



Killed for Protesting

6 Things to Know About the #GreatReturnMarch

On March 30th, 2018 tens of thousands of Palestinians marched peacefully in Gaza in the Great Return March, beginning a six-week tent city protest along the Gaza/Israel border from Land Day, March 30th, to Nakba Day, May 15th.

[The Nakba](#) (“Catastrophe” in Arabic) refers to the forced displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians that began with Israel’s establishment in 1948, and that continues to this day.

The #GreatReturnMarch, organized by civil society and grassroots activists, called for an end to the siege of Gaza and the right of return for Palestinian refugees according to international law.

On the first day of the march, the Israeli military killed 19 Palestinians and wounded over 1,400. No Israeli soldiers were harmed. [Videos](#) show Israeli soldiers shooting unarmed Palestinians as they ran away from the gunfire and even as they prayed.

No one should be killed for taking part in a peaceful protest, and Jewish Voice for Peace and our members will not sit quietly while the Israeli military kills Palestinians for demanding their rights.

Here’s what you need to know about the what happened in Gaza during the #GreatReturnMarch and how you can support Palestinian protesters.

1. GAZA IS UNDER PERPETUAL SIEGE

Nearly 2 million Palestinians, including 1.3 million refugees, live in Gaza. Israel and Egypt control Gaza’s borders by land, sea, and air.

Israel’s siege has turned Gaza into what Noam Chomsky calls the world’s largest open-air prison. **The vast majority of residents are unable to leave**, including to the West Bank, due to sweeping Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on movement.

[Israel’s closure policy](#) also heavily restricts the flow of goods, including building supplies and medical aid. One of the most densely populated places on Earth, the

U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reports that Gaza will cease to be a “livable place” by 2020.

2. PALESTINIANS WHO PROTEST GET SHOT, AGAIN AND AGAIN

Israel has a [widely documented record](#) of [responding violently](#) to peaceful protest. Well before the latest demonstrations in Gaza began, Amnesty International [called on Israel](#) to abstain from deadly violence, saying that the Israeli military has a “dark history” of killing Palestinian protesters with impunity.

After the March 30th attack, the official Israeli army's Twitter account claimed – [then deleted](#) – full responsibility for the #GreatReturnMarch Gaza shootings.

Human Rights Watch [reported](#):

“ISRAELI SOLDIERS WERE NOT MERELY USING EXCESSIVE FORCE, BUT WERE APPARENTLY ACTING ON ORDERS THAT ALL BUT ENSURED A BLOODY MILITARY RESPONSE TO THE PALESTINIAN DEMONSTRATIONS. THE RESULT WAS FORESEEABLE DEATHS AND INJURIES OF DEMONSTRATORS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF A BORDER WHO POSED NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO LIFE.”

A [source from the Israeli army](#) responded:

“WE WILL CONTINUE TO ACT AGAINST THE DEMONSTRATORS IN GAZA AS WE ACTED LAST FRIDAY.”

The Israeli military evidently believes that any time Palestinians assert their basic rights, they should be met with deadly violence. The same belief exists in Israel's ruling political class. Eli Hazan, the spokesperson of Israel's Likud Party, claimed that all 30,000 Palestinian protesters are legitimate targets.

This cycle of Israeli violence against peaceful Palestinian protesters is in grave violation of International Law. No one should be killed for taking part in a peaceful protest.

3. MAINSTREAM MEDIA INACCURATELY PRESENTS BOTH SIDES AS EQUALLY VIOLENT

Our horror at Israel's planned killings only intensifies when media coverage frames the Israeli military and Palestinian civilians as equal powers.

On the eve of the protests, mainstream U.S. news outlets repeated the phrases “Gaza clashes” and “border confrontations,” presenting both sides taking part in comparable

violence. But the fact remains: **on one side was a military that fired all of the bullets, and on the other side were civilians marching for basic human rights.**

It is misleading to call the Israeli military reaction to a peaceful protest a “clash” or “confrontation” as it was a violent response to a civil society march.

In the days after the initial demonstration, Palestinians who documented the protests on social media and human rights supporters who amplified their coverage have pressured U.S. media outlets to more accurately portray Israel’s killings:

- The [Washington Post](#) published an op-ed from Diana Buttu highlighting that “Palestinians demonstrating against the killing of unarmed Palestinians are themselves gunned down by Israel’s military.”
- On Brian Lehrer’s [WNYC](#) show, Cornel West said Martin Luther King Jr would have spoken out against Israel’s “massacre” in Gaza.
- [NBC](#)’s Ayman Mohyeldin reflected on media’s double standard covering Palestinian vs. Israeli lives, asking “what the mainstream media coverage would have been like if 15 Israelis were killed?”
- [MSNBC](#)’s Chris Hayes called Israel’s attacks a “frankly unconscionable use of force.”

Many other examples exist of activists and journalists providing accurate context and calling for principles of international law to be enforced. At Jewish Voice for Peace, we’ve put together resources to [help amplify human rights](#) in the media.

