

# Two articles about the Silent March

<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL11222279>

## 60 years on, refugees visit lost Jerusalem homes

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By Wafa Amr

JERUSALEM, May 11 (Reuters) - Eighty-year-old Beatrice Habesch sobbed when she caught sight of her father's house in Jerusalem on Sunday and remembered how it was taken over by Jews in 1948.

"This is our house! This is my house!" she shouted as fellow Palestinians held her back from running towards the building.

Some 300 Palestinians marked 60 years since Israel's founding in May 1948 with a protest walk through affluent Jewish parts of west Jerusalem that were once home to many Arabs. They wore black T-shirts with "This is my House" printed on the back.

The Palestinians said their families had owned houses in Talbīyah, German Colony and other districts until Israelis drove them away or they fled in the Arab-Jewish fighting that accompanied the creation of the state of Israel.

Habesch said her father, a merchant, had owned property in Talbīyah and that he had had friendly relations with his Jewish neighbours, letting part of his property to them.

One of their neighbours, she said, was Golda Meir, who as Israel's prime minister in the 1970s refused to acknowledge the existence of Palestinians.

"I was 19 during the war in 1948. I remember two men and a woman came to our house and told us to leave. They said our house would be bombed if we did not leave," Habesch said.

Like many of the 700,000 or so Palestinians who fled their homes in 1948, the Habesch family thought they would return after the war between Israel and the Arab states was over.

But they never did.

The demonstrators pointed at houses, many decorated with Israeli flags marking the 60th anniversary of independence, and recalled their former Palestinian owners: "This is the Dajani house. That is the Nammari house. This is the Halaby house."

### ISRAELIS LOOK ON

Israelis watched from porches, mostly in silence, though one man who trailed the marchers yelled: "Arabs out!"

"Most Israelis react defensively or aggressively," said Tomer Belity, an Israeli teacher at a school in Talbīyah.

"They are afraid and full of hate because they think the Palestinians want to get us out of here."

Nahla Assaly, 70, was 10 when she and her family left their house in the German Colony, now a haven for well-heeled bohemians. "We left our house because we panicked," she said. "People panic during wars."

Assaly said her family heard of the killings of dozens of Arabs by Israeli guerrillas at Deir Yassin, a village near Jerusalem, in April 1948. Fear set in. When the shooting came closer to home, it was time to leave.

"Bullets came through our doors and windows, so my father took us to Damascus for what he thought would be a couple of weeks," Assaly recalled. "But we never came back."

She said she felt bitter about the festivities surrounding Israel's 60th Independence Day, including this week's visit by U.S. President George W. Bush, who is sponsoring a drive for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal by the end of this year.

"Bush is coming to celebrate. Why? Did anybody go to South Africa to celebrate apartheid? This whole idea of celebration is a mockery of peace."

"Let the Israelis admit their wrongdoing in 1948," said Assaly. "Then there will be room for healing."

(Editing by Kevin Liffey)

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## March marks dispossession of Palestinians

**MICHAEL JANSEN in Jerusalem**

Mon, May 12, 2008

MIDDLE EAST:SEVERAL SCORE Palestinian men, women and children whose families lost homes in west Jerusalem walked through the neighbourhoods of Katamon, Talbiyeh and Bakaa yesterday in peaceful commemoration of the catastrophe, the naqba, which befell their people 60 years ago at the time Israel was created.

Dressed in black, they gathered beside Israel's national theatre and donned black T-shirts printed in white with the words "Naqba Survivor" on the front and "This is My Home" on the back.

Although many were not from these neighbourhoods - or even Jerusalem - to these Palestinians, this event symbolised the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian people.

As we walked uphill towards the Belgian consulate, Beatrice Habesch, now 80, talked about her eviction. She said her family had Jewish friends and tenants before the battle for Jerusalem began in December 1947.

"One day in March [1948], two men and a woman, our tenants, came to our house. After they were served coffee, they told my mother to prepare the suitcases. They asked us to leave for two or three months . . . We told them to use the stores of rice, coffee and flour in the basement if we did not return after a month. We moved to the Casa Nova [a convent in the old city] where we lived in one small room. Every family had just one room. We stayed there until we went to Amman. My father had the best printing press in Jerusalem."

When we reached the corner, she threw her arms out and cried: "There's my house, there's my house." Across the street stood a square, stone house built early last century, a typical home of

prosperous Palestinian professionals and merchants.

As we walked the route, elderly, middle-aged and young Palestinians pointed out family homes, two or three storeys tall, with arched windows and red-tiled roofs.

Lisa Amintov, an Israeli retiree who belongs to a group advocating the establishment of a secular democracy for both sides, said she had joined the walk to show solidarity with Palestinians.

Nahla Asali was 10 when her family was compelled by heavy bombardment and constant gunfire to leave their house. "Look, it has been turned into several flats," she observed. "We were five children and our parents."

They left after a massacre by Israeli irregulars of Palestinians at a village called Deir Yassin. "We went to Damascus, where we stayed for two years before returning to East Jerusalem," then under Jordanian rule.

Eitan Bronstein, a member of Zochrot, an Israeli peace group, said: "It is necessary for Israelis to understand that our independence and our Jewish state came at the expense of the Palestinians."

When asked where he comes from, he replied: "From Tel Aviv, 100m from a destroyed Palestinian village."

Three Israeli settlers proclaiming "No Palestinian state" attempted to disrupt the walk.

On Saturday, the naqba was commemorated by an ecumenical service at the Church of All Nations. Prayers were offered for peace by prelates and priests of the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Armenian and Coptic churches.