

# **Palestine International Institute**

**Aspiring to Bind Palestinians in the Diaspora  
and Expatriates to the Homeland**

## **The Palestinian Community in The United Kingdom**

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## Foreword

The Palestine International Institute (PII) pioneers in producing studies provided by researchers in the Diaspora, in coordination with the Institute, under the broad category, 'Palestinians in the Diaspora'. This time we are pleased to present our readers with the new study titled, 'The Palestinian Community in the United Kingdom'. This study falls under the category of the 'Horizontal Studies' series which examines the emergence and evolution of communities and tackles issues related to the origins, structure, makeup, size, problems and challenges of Palestinian communities in the Diaspora. The PII also issues the 'Parallel Studies' series which are supplemental studies with indirect bearing on communities, such as the study on Arab-European relations. These studies are overseen and supervised by the executive chairman and the research team. In addition, our scientific committee, comprising Dr. Mohammad Mikdashi, Dr. Hasan Al-Charif, Dr. Emile Nemah Khoury, and Dr. Nabil Dajani, supervises the upgrading and maintenance of the PII website, as well as updating the 'Vertical Studies' series which are studies on the elite, focusing on activists in Palestinian communities in the Diaspora.

Before scrutinizing the following data, statistics and information, we wish to indicate that this study presents academic insight based on scientific and objective research. This is indeed one of the goals for which the PII has been established. Our researchers have exerted considerable effort in order to overcome the difficulties imposed by the scarcity of resources and documents in an attempt to achieve integrated, rather than fractured data, at a time when scientific research is considerably lacking and insignificant. The importance of this study, as well as other PII studies, emerges from a number of factors, the most important of which are the following:

- ▶ It comes as an early harvest in virgin territory, where documents and sources of information on these subjects, in both Arab and foreign libraries, are virtually nonexistent, including the Internet and centers that specialize in Palestinian issues.
- ▶ No scholar or institution has come up with a partial, needless to say complete, series of studies about Palestinians in the Diaspora in countries where they exist, or about communities of countries which have hosted Palestinians.

Despite all said, we acknowledge the fact that the present study is in its early stages and is open to further development and expansion on the basis of professionalism, authenticity, transparency and documentation, and with the intent of being broadened and updated. Our mission and duty dictate that we make sure it is subject to the above processes in each of its new editions.

The PII welcomes any comments on the development of its studies and scientific and research references with the aim of achieving its final goals and aspirations. If it appears that we are slightly lagging, it is because our human and financial resources are limited, and the conditions under which the research is being conducted are difficult.

The time to pick the fruits of our labors is near. All this has been the result of an effort exerted by a dedicated team, despite our humble resources. Our gratitude goes to all scholars and researchers who have contributed to this and other studies which aim to reach those interested, address their patriotic, national, human and intellectual aspirations, and reveal facts and data that were previously unknown to those who have had no access to such information.

We further reiterate our desire to receive feedback, and urge our readers to send us their comments and suggestions that would serve to improve or advance our studies.

As'ad Abdul-Rahman,  
Executive Director

## **Acknowledgment**

The Palestine International Institute wishes to extend its appreciation and gratitude to all those who contributed to this study in various ways, including research, obtaining information, translation, editing and typing... etc. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the main author of this study, Dr. Maher Uthman.

Thanks are due to all PII staff, including researchers and technical support, for their hard work and dedication, which is why this study has been produced with useful content and in proper format. Without their efforts this study would not have been possible.

## **Chapter One**

### **The United Kingdom: The Political and Social System and its Stance Regarding Immigrants**

#### **The Host Country**

The United Kingdom comprises England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Ulster). England, the largest in area and population, includes most of the cities, towns and villages of the kingdom, and hosts the most important financial, industrial and cultural activities. The United Kingdom (UK) is fifth among the richest countries of the world and has a population of 60 million.

With some difficulty, Britain was able to adapt to its new position as an empire which lost most of its power and was left, after World War II, with an exhausted economy. Britain was forced to withdraw its forces from the Arabian Gulf, Egypt and Aden and to minimize its forces in other parts of the world.

The close, albeit tragic, connection with the United Kingdom (commonly known as Britain) motivates us to write in some detail about the old, and firmly established, British political system, and its most prominent social and health systems and policies, some of which serve as good examples for Arab countries to follow.

## **The British Political System**

Democratic and parliamentary, the British political system is a constitutional monarchy. It is based on free public elections with one vote for each qualified citizen. Since the turn of the 20th century, three major parties, the Labor Party, the Conservative Party and the smaller Liberal Democrats Party, have been the major contenders in parliamentary elections. The latter party calls for the adoption of proportional representation in the elections, which would give it a chance to form the government. Since World War II, only the Conservatives and the Labor parties have been able to form various British governments.

