

# SABRA AND SHATILA:

## Remembering the Crimes, Fighting for Justice

On September 16-18, 1982, thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese residents of Sabra and Shatila refugee camps near Beirut, Lebanon, were brutally murdered in one of the most horrifying massacres in recent history. The massacres at these refugee camps, carried out by right-wing Phalangist militias in Lebanon at the behest and with the approval of invading Zionist armies, were yet another catastrophe visited upon the Palestinian refugee population by a state determined to crush the Palestinian people, their resistance, and their very existence.

Many Palestinians lived in refugee camps in Lebanon, having been forced from their homes and lands in Palestine in the Zionist invasion and occupation of 1948, and denied their right to return to their homes ever since. These Palestinians, denied fundamental rights in Lebanon and determined to return to their homes in Palestine, organized within the camps, building their community and resistance organizations and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO.)

On 6 June 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon with the full backing and support of the United States of America, claiming to attack the PLO and justifying its invasion by referring to the ongoing Lebanese civil war, and killing 17,000 Palestinians and Lebanese. A few days later, the invading army besieged West Beirut for two-months before the US, France and Italy intervened with a plan to evacuate Palestinian resistance fighters from Lebanon. This occurred under the auspices of a multinational force on August 21 which was sent to oversee the departure, and to protect Palestinian refugees. However, in a sudden and inexplicable move, the multinational force withdrew by early September claiming its mission was accomplished.

On September 15, Israeli forces invaded West Beirut in a clear violation of the evacuation agreement with the Palestinian resistance and the US. A day later, Ariel Sharon ordered entry of the Lebanese Forces (a right-wing, Phalangist militia with a long history of close relations with Israeli governments) and the South Lebanon Army (Israel's proxy militia in Southern Lebanon) into the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, which were completely sealed off by Israeli tanks. When the militiamen entered on the evening of September 16, the only resistance they were faced with was from lightly-armed young boys, the Ashbaal (lion cubs).

For the next 38 hours, aided by material support from Israel's army, including flares at night, Israel's proxy militiamen raped, tortured, mutilated and killed, in cold-blood, thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese residents of the camps. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, more than 2,750 Palestinian men, women and children were massacred in the Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut while the city was occupied by the Israeli army. The main war criminal bearing legal responsibility for the massacre is then Israeli Minister of Defense, General Ariel Sharon. Israel's official Kahane Commission concluded that Ariel Sharon was "personally responsible" for the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

Although the massacre was classified by the United Nations as a war crime, Ariel Sharon has not yet been brought to trial for his horrific war crimes against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples.

Today, Palestinian refugees continue to be denied their right to return to their homes and lands. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians live in Lebanon as refugees, continue to be denied civil and human rights in Lebanon, and continue to be prevented from returning to their homes in Palestine. They are prevented from returning home because they are Palestinian, and because the Zionist state that has occupied their land since 1948 – Israel – is determined to erase Palestinian existence, identity and self-determination from the land of Palestine in its quest for a racist "Jewish state" on Palestinian land.

Ariel Sharon, today the Prime Minister of that Zionist state, continues to preside over the occupation, oppression and massacre of Palestinians on a daily basis. Sharon, with the blood of Sabra and Shatila on his hands – and before that, the blood of Qibya, where, in 1953, he led a Zionist army contingent to explode and exterminate an entire Palestinian village – continues to preside over the Zionist state, impervious to prosecution for his crimes, and continuing in his wanton spree – presiding over massacres in Jenin, Nablus and Rafah, and over the daily murders, assassinations and executions of Palestinians.

Zionist crimes did not begin nor do they end, however, with Ariel Sharon. Since 1948, the consistent and continuous policy of Zionism in Palestine has been to eradicate Palestinian life – through massacres, occupation, exile, and the constant attack of life under apartheid rule. Ariel Sharon, as an individual, is no more than one of the worst examples of the brutality of the Zionist state in Palestine – a state founded on the principles of racism and apartheid and committed to the dispossession of Palestinians from Palestine.

These crimes, however, do not take place in isolation. Every day, over \$15 million in US tax money is spent to support the Zionist state and its drive for a Palestine free of Palestinians. From F-16 fighter planes, to Apache helicopters, to M-16 rifles, to the bullets whose casings litter the streets of Palestine after attacks and invasions, the weapons of Zionism are stamped "MADE IN USA."

As residents and taxpayers in the United States, it is imperative that we organize to demand that this money no longer be spent to occupy and oppress Palestinians in our name. Five million Palestinian refugees around the world are being denied their right to return home, their right to self-determination, and their fundamental individual and collective rights at the behest of the US government and the Zionist state. Join us to demand justice.

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