

# Israeli citizenship law isolates Palestinians

Noreen Sadik

Taybeh, Israel

Randa, a Palestinian resident of the West Bank city of Qalqilya, married Hosam, an Arab citizen of Israel from Lod, in 1998.

Although she received an Israeli residency permit that was renewable every year, little did she know that within a few years a new law passed by Israel's Knesset would jeopardise her status in Israel, complicate her life and threaten her marriage.

"I was living happily and quietly as a wife and mother of two young children," she said. "It was until 2003, when my brother was deemed a threat to Israel, that my residency and my rights were revoked."

Attempts to reinstate her permit through attorneys, human rights organisations and Knesset members failed.

"I paid a high price for someone else's mistake," she said.

The measure that changed Randa's life is the Citizenship and Entry to Israel Law.

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**Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer with Israeli non-governmental organisation Adalah**

It was presented in 2002 and passed a Knesset vote a year later after a suicide attack in the port city of Haifa by the son of an Arab-Israeli whose mother was also a Palestinian from the West Bank.

Arab-Israelis are Palestinian natives of British-mandate Palestine who remained in their land after Israel seized it in 1948. Those Palestinians – mostly Christians and

Muslims – were accorded Israeli citizenship and rights, although they complain of stereotyping and discrimination.

Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip share blood ties but live under Israeli military occupation since the war in 1967. Although they are ruled by the Palestinian Authority, since a 1993 broad framework of a peace deal with Israel, they are bound to the rules of the military occupation.

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The Citizenship and Entry to Israel Law prevents Arab-Israelis who are married to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from living with their spouses in Israel. Citizens of "enemy states", such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, Pakistan and Yemen, are also barred access to Israel.

Although the law was passed as a temporary order deemed necessary for Israel's security, it is extended on an annual basis. It was done so in June on a 65-14 Knesset vote.

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MK Zehava Galon said: "Over the years, there have been Interior ministers who explained that this law is necessary because there is a demographic threat, because the Arab residents of Israel bring their wives in from the territories. Then it became a security threat. The truth of the matter is that there is a rightist government that hates Arabs, excludes them, and is using the terror attacks as an excuse for this disgrace."

Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer with Israeli non-governmental organisation Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, said: "The philosophy is very dangerous because it views a person as a threat to state security simply because of his or her national belonging or geo-



A July 2015 file picture shows Israeli-Arab lawmakers (from L to R) Osama Saadi, Ahmad Tibi, Ayman Odeh, and political leader Masud Ghanayem in front of the Dome of the Rock at al-Aqsa mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem.

graphic location."

"It affects people at the most fundamental level," she cautioned. "The immediate effect is to split families, to separate husband from wife, children from their parents and brothers from their sisters."

The law creates three types of naturalisation: One for Jews who can get citizenship automatically based on the 1950 Law of Return, a second for foreigners who are permitted to obtain residency and citizenship over a four-year period and a third for spouses of Arab-Israelis who are from the Palestinian territories, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Iran.

Prior to 2002, according to HaMoked – the Israel-based Centre for the Defence of the Individual – applications filed by Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza were reviewed on merit and decisions were

based on personal circumstances. However, HaMoked stated that from 2001, the Ministry of Interior had been trying to stop the immigration of Palestinians.

Commenting on the high number of Palestinians applying for family unification, then-minister Eli Yishai said "through Israel's back door, the Palestinians are realising their right of return". He was referring to Palestinians using laws for their benefit.

"This is surprising and worrisome," Yishai said.

Statistics from Adalah show that from 1996 until 2008, more than 130,000 Palestinians entered Israel for reasons of family reunification. Of the total, 54 were involved in acts of violence against Israel and seven were indicted, convicted and sentenced to prison.

Palestinian women often suffer most because of the law as the male spouse can decide whether to apply for renewal.

Randa's story, however, was different. In 2004, Hosam died on the same day she was in court fighting for her residency. Being a widow hindered her chance of having her residency or any rights reinstated.

Now, an illegal alien, she lives with her mother-in-law in Israel. She does not have the right to work, obtain health care or receive social benefits.

"I don't want anything from the government except permission to stay with my children," Randa said.

**Noreen Sadik, based in Israel, is a Palestinian-American citizen who has written on issues affecting that community.**

# US and Israel near agreement on record-breaking defence aid package

Mark Habeeb

Washington

The United States and Israel are close to finalising an agreement over a military aid package under which the United States would pledge to provide Israel with up to \$40 billion in military aid over ten years, sources in Washington say.

The United States has never promised such a large amount of military aid to another country.

**The proposed new agreement is regarded by some as compensation for Israel in light of the nuclear agreement the United States and other powers signed with Iran in 2015.**

Israel receives just more than \$3 billion a year in US military aid, which represents 25% of Israel's defence budget. Various other financial transfers and periodic emergency funds – known in Washington budget circles as "plus-ups" – mean that in any given year significantly more US funds are actually provided to Israel.

The proposed new agreement, which will take the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), is regarded by some as compensation for Israel in light of the nuclear agreement the United States and other powers signed with Iran in 2015, a deal that Israel adamantly opposed. It would replace the 2007 MOU that promised Israel \$30 billion over ten years.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has said that Israel requires \$5 billion per year from the United States to meet the security challenge from Iran and that was his initial demand. The administration of US President Barack Obama is believed to be negotiating for a package that provides about \$3.8 billion per year.

US Marines General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with his Israeli counterpart, Lieutenant-General Gadi Eizenkot, August 4th at the Pentagon. In a statement released by the Pentagon, Dunford stressed the closeness of the US-Israeli relationship and said that he and Eizenkot discussed "regional security issues".

The aid package was not mentioned but Eizenkot travelled to Washington along with Yaakov Nagel, the acting head of Israel's National Security Council, to try to complete negotiations on the proposed MOU, which would go into

force in 2018. Nagel met with US National Security Adviser Susan Rice at the White House.

Eizenkot also visited Utah where he inspected F-35 Joint Strike Fighters that will be delivered to Israel this year. The F-35, a stealth aircraft, has the capability of eluding Iranian air defence systems, allowing Israel the potential to launch a pre-emptive strike against Iran.

While many pro-Israel members of the US Congress have been urging the administration to finalise negotiations, unresolved issues remain.

The Obama administration has been demanding that the new MOU reduces the percentage of US military aid that is spent on Israeli-manufactured armaments. Under the existing aid package, 26.3% of US funds may be spent in Israel. Obama wants more of the US military aid – and eventually all of it – spent on weapons manufactured in the United States.

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Israel is the only recipient of US military aid that is allowed to use military assistance funds to support its own armaments industry. However, according to a Reuters report,



A Lockheed Martin test pilot attends a presentation of the F-35 US fighter jet at the Israeli Air Force house in Herzliya, Israel, last April.

after initial resistance Israel agreed to phase out the special provision over a five-year period, although doing so will cause job losses in Israel's armaments sector.

The Obama administration is also insisting that the new package forbids "plus-ups" except in cases of extreme emergency. Israel likely will agree to this provision because it knows that with its strong support in Congress – and it is Congress that appropriates US funds – it is a virtually meaningless concession.

The Obama administration apparently is eager to agree to a new deal before the president leaves office, in part to rebuff those who claim he has not been sufficiently supportive

of Israel. Netanyahu also apparently wants to reach a deal with Obama, in part to challenge his domestic critics who claim that he has permanently damaged the US-Israel relationship because of his transparent hostility to Obama.

A ten-year deal reached now would solidify US support for Israel until 2028. Israel's favourability ratings in the United States, especially among Democrats and young people, have been falling.

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