The British Parliament is a bicameral system consisting of a house of elected members (the House of Commons) and an upper house of appointed and hereditary peers (the House of Lords) – there are, at present, 92 hereditary peers. This House of Lords is still subject to reform with the purpose of making it more representative of society without becoming a copy of the House of Commons.

After the elections, the Queen invites the leader of the main party to form a government on her behalf (she is still technically responsible for the appointment of ministers, and is still required to approve the cabinet). The prime minister will select members of the cabinet, which consists of both senior and junior ministers and secretaries of state, from elected members of the House of Commons. He/she can also choose cabinet members from the House of Lords. In this case, these lords cannot appear before the House of Commons for questioning and must, therefore, send delegates from among the secretaries of state. To the right of the speaker at the House of Commons sits the government. Ministers sit on the front benches, with the prime minister 11 positions away from the speaker's chair. On the front benches of the opposite side sit the opposition leader and his 'shadow cabinet', each of whom follows the affairs of his/her concerned ministry in order to be able to question its secretary. The opposition, like the cabinet, has its political and legislative program. This makes it ready to assume responsibility if it wins the general elections. The government is changed if it loses in the House of Commons or in the general elections.

In addition to the central government, there are local ruling councils everywhere in the country. The last Labor government, led by Tony Blair, made some reforms in the federal system, giving Scotland and Wales the right to have an elected local parliament in addition to being represented at Westminster (the central parliament). Although the Scottish nationalists call for an independent Scottish state, it is generally believed that this is not possible in the foreseen future. This is due to the harmony among the British, rendering the nationalist tendency for independence pragmatically difficult.

The rule of law is the most important part in the British political system. It means that individual rights are defined by law, not by the random behavior of the authorities. It also means that no punishment may be applied against an individual unless decided by a magistrate on the basis of a violation of law. Every citizen, irrespective of his/her social position, is subject to the power of law. Parliament's authority means that any law approved by parliament may not be annulled except by parliament.

However, a drawback in this system is the remote possibility for independent persons to become members of the House of Commons. This is due to the fact that the candidate needs a party machine to support him/her. In this case, the elected member has to act according to his party's agenda. The prime minister has the authority to ask any minister who adopts a path that is not in line with the government to resign his office.

## **The British Constitution**

Unlike the American constitution, the British constitution is not written. This means that there is no document that may be called the British Constitution. Its elements may be found in a number of various documents that have been written down through the past centuries in response to various historical conditions. Supporters of the constitution in its present form think it is flexible enough to allow amendments without many problems. On the other hand, those who demand a written constitution believe that putting it in writing will allow all citizens to learn details that, presently, nobody knows except constitutional experts.

British Constitution sources are such laws as the Magna Carta (of the year 1215) that regulated the relationship between the king and barons. It stipulated that the king's will can be limited by the law, guaranteeing basic rights for the king's subjects, like the right to appeal against being imprisoned without a legal reason. This document is considered one of the most important legal documents in the history of democracy. The Magna Carta was the legal reference for the American representatives when they drafted the American Constitution. One of the important documents is the Act of Settlement (of 1701) which regulated succession to the English throne. This is in addition to various laws which were enacted by parliament, as well as parliamentary norms, political conferences,

legal precedents and various constitutional matters that are dealt with by the courts of law. The British Constitution is based on two principles: the rule of law and the supremacy of parliament.

## **The Welfare State**

The Labor government which was led by Clement Attlee, who succeeded Winston Churchill as prime minister in 1945, created a welfare state, to end poverty and look after everyone 'from the womb to the tomb' or the 'cradle to the grave'. The two chief reforms for the welfare state were the National Health Service and the National Insurance Act of 1946. Under the 1946 act, insurance was made compulsory for all of the adult population.

Probably the most important was the introduction of a new retirement pension scheme to supersede the 1908 scheme. The new government nationalized the Bank of England, the fuel and power industries (coal, electricity, gas and atomic energy), transportation, and most of the iron and steel industries.

## **Palestinians in the United Kingdom**

Members of the Palestinian community in the UK live in a country ruled by law, the judicial authority of which is independent. With the exception of some recent laws enacted to fight terrorism, public and personal freedoms, as well as human rights, are highly respected. The information media enjoy absolute freedom and, indeed, assumes the role of the 'Fourth Estate'.

