Former Israeli Labor MK: UNRWA Inflated Number of Refugees by a Factor of At Least Four

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The number of Palestinians registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) as refugees is at least four times inflated, former Labor parliamentarian Dr. Einat Wilf said in an exclusive [**interview**](https://soundcloud.com/user-579725143/episode-86-no-refuge-for-unrwa/s-b3rVm) with The Israel Project on Tuesday, as she explained the decision by the United States to halt its funding of the U.N.’s Palestinian refugee mechanism.

Wilf observed that of the 1.8 million Palestinians living in Gaza, 1.4 million are registered by UNRWA as refugees. “Almost all of them have been born in Gaza and lived there all their lives. By now their parents have been born in Gaza. Their grandparents have been born in Gaza. And yet they claim to be refugees from Palestine,” she said. “I think we can all agree that Gaza is Palestine.”

Moreover, of the 5.3 million Palestinian refugees that UNRWA currently services, 40% live in Jordan as citizens and enjoy full access to state services, including health and education. “So 80% of Palestinians East and West of the Jordan River are not even refugees,” Wilf said.

She also charged that attempts to appease Gaza through financial investments and economic initiatives have failed because the vast majority of Gazans don’t care about the future of Gaza. They see it “as a temporary” home, before they can resettle in what is now Israel – from the river to the sea.

Wilf continued: “As a person of the Left, as a person of the Labor Party, as a person who supports two-states, I just couldn’t understand why it is that the world focuses so much on the settlements as an obstacle to peace and is saying literally nothing on this Palestinian demand to settle in Israel pre-67.”

For peace to have a chance “we need to limit Israeli maximalisim and we need to limit Arab maximalisim,” Wild affirmed.

The former Labor MK heavily criticized the central role played by UNRWA in the perpetuation of Palestinian victimhood mentality and the creation of the myth that the demand to resettle in Israel and make Jews a minority in their own country is a legitimate demand.

UNRWA is “wholly devoted to one political goal, which is the goal of return,” Wilf said. “But return was established at the end of the war as the continuation of the war by other means.” She explained that “it’s not a right, it’s not a humanitarian issue – nowhere in the world do refugees possess a right of return.” Instead, she said, efforts should be placed on “local integration.”

In an [**op-ed**](https://www.algemeiner.com/2018/08/28/why-unrwas-funding-should-be-cut/) published in the Algemeiner last week, Joshua S. Block, CEO & President of The Israel Project, expressed similar views. Block wrote that “UNRWA is creating a climate in which hatred and violence become legitimate political and ideological options for Palestinian children. And if UNRWA also promises those millions of Arabs who are citizens of other countries the right to relocate to Israel, then Israel would no longer exist as a Jewish state.” He added: “This is not the pathway to peace. It’s a recipe for perpetual failure and conflict. It’s time to acknowledge that reality and introduce real reform at UNRWA.”