Affirmation of the Palestinian Right of Return

One hundred prominent Palestinian personalities all over the world (from Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Gulf, Europe, the UK and the US) have issued a declaration affirming the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

The declaration is sponsored by the following committee members: Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu Loughod, Salman Abu Sitta, Bilal Al-Hassan, Faisal Darraj, Anis F Qassim, Khalil Hindi, Haidar Abdel-Shafi, Rawiya Shawwa, Wakim Wakim, Mohamed Mfari and Shafiq Al-Hout.

The declaration will be presented to heads of Arab governments and the PLO, European governments and the UN secretary-general, in addition to other regional organisations. The signatories are from all walks of Palestinian life and do not represent any political organisation.

Text of the declaration:

We the Palestinian signatories to this Declaration, Cognisant of the fact that: Our people have been expelled from their homes in 531 towns and villages in Palestine in 1948 by the Zionist and Israeli military forces and their land, comprising 92 per cent of Israel, has been confiscated;

Our people have endured 51 years of exile, ravages of war, oppression, denial of national identity and racism and have been the victims of the largest ethnic cleansing operation, unprecedented in modern history and designed to replace them with Jewish immigrants from all over the world;

Two thirds of our people, over five million refugees and uprooted, represent the largest and oldest group of the refugees in the world;

In spite of an overwhelming international consensus supported by hundreds of UN resolutions, our people are still unable to fulfill their natural right to return home.

Therefore we affirm the following:

The right of the Palestinian refugees and the uprooted to return to their homes is a fundamental right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the
European, the American and the African Conventions on Human Rights;

The right of the Palestinian refugees and the uprooted to return to their homes is an inalienable right and has been affirmed by the UN Resolution 194 over 110 times since 1948;

The Right of Return is derived from the sanctity of private ownership, which cannot be extinguished by new sovereignty or occupation and does not have a statute of limitation; it is according to this principle that the European Jews claimed successfully the restitution of their lost property in World War II, without the benefit of a single UN resolution;

The Right of Return is essentially an individual right which cannot be delegated, diminished, reduced or forfeited by any representation on behalf of the Palestinians in any agreement or treaty;

The Right of Return is not substituted or affected in any way by the establishment of a Palestinian state in any form.

**Accordingly, we hereby declare that:**

We absolutely do not accept or recognise any outcome of negotiations which may lead to an agreement that forfeits any part of the right of return of the refugees and the uprooted to their homes from where they were expelled in 1948, or their due compensation, and we do not accept compensation as a substitute for return;

We demand due reparations for the psychological suffering, the material losses and damages and war crimes which the refugees endured for 51 years, in accordance with international law and legal precedents;

As we sign here, members of the Palestinian people from all walks of life, including the refugees in the Palestinian territory, where 29 per cent live and the rest scattered in the rest of the world

Appeal to fair-minded people, human rights advocates, the international community, the United Nations, and world governments, particularly those who were involved in the Palestinian tragedy, to recognise and support by all available means the right of the Palestinians to return home, in addition to their compensation, realising that just and comprehensive peace can only prevail in the Middle East upon the implementation of the Right of Return for the largest and oldest refugee problem in the world.