## **Major Events Marking the Tragic Relationship between Palestine and Britain**

The following are the major landmarks of the British-Palestinian relationship:

1. In correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon, on behalf of the British government, and Shareef Hussein Ibn Ali of Mecca, between 1915-1916, McMahon promised Ibn Ali Arab control over the entire Arab areas to be liberated from Turkey, as a gesture of gratitude for the supportive stance of the Arabs for Britain and its allies.
2. In 1916, Britain and France, with the assent of Russia, signed a secret agreement, called the Sykes-Picot agreement, for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement simply divided Turkish-held Arab lands into various French and British administered areas. This agreement conflicted with the above-mentioned pledges already given by the British to the Hashemite leader.
3. On November 2, 1917, British Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour, issued a letter to Lord Rothschild, the Jewish leader in Britain, declaring



that 'His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object.'

4. As a result of WWI and the victory achieved by the Allies, British forces, led by Gen. Edmund Allenby, entered Jerusalem on December 9, 1917.

5. At the San Remo conference (April 25, 1920), France was given the right to control upper Syria (later Syria and Lebanon) and Britain the right to control lower Syria (Palestine and Trans-Jordan) and Iraq. In the conference, the Balfour Declaration, to be given greater weight, was incorporated in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

6. In 1920, a Zionist Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel, was appointed by the British government as the first high commissioner of Palestine.

7. The fourth Palestinian National Council decided in June to send a delegate to London to explain Palestinian opposition to the Balfour Declaration. A wave of protests erupted in Jaffa against the Zionist migration to Palestine.

8. The British government issued a 'White Book' about Palestine, excluding Trans-Jordan from the terms of the Balfour Declaration.

9. The League of Nations approved the mandate of Palestine in June 1922, without the consent of the Palestinians.

10. The first British census of Palestine was conducted in October 1922 and showed the population at 757182, with 11 per cent Jews.

11. On September 29, 1923 the British Mandate of Palestine became effective.

With Palestine under their full control, the British openly facilitated immigration of European Jews to the country, with the purpose of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In spite of the violent Palestinian resistance, this policy was continuously pursued by the British until May 15, 1948, when Britain decided to withdraw its forces from Palestine, leaving the country prey to the well-armed Zionist militias. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was declared, and international recognition followed with bizarre momentum.

### **British Information Media and Official and Public Stances Regarding the Palestinian Cause**



The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is internationally recognized as the oldest in the information industry and has the most political and intellectual influence on British public opinion. In addition, it is one of the best producers of documentary, nature and historical programs. Besides its four television channels, the BBC has one international channel, namely BBC World. These five channels focus on news and political affairs. The BBC also has seven radio channels, local and international, broadcasting in over 35 languages around the world. The largest international broadcasting departments are the English and Arabic divisions.

The BBC was established as part of a process of reorganization in the country, with the purpose of creating corporations highly independent of the influence of the government and that of the political parties. In 1927, after starting its radio broadcasts, BBC became a public corporation. In 1936, television broadcasts were started. Taxes levied on listening to the radio and television broadcasting are used to finance this corporation, a prerogative granted by Royal Charter. Until 1954 and 1972, BBC had monopolized both radio and television broadcasting. Later, private channels emerged.

In spite of its obvious bias in the news and newscast programs in favor of Israel, the BBC gives equal opportunities to those who are thought to represent the two sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Still, Israel and the Zionist special interest groups in Britain have been able to apply pressure on the BBC to appoint an internal observer whose mission is to inspect the policy of editing the news and producing the programs related to the said conflict. This means that the BBC is careful and impresses on its journalists that someone is monitoring their work.

Members of the Palestinian, Arab or Muslim communities can make their views heard on the BBC, or any other British media, by calling, mailing or e-mailing, either to protest, to intervene or to share in programs bearing on issues of their concern. One can follow what the media broadcast or publish and give one's comment. Most of the time, such points of view are welcome when they come in time and are logical and concise. It must not be taken for granted that an information empire, like the BBC, is hopeless in giving justice to the Palestinians, Arabs or Muslims. The quality of people who watch the programs and give their comments is important.

## **The British Press**

In Britain, there are many national newspapers, like *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Timers*. In addition, there are tabloid papers, like *The Sun*, the most popular in its category, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mirror*. There are evening papers, like *London Evening Standard*, and weekly papers, like *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent* on Sunday and *The Observer*. There are also tens of local and regional papers, like *The Scotsman*, *Glasgow Herald* and *Scottish Daily Record*.

In addition to these papers, there are also many local and regional radio and television stations through which one may have an influence over public opinion. Palestinians and Arabs can contact these media outlets to explain their points of view, or to comment on whatever deals with their problems.

## **British Official and Public Opinion Stances**

Britons have a relatively high level of education and general knowledge, including knowledge of world affairs. In addition, they are ready to listen and understand. Had it been left to ordinary people, Britain would probably have refrained from taking part in the war against Iraq in 2003, or in the aggression against Egypt in 1956. It seems, however, that once people elect their deputies to parliament, they leave major problems to the cabinet to decide upon. That is why they may be unwillingly dragged into unjust wars, like the tripartite aggression against Egypt waged by Anthony Eden's government, or the alliance of Tony Blair with the American President George W. Bush in spite of the largest demonstrations in British history in protest of the war on Iraq.

In the past four decades, with a great number of Britons participating, Britain witnessed a great number of festivals, marches and demonstrations in support of Palestinian rights and in protest against Israeli aggression. Special anniversaries and occasions were used for these activities, like *Al-Nakba*, the June 1967 war, the Dair Yaseen carnage, the first *Intifada* (uprising), the aggression against Jineen, *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, etc. One can assert that the number of Britons who support the Palestinians' rights far exceeds the number of those who support Israel and its atrocities. The same may be said about the British media, especially *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Although the media mogul Rupert Murdoch leaves for his papers a good deal of policy freedom, he himself is believed to be more pro-Israel. Sky TV, which Murdoch owns may be considered more objective than biased. Channel 4, a commercial television station, generally stands in support of Third World people and people under occupation.

The policies followed by the British governments, however, are subject to a few factors, like the personal viewpoint of the prime minister, British economic interests and what is described as a 'special relationship' with the US. This special relationship, however, seems to work only one-way: from Washington to London, but not the other way round. The general policy of the European Union towards the Arab-Israeli struggle and the Palestinian cause is also one of the factors that influence the British government's stance. With regard to the Palestinian problem, even the EU seems to prefer taking a backseat to the Americans. In short, such prime ministers like Harold Wilson and Tony Blair (both from the Labor Party), who were known for their strong support of Israel<sup>1</sup>, had the strongest say regarding the policies towards the Palestinian cause. In spite of this, many British ministers in the past four decades have been known for taking

noble stances towards the Palestinians. The same can be said about the majority of MPs who belong to the various parties. This is true, despite the fact that the relative number of Jews in the House of Commons far exceeds their ratio in British society.

As British economic interests form the foremost factor in government policy making, the individual attitude of Arab governments, particularly those of the oil-rich countries who possess a great financial surplus, can have a decisive influence on British policies and those of the West, in general, towards Arab issues, the oldest of which is the Palestinian cause. The situation, however, is that these countries do business with the West, especially in the purchase of arms, without using this as leverage to solicit support for Arab interests.

An example of the British government's attitude regarding the Palestinian problem is found in an article by David Miliband, the foreign secretary in Gordon Brown's government, published by The Sunday Times on January 6, 2008. Here, Miliband gives the impression that he adopts a strong policy in leaving the two contending sides to solve the problem by themselves, despite the blatant inequality of power between both. He even demands Arab countries recognize Israel and normalize relations with it, even before any guarantee of real peace. This attitude gives no respect to the Arab Peace Initiative which links any such relationship with Israel to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In his article, Miliband defined four policy objectives through which his office could provide a distinctive contribution. At the beginning, he went through the two internal crises in Pakistan and Kenya and the British relationship with these two countries, 'who have a heritage as British colonies'.<sup>2</sup> He says that 'to understand what these crises say about the wider foreign policy context facing Britain in 2008, it is possible to discern three key trends. First, there are a number of faltering states in the post-cold war world'. The examples he cites are Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Then he cites Burma and Zimbabwe, as examples 'where the state is too strong – overriding citizens' rights'. He describes important unresolved conflicts, like Kosovo and continues to the Arab-Israeli struggle, asserting: 'The conflict in the Middle East is of longer standing. Since 1967 a two-state solution, a viable Palestine alongside a secure Israel, has been the only way to establish both justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel. But it has become a more remote possibility; 2008 needs to be the year of vision and leadership by the two parties, by the other countries in the region who need to normalize relations with Israel and provide an economic road map for Palestine, and for those of us further afield in the United States and Europe who can underwrite the political compromises necessary.' He recognizes that 'the balance of power in the world order is tilting east, with the emergence of India and China as world economies'. He speaks of the USA as 'our single most important partner' and adds that the emergence of India and China 'does not mean America's position as the world's superpower is under threat'. In his article,

Miliband emphasizes that British foreign policy should be committed to global engagement and 'Britain should see itself as a global hub for diplomacy and ideas'.

