

PALESTINIAN LAND DAY

An explainer

Background

In 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes. Hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages [were depopulated and destroyed](#) and refugees prevented from returning in events that became known as the Nakba, or catastrophe in Arabic.

About [150 thousand Palestinians](#) were allowed to stay in the newly created state of Israel and were given Israeli citizenship. However, they were [denied](#) Israeli nationality, institutionalising their lesser status.

Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel make up one fifth of the total Israeli population and face [discrimination in all walks of life](#). Nevertheless, they are well organised and share a common struggle with all those, no matter their identity, who work to defend democratic and human rights for all in Israel.

The fight for equality

In the aftermath of the Nakba, Palestinian citizens of Israel were regarded with profound suspicion by state and society. [Until 1966](#), Israel placed them under martial law, which was used to expropriate their land, restrict freedom of movement and prohibit political activity.



Solidarity

GUE/NGL MEPs have built a close relationship with progressive political and civil society forces Palestinians in Israel, including their elected representatives in the Israeli parliament. We wholeheartedly support their struggle for full equality under the law and demand that the EU make their plight a standing issue with Israel.

Land Day serves as a reminder of their struggle and demands: Israel must revoke all laws that discriminate against its Palestinian citizens, guarantee equality under the law and make amends for a historic injustice against them.

It was not until the 70s that Palestinian society inside Israel could organise again and was able to work against the racism and discrimination they faced. On the [30th of March 1976](#), thousands went to the streets in the Galilee protesting the Israeli state's expropriation of their lands. The Israeli police's response was brutal. In total six Palestinians were killed, hundreds injured and jailed.

These events galvanised Palestinians inside Israel and gave impetus to a fight for equality that goes on to this day. Land Day, commemorated every year on the 30th of March, puts the spotlight on this struggle.

Discrimination as a constitutional value

Successive Israeli governments have continued to entrench the second-class status of Palestinian citizens of Israel through discriminatory laws and [mainstream racist incitement](#). [More than 50 laws](#) have directly or indirectly discriminated against Palestinian citizens of Israel in all areas of life.

The recently adopted Jewish Nation State Law makes discrimination a constitutional value and cements [Israel's regime of apartheid](#).

Most Israeli towns have "admission committees" which vet prospective residents. According to [Human Rights Watch](#) this system is used "to exclude Arabs from living in [hundreds of] rural Jewish communities". Furthermore, Palestinians cannot own or lease the vast majority of land in Israel under the [1960 Israel Lands Basic Law](#).

Palestinian citizens of Israel [are de facto prohibited](#) from marrying Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory due to a law that blocks family unification or from marrying Israeli Jews, because [civil marriages do not exist](#) in Israel. Furthermore, Israel's laws establish [separate educational systems](#) that are administered unequally.

About [80 thousands Palestinian](#) citizens of Israel live in 45 villages, which Israel does not recognise. The majority of these localities have existed before the creation of the state but Israel has refused to acknowledge them on any map, denying them basic services such as water and electricity.

Political parties that advocate for "a state of all of its citizens", a popular slogan of Palestinian citizens of Israel, can be banned from elections on the basis that they deny the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [recently echoed](#) this founding principle of the state saying that Israel "is not a state of all its citizens."

The view of the Left

Palestinian citizens of Israel are often invisible in the public discourse about the Palestinian struggle but their plight is no less pressing. Government and politicians routinely describe them as a "[fifth column](#)" and a "[demographic threat](#)".

Israel [promotes an image to the world](#) that it is a modern democracy but a democracy has equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. In Israel, citizenship is hierarchical and equality is not a constitutional right. Dozens of laws impose on Palestinian citizens an inferior status.