4. THE GREAT RETURN MARCH IS LEAD BY GRASSROOTS PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The Israeli foreign ministry [preemptively labeled](#) the 30,000-person march in Gaza as a Hamas-sponsored event in an [effort to excuse](#) violent suppression of Palestinian protesters. But in the demonstration, the only visible flags were Palestinian, not factional. What’s more, Israel’s claim only distracts from the fact that they shot at thousands of civilians in a contained, occupied zone.

Israeli journalist Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man writes:

"HAMAS IS A CONVENIENT EXCUSE BUT ONE THAT ISN'T ACTUALLY NECESSARY. ISRAEL HAS NEVER NEEDED A JUSTIFICATION TO VIOLENTLY SUPPRESS PALESTINIAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY — ESPECIALLY WHEN MASSES TAKE TO THE STREETS."

Israel’s efforts to portray the marchers as armed militants were debunked by Human Rights Watch. In their investigation, they “could find no evidence of any protester using firearms or any IDF [Israeli army] claim of threatened firearm use at the demonstrations.”

5. PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN MARCHING FOR 70 YEARS

The question many are asking is: **why are Palestinians marching in the first place?**

May 15th, 1948 marked the end of the British Mandate (1922-1948) and the founding of the Israeli state. Palestinians consider this day to be al-Nakba, 'the Catastrophe', whereby they were dispossessed from their homes, lands, and livelihoods as a result of Israeli ethnic cleansing operations during the Arab-Israeli War between November 1947 and July 1949.

In 2018, Palestinians commemorate 70 years of loss and dispossession while the Israeli state celebrates 70 years of independence. Palestinians face restrictions on freedom of movement, arbitrary military detention, torture, theft of water and land, ongoing settlement building, the blockade and siege of Gaza, and other severe violations of international law.

Tareq Baconi writes in the Guardian that [The Gaza march is a wake-up call to the world](#):

"PALESTINIANS IN GAZA MARCHED NOT TOWARDS THE BORDER WITH ISRAEL, BUT RATHER TOWARDS THE FENCE THAT HAS KEPT THEM SEGREGATED AND IMPRISONED... FOR THE PEOPLE ON THE GROUND, ADDRESSING THE INJUSTICES OF 1948 REMAINS AT THE HEART OF THEIR QUEST FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND EQUALITY."

The #MarchForReturn is about making good on the basic right of Palestinians, and all people, to live freely in their homelands. The only way forward is to recognize that **there is a root cause**: 70 years of Nakba.

6. JEWISH VALUES CALL ON US TO SUPPORT ALL PEOPLE'S YEARNING FOR HOMELAND

Rather than excuse the violence committed in our names, we have the opportunity to honor the yearning for homeland propelling today's Land Day protests. To listen, learn, and plan our place in the world where **all people have access to basic human rights**.

It's a challenge to call out our Jewish institutions when they stand on the wrong side of history, to talk to our families when we have suffered personal attacks because of our religion, to speak out in our communities when we feel like the only voice. But it's an opportunity too important to miss.

There is no question that Israel's actions divide the Jewish community and that increasing numbers of U.S. Jews are actively opposing Israeli policies. **We are calling**

for an end to Israeli violence against civilians and a just solution for Palestinian refugees in Gaza based on principles established in international law.

In the U.S., many of us are participating in mass protests against repressive government policies, from gun control to healthcare to humane immigration policy. More than ever we all should understand the power of gathering publicly to say “enough!”

Yearning to be freed from imprisonment and for basic rights simply cannot be stopped by violent force – our own age-old stories, which we will recount every Passover, tell us so.

HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT THE GREAT RETURN MARCH

Jewish Voice for Peace members are inspired by Jewish tradition to work together for peace, social justice, equality, human rights, respect for international law, and a U.S. foreign policy based on these ideals.

There are many ways you can take action in solidarity with the people of Palestine marching for their rights.

1. As Israel’s closest ally and major military funder, the US has immense power to pressure Israel to conduct an independent investigation to make the facts known. It’s up to us to call on progressive Senators to demand an investigation and show that Israel can’t get away with this massacre. [Add your name here.](#)
2. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is calling a two-way military embargo to pressure Israel to abide by international law. Learn more and [join military embargo campaigns](#) targeting Israeli military companies.
3. [Facing the Nakba](#), a project of Jewish Voice for Peace, offers educational resources to U.S. Jews and a general U.S. audience about the history of the Nakba and its present implications in Palestine/Israel. You can use it to share information your friends and family, and even lead a teach-in in synagogues or on college campuses using [Facing the Nakba materials.](#)
4. Help change U.S. culture and shift foreign policy to support Palestinian rights. [Join a local Jewish Voice for Peace chapter.](#)
5. View Jewish Voice for Peace’s [resources and event roundup](#) commemorating 70 years of Nakba.
6. [Print out posters](#) honoring Palestinians who have been killed since the #GreatReturnMarch began. Posters designed by JVP member Sarah Sills.