## **British Policy towards Foreign Immigrants**

The influx of foreign immigrants to Britain becomes a hot topic during the seasons of general elections, as well as when a great number of immigrants arrive suddenly in a short period of time, especially if their arrival coincides with an abnormal rise in unemployment or during economic stagnation.

In the past centuries, foreign immigration to Britain was linked to the fact that it was a colonial power in control of many countries of the world. It had participated in the slave trade and had a large commercial fleet which possessed many ports and recruited foreign sailors.

In the past decades, to obtain residency rights, immigrants resorted to phony marriages, or enrolling in one of the academies or universities as students, after which they would disappear and start looking for jobs without obtaining work permits. They assume minimal wages working under these conditions, a situation which gives credibility to the statement that illegal immigration comes from illegal employment, which led, in 2007, to enacting a law that would apply financial penalties to owners who employ illegal immigrants.

Although Britain, historically, was a country which welcomed immigrants from Europe and the rest of the world and people seeking political asylum, the immigration of colored people has always instigated racial tendencies on the part of white Britons against this kind of immigration. This was heightened by the fact that the majority of these immigrants were economic migrants, in the sense that they were merely looking for a standard of living better than that in their countries. They come, therefore, seeking better jobs or, at least, to be granted free lodging and assisted salaries from the government, expenses which are financed by the taxpayers.

British society has recently become multiracial and multicultural. From 1940 to 1990, the ratio of foreigners has increased from 1 per cent to 6 per cent. By 2025, Asians and blacks are expected to form 10 per cent of the population.<sup>3</sup> Asians are those who originate from the Indian subcontinent, namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

To give the reader an idea about immigration numbers and races, let us take the example of colored people in a city like Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. In 1930, the colored population was 2,500 people, 60 per cent of whom were Arabs and Somalis, while there were 700 African people. These numbers have naturally increased by marriage.<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that before WWII, the greatest

number of colored gatherings was Arabic-speaking who were described as Adenis or Somalis.

Today, Asians and blacks have become a matter of fact in Britain, and official British policy tends to limit their existence and immigration. The greater the immigration waves, the greater were the arguments in the political parties, the government, the media and public opinion. During the period between the two world wars, official British policy concentrated on limiting the immigration of colored sailors, who started to have stable settlements in a number of British ports.

The government's policy towards immigration before or after WWII, however, was not based on acts which resulted from open debates. This only happened in 1962. The policy aimed to limit colored people's immigration was applied discreetly using administrative means and correspondence labeled 'Strictly Confidential' from the Home Office to the police, while publicly such slogans as, 'Equal Rights for all British Citizens' were always spoken.<sup>5</sup>

Although the principle of free entry for the citizens of the Commonwealth is binding, some ministers, during the period between the two world wars, counseled a policy of deportation. The problem of formulating an accepted immigration policy is ascribed to the inability to reconcile the differences between this principle and the desire to limit the immigration of colored and Asian people. In November 1955, 13 years after a special debate on the immigration question, the British cabinet decided to shelve the problem. This was a crucial decision which paved the way for Britain to become a multiracial country.

In 1961, in the wake of a sudden increase in the number of Asian and colored immigrants from Commonwealth countries, debate on immigration was renewed. Differences in opinion on this question in the media, the government, parliament and public opinion led to freezing it. To cite an example, The *New Statesman* was against imposing any obstacles on citizens of the colonies, considering that the case was ethically impossible to defend. Britain, according to the paper, had been responsible for the misfortunes in the colonies, which was a main reason for immigration, and it is the responsibility of Britain to solve problems or give the colonies their freedom.<sup>6</sup>

In the first months of 1958, for example, debate on immigration renewed as the result of a sudden increase in the number of immigrants from India and Pakistan. In February that year, newcomers from these two countries formed 30 per cent of the total number of immigrants in the previous year. Immigration officials noticed that most of these immigrants belonged to an uneducated class of laborers who did not speak English.<sup>7</sup> Lord Alec Douglas-Hume, secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, believed that most Indians and Pakistanis who arrived in Britain were mostly unsuitable and could not be assimilated. He had no reason to think that the public, in general, would show them the same degree of



tolerance that was generally shown to the citizens of West Indies, who were literate Christians and spoke English, and who were mentally and physically fit.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the immigrants from the Indian subcontinent settled in mid-country, like Coventry, Sheffield and Birmingham. In some London suburbs, like Wembley, Southall and Totting, they form the greatest majority, while the blacks, for example, form the greatest majority in Brickstone, London.

