

Israel/Palestine: A Lesson Plan for Understanding the Middle East Conflict

In recent years, a significant international debate has emerged as to whether the state of Israel is violating basic international law and human rights, being compared to the former apartheid regime in South Africa. This has been controversial, and has raised discussions around the world.

For students to understand the current Middle East conflict and to make up their own minds, it is important that they be introduced to some of the controversial laws and practices. Students can then judge for themselves whether this is in violation of international law, with reference to the globally accepted standards, as codified in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Activity

Students will be presented with a list of laws or practices that may violate articles of the UN Declaration. They will then be asked to identify which articles, if any, they believe are being violated. Students should be encouraged to seek out explanations for these laws from both non-governmental and official sources, where possible, including the Israeli Consulate and Palestinian organizations in Canada.

After the students have examined 6 laws or practices, and the differing opinions as to why the laws were enacted, they can either write a letter saying they do not believe these are violations, or they can write explaining why they believe the UN declaration is being violated. Teachers should make available copies of the UNDHR. Student letters should make reference to specific articles in the UN document. Letters can be addressed to any of the relevant actors – the United Nations, the Israeli government, the Palestinian Authority, or the student's own national government. Laws or practices in Israel and the occupied territories: 1) The Law of Return, 2) The Citizenship Law (with respect to marriage), 3) Land ownership in Israel, 4) The 'Separation' Wall in the West Bank, 5) Water in the occupied territories, and 6) Checkpoints & curfews in the occupied territories. [See Descriptions Below]

Extensions: An oral version of this project could naturally involve a classroom debate, perhaps in the format of a discussion at the United Nations.

Resources

- UNDHR: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>
- Jimmy Carter and Shimon Peres on Charlie Rose: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-535303124857726755&q=%22Jimmy+Carter%22+Charlie+Rose>
- Decision of International Court of Justice on the Wall: http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ipresscom/ipress2004/ipresscom2004-28_mwp_20040709.htm
- B'tselem, Israeli human rights centre, <http://www.btselem.org/English/>
- Water resources in Palestine, <http://www.palestine-pmc.com/pissue/water.asp>

Worksheet: 6 controversial laws or practises in Israel/Palestine

➤ In point form, fill in the columns below as you conduct your research.

Laws/practices	How, if at all, do these laws violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?	Notes: What is the meaning or impact of these laws?	In your opinion, why do think these laws and practices are in place?
The Law of Return -Facilitates and privileges Jewish immigration to the State of Israel			
The Citizenship Law -Denies Israeli citizenship to Palestinian spouses of Israeli citizens.			
Land ownership in Israel -Jewish National Fund denies leasing and ownership to non-Jewish citizens of Israel.			
The Separation Wall -Barrier being constructed inside the Palestinian occupied territory, the West Bank			
Water use in occupied territories -Israeli settlers in the West Bank control disproportionate amount of water resources			
Checkpoints & closures -Frequent road checkpoints and closures for Palestinian population			

Brief descriptions of laws and practices in Israel and the Palestinian territories

The Law of Return

The Law of Return was established to accelerate Jewish immigration from all over the world to Israel. To this day, anyone with one Jewish grandparent can immigrate to Israel and obtain citizenship. In contrast, millions of Palestinian refugees are denied the right of return to Israel, even though in many cases they or the parents or grandparents were born and raised in what is now the state of Israel, and still have the deeds and keys to their land and houses. The issue of immigration and refugee rights is central to the conflict in Israel/Palestine.

Further reading: An introduction to the Law of Return,

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/return.html>

Wikipedia's Law of Return page, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Return

The Citizenship Law

The new Citizenship and Family Unification Law denies Israelis the right to have their new spouse to become a resident or citizen of Israel if he or she is a Palestinian. This forces the new couple, mostly Arab Israeli citizens and their new Palestinian spouse, to leave the state of Israel if they wish to live together. On the other hand, Israeli citizens have the right to have their new spouse live in Israel and become an Israeli citizen as long as they are not Palestinian.

This means that Israelis, especially Israeli Arabs, who are married to Palestinians will be encouraged to leave Israel in order to keep their families united.

Further reading: BBC article,

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/sovereign/citizen/2004/0802angerlaw.htm>

Znet article, <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=7630>

Legal news commentary, <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/mariner/20030811.html>

Land ownership in Israel

The Jewish National Fund is a non-governmental organization that controls leasing and ownership of the majority of the land in Israel. Arabs living in Israel and Palestinian refugees native to the area are not allowed to purchase this land, which can be sold only to Israelis and others of Jewish background.

Further reading:

-UN Human Rights report on JNF,

<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/85255db800470aa485255d8b004e349a/258eda552cbb854a852571310058a594!OpenDocument>

The Separation Wall

Israel has been constructing a “separation wall” inside the territory of the West Bank. The stated reason for the Wall was to keep Palestinian suicide bombers or other would be terrorists out of Israel. The Palestinians claim that it is a “land grab”: The wall is being build inside Palestinian territory. In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled by a vote of 14 to 1 that the Wall contravened international law (only the US judge voted against the decision). This ruling was upheld by a vote in the UN General Assembly. Further reading: The ICJ ruling, http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ipresscom/ipress2004/ipresscom2004-28_mwp_20040709.htm

Water use in the occupied territories

The Middle East is an extremely water-scarce region. Much of Israel’s ground water comes from aquifers in the West Bank and from upstream diversion of the Jordan River. In the West Bank itself, Israeli settlements often have swimming pools and green laws, and controlling a significantly higher percentage of the water than the adjacent Palestinian villages, which are often short of water. Further reading: ‘Blood and water,’ <http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2002/02/26/blood/>

Checkpoints and closures

Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank are frequently stopped at military checkpoints. Sometimes roads in and out of towns are closed entirely. This has been a controversial policy, justified by Israel on security grounds, which has resulted in incidents of pregnant women and others being unable to get to hospital in time, sometimes causing death. Further reading: Articles on closures and checkpoints, <http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article8>