure when contacted by Haaretz.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. (res. ) Danny Rothschild, who served as coordinator of government activities in the territories from 1991 to 1995, said he was completely unaware of the procedure, even though it was in use

during his term. « If even I wasn't told of the procedure, one may infer that neither were residents of the occupied territories, » he said.

The Central Bureau of Statistics says the West Bank's Palestinian population amounted to 1.05 million in 1994, which means the population would have been greater by about 14 percent if it weren't for the procedure.

By contrast, Palestinians who immigrated from the West Bank after the Palestinian Authority was set up retained residency rights even if they did not return for years.

Today, a similar procedure is still in place for residents of East Jerusalem who hold Israeli ID cards ; they lose their right to return if they have been abroad for seven years.

Palestinians who found themselves « no longer residents » include students who graduated from foreign universities, businessmen and laborers who left for work in the Gulf. Over the years, many of them have started families, so the number of these Palestinians and their descendants is probably in the hundreds of thousands, even if some have died.

Also, several thousands Palestinians with close links to the Palestinian Authority were allowed to return over the years, as did a number of Palestinians whose cases were upheld by the joint committee for restoration of Palestinian ID cards. As of today, 130,000 Palestinians are listed as « no longer residents. »

Among them is the brother of the Palestinians' chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat. Erekat's brother left for studies in the United States and was not allowed to come back ; he still lives in California.

Erekat told Haaretz he had learned from his brother's experience, and when he himself left for studies abroad, he made sure to visit home from time to time so as not to lose his right to return.

The regulation's existence was discovered by the Center for the Defense of the Individual by pure chance, while it was looking into the case of a West Bank resident imprisoned in Israel.

The Civil Administration told the prisoner's family his ID card was « inactive. » After a request for a clarification, Israel's legal adviser for Judea and Samaria said this was a misapplication of a certain policy by the census supervisor in the occupied territories.

The adviser added that three residents were mistakenly defined as no longer residents while in prison or in detention, and that their residency had now been restored. He wrote that their status had been changed not because of a policy but because of a technical error, without any connection to their imprisonment.

The Center for the Defense of the Individual said that « mass withdrawal of residency rights from tens of thousands of West Bank residents, tantamount to permanent exile from their homeland, remains an illegitimate demographic policy and a grave violation of international law. »

It noted that an unknown number of Gaza residents had lost residency rights in a similar manner, but that the exact number was still a secret the center vowed to uncover. « The State of Israel should fix the ongoing wrong at once, restore residency rights to all affected Palestinians and allow them and their families to return to their homeland, » the center said.

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