In the last decades, the British government started asking its representatives in Commonwealth countries to gauge the desire to control the influx of immigrants. In response, the Indian foreign ministry adopted a policy where people with low levels of education and means were forbidden from migrating to Britain. The Indian government made it a condition for those who applied for a passport to declare the reason for their application, and to name the countries they wished to travel to. In its drift to impose restrictions on its citizens' travel abroad, India started to refuse applications presented by illiterate people.

The greater part of the last increase in Asian immigration came from Pakistan. The Pakistani government, in turn, imposed requirements on immigration, like proof of English language knowledge and raising a financial guarantee, together with proof that a job was awaiting the immigrant in Britain. Otherwise, the passport was denied.

In 1968, Enoch Powell, of the Conservative Party, who was the shadow secretary of state for defense, made a blatantly racial speech in Birmingham, in which he instigated a feeling of panic in the increased number of black and colored people in Britain. He speculated that their number would exceed 3 millions in 15 to 20 years. Advocating voluntary re-emigration by 'generous grants and assistance', Powell said, 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood".' Although a person like Margaret Thatcher sympathized with Powell's overall message, reactions by most of the prominent figures in the Conservatives Party were disparaging, and the Conservative Party leader, Edward Heath, had to sack Powell from his post as shadow defense secretary.

## **Are Britons Racially Discriminatory?**

It is difficult to give a precise answer to this question. In general, however, one may say that white Britons accept colored and Asian people living among them if they speak English without a foreign accent, and participate in activities related to art, music, theater and cinema as well as such sports like cricket, football, tennis, etc. In other words, racial elements will almost disappear if the person who looks foreign demonstrates that he has acquired a British education and become intellectually British.

One can see tens of Asian and black broadcasters, journalists and directors at radio and television stations. One can also see tens of Asian and black comedians, singers, famous football players, sports commentators, rally drivers, lawyers, doctors and other workers in various businesses. The example of Ghassan Karayan is worth mentioning, for this gentleman, as a mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham in London, was the youngest mayor in British history. Ghassan is the son of two Palestinian parents; his father, a caricaturist, is an Armenian Palestinian and his mother is an Arab Palestinian. Ghassan came to Britain when he was a child.

Some of the naturalized colored and Asian people (where do Arabs fit?) became ministers and members of both houses of parliament, as well as in councils of the municipalities. There are thousands of these people in the civil service. It must also be mentioned that the Racial Equality Council has branches throughout the country. This council has played an important role in responding to and solving citizens' complaints of racial discrimination at work or at the state offices.

It must also be said that racial discrimination is still deeply rooted in some British police circles. On February 4, 2008, for example, it was discovered that the police had wire-tapped the meetings of a British Asian who was accused of raising funds for terrorism, and his lawyer, MP Sadiq Khan who was, before being elected to the House of Commons, practicing law and defending people whose civil and human rights were violated by the British police. Most of the lawsuits this MP had filed were won, and this case, are still being reacted to by society.

Racism in Britain can clearly be seen in such organizations like the National Front Party that unsuccessfully participates in general and municipal elections. Still, membership in this party is in the thousands.

## **Ipsos MORI's Public Opinion Survey on Nationalities and Immigrants**

A public opinion survey broadcast by the BBC on April 17, 2008 showed that two-thirds of Britons are apprehensive of violent racial actions. 64 per cent of the people surveyed believed that racial tension in Britain would lead to violence. Commenting on the tension among the various races and nationalities, 24 per cent believed it was dangerous, while 52 per cent thought it was acceptable. 59 per cent agreed with the idea that there were too many immigrants in Britain. 49 per cent called upon the government to encourage immigrants to leave Britain, 43 per cent did not support this opinion, while 8 per cent abstained. This Ipsos MORI survey was done on a sample of 1,000 persons.<sup>9</sup>

## **Chapter Two**



## **The Palestinian Cause and the Arab and Islamic Studies at British Universities**

Many British universities have departments or colleges specialized in teaching Arab and Islamic history and culture. Although a few of these universities only added their departments of oriental studies in the past few decades when they received financial support from rich Arabs and Muslims, the older universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Edinburgh and others have had these departments for a long time. There have been generations of British professors who are specialized in Arab and Islamic culture and history.

Over the past seventy years or more, thousands of Arab students, including Palestinians, have taken oriental studies at British universities, not to mention others who studied applied sciences like medicine, pharmacy, engineering, physics, etc. One of the factors which encourage Arab and Muslim students to study in Britain is their knowledge of English, which is a result of the fact that their countries were in the past under British colonial rule and they were required to learn English in school as a foreign language. Another reason for students in general to be attracted to British universities is their rich libraries and the existence of very important documents at a few centers, like the Public Records Office in Kew, Surrey near London. This office usually avails to the public secret documents after a lapse of 30 years, but some documents, at the discretion of the government, may take 70 years or more to be released to the public.

Needles to say there are Palestinian, Arab and Muslim professors and scholars at British universities such as Karma Nabulsi, Yazid Sayegh and Hassan Agha, to name a few.

### **The Arab Community in Britain**

It is difficult to give a precise estimate of the size of the Arab and Palestinian communities in Britain, for such data may only be obtained through extensive work by trained staff. Nabih Muqayyad, the president of the Arab Club and the Syrian Society in Britain, who has been living in Britain for the past 40 years, estimates Arabs with permanent residency in Britain to be around 800,000. The largest two Arab communities in Britain, according to him, are the Egyptian and the Iraqi, with each exceeding 200,000 in number, i.e. together they comprise half of the Arab population in the country.<sup>10</sup>

According to documents on foreign immigration to Britain, it is believed that the oldest migrant Arabs to the British Isles came from Yemen, particularly from South Yemen, which was under British colonial rule, as well as from Somalia. Prior to the independence of Arab countries from the two major colonialist countries, Britain and France, the number of immigrant Arabs in Britain (students not included) was small, yet this number started to increase after independence.

France received a greater number of immigrants from countries which were under its rule, namely Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Lebanon, than those Arabs who immigrated to Britain from its own colonialist countries. Desire to escape from civil wars or other kinds of violence, as well as to seek better economic opportunities, led many Iraqis, Egyptians, Lebanese and others to migrate to Britain.

Some Iraqis, for example, resided in Britain after the fall of the Iraqi royal regime in 1958. However, the greatest influx of Iraqis took place after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, when Shiites in south Iraq and Kurds in the north were persecuted. The international verdicts on Iraq increased the rate of Iraqi immigration to Britain. Other waves of immigration took place after 2003, the year of the American invasion of Iraq. It is clear that among Iraqis in Britain there is a great number of highly qualified professionals, intellectuals and artists. The number of Iraqis who officially reside in Britain — many of them have obtained British nationality — is estimated to be approximately 100,000 persons.

Thousands of Yemenis have been living in the Midlands since the first half of the 20th century, in cities like Birmingham and some ports like Liverpool as well as in Wales. In Britain, there is a great number of Egyptians and Moroccans in addition to a smaller number of Algerians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and Tunisians. Historically, it is noted that the number of the citizens of oil-rich Arab countries having permanent residence in Britain is very small, and members of this small community either belong to the opposition in their countries or possess their own houses and run their businesses. Their residence in Britain is intermittent.

Since the fall of the political system in Somalia after the coup against the previous president, Muhammad Sayyad Birri in 1991, followed by the civil war in that country, the number of Somali immigrants has tangibly increased, bringing their number of residents in Britain to tens of thousands. Most of them work as bus drivers and for the underground transport system.

## **Arab Community Organizations**

### **► The General Union of Arab Students in the UK and Ireland**

This is one of the oldest Arab societies in Britain and it used to include representatives of the regional Arab student unions. This union used to have noticeable political, social and cultural activities, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. It is noted that, unlike students of such countries like Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait and Sudan, Saudi students did not have a union.

This union participated in organizing and leading demonstrations, protests and other activities in support of important Arab issues, on top of which was the Palestinian cause. It was a progressive and unifying podium that formed a mini-

albeit important, Arab league. Some cracks in its solidarity, however, started to appear when the late President Jamal Abdul-Nasser accepted the Rogers Plan. This plan was initiated by the then-American Secretary of State William Rogers in June 1970, to end hostilities in the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Six-Day War by accepting Security Council Resolution No. 242. Nasser, at the time, accepted the Rogers Plan to enable his army to install a surface-to-surface missile system on the Suez front for the purpose of nullifying the effect of the Israeli air force. As Egypt could not have declared its intentions, the reaction of most members of the union, except Egyptian students, was against the Rogers Plan.

After the visit of President Anwar Al-Sadat to Israel in November of 1977, and the freezing of Egypt's membership in the Arab League, the General Union of Arab Students in the UK and Ireland started to fall apart. This was unfortunate for this union was a source of national pride for Arab students. The impression among those who were members of this union is that the educated Arabs are more for unity and consolidation than their governments. Unfortunately, conflicts among Arab territorial states form a strong factor in weakening the national and unifying links among Arabs.

#### ► Arab Territorial Unions

The most active among these territorial unions are the Egyptian, the Syrian, the Palestinian and the Yemeni unions.

#### ► The Arab Club in Britain

This club was established on June 1, 1980, with the purpose of defining an identity for the Arab community in Britain, safeguarding the best of Arab culture and helping Arabs to integrate into British society while keeping the connection with their cultural roots. The founders hoped that this club would, among others, facilitate closer relationships for Arabs with each other all over Britain. This club was officially registered on November 23, 1992, per commercial law, as a limited liability company under the number 2767041. Its first conference was held in 1990, its second in 1993 and its third in 1999.

The Arab Club holds various activities dealing with Arab political, cultural, literary, artistic and social affairs. This can be seen in its sponsorship of lectures, poetry recitals, singing and playing music, films and trips for its members. The first president of the Arab Club was Iraqi Dhiyaa Al-Falaki. Other presidents were Amin Al-Ghafari, Antoin Abu-Ra'd and Ibtisam Al-Awji. Its present (2008) executive committee is chaired by Nabih Muqayyad from Syria, and includes Shareef Yusuf, Ameena Hamdi, Fadi E'itani, Fayez Ali, Thamer Al-Sidi and Eenas Isma'eel. The Arab Club has a monthly magazine titled *Al-Urwa*, the chief editor of which is Dr. Fuad Haddad.

#### ► Council of Arab Ambassadors in Britain

This council meets periodically at the Arab League office in London in the presence of the Arab League representative. The latter coordinates and helps in organizing certain Arab activities in the UK.

### ► **The Arab Medical Society**

This association was established 12 years ago and includes Arab doctors of various specialties from around Britain and Ireland. Its first president was the famous Egyptian cardiac surgeon Dr. Thihni Farraj, one of the associates of Sir Majdi Ya'qoob.

### ► **Arab-British Institutions**

#### **1. The Council for Advancement of Arab-British Understanding**

Known by its acronym, CAABU, it is 'the only such full time, professional pro-Arab lobby in Britain. Founded in 1967, it is a cross-party group, the oldest and largest organization of its kind in Europe. In light of the "war against terror", crises in the Arab world, the ongoing and worsening conflict in Palestine and increasingly negative images of Arabs, CAABU's role in explaining events is more important than ever'. CAABU feels especially obliged to defend the rights of Arab Palestinians, particularly since Palestine was under British Mandate until 1948. The Palestinian cause, CAABU believes, must not be allowed to be neglected.

Some of the prominent British figures who shared in founding CAABU were the late Sir Christopher Mayhew, the late Sir Anthony Nutting, the famous journalist and academic, Michael Adams, journalist Peter Mansfield, the late broadcaster and writer Doreen Ingrams and the late Sir Ian Gilmour (MP and defense secretary). One of the active persons in the first period was Sir Denis Walters.

#### **2. Arab-British Chamber of Commerce**

This organization was founded in 1975 to specialize in promoting commercial and economic cooperation between Britain and the Arab world. The founding of this chamber is attributed to the then-UAE ambassador in London Mahdi Al-Tajer. Its first general secretary was Abdul-Kareem Al-Mudarres. This chamber cooperates with Arab embassies, the Arab League office in London, as well as with the chambers of commerce and industries in the Arab world, together with Arab businessmen.

#### **3. Arab Community Nexus**

Chaired by Nadwa Al-Jundi, this union is concerned with coordinating the activities of various territorial Arab unions.

#### **4. Arab Communities Corporation in UK**

Chaired by Dr. Ismaeel Al-Jaleeli, it has an excellent idea that is reminiscent of the Zionist organizations outside Israel. Unfortunately, the relative weakness of Arab community unions renders such a coordinating organization ineffective.

#### **5. Arab Media Watch**

Founded by Muna Nashashibi and her son Shareef, it monitors the contents and attitudes of the British information media towards Arab issues and tries to make available Arab speakers and writers to explain Arab issues. This center needs additional financial support to increase the number of qualified personnel to be more active in the information business (The reader is requested to see Appendix No. 1 for 'useful web links' taken from CAABU).

### **Chapter Three The Muslim Community in the United Kingdom**

With its hundreds of mosques and organizations, the Muslim community can be found everywhere in the United Kingdom. Most British Muslims come from the Indian subcontinent, but Arabs also form a tangible part of it. While 43 per cent of British Muslims originate from Pakistan and 17 per cent from Bangladesh, 21 per cent are of Arab, Iranian, Kurdish and Turkish origin, 9 per cent of Indian origin, 6 per cent of African origin and another 6 per cent are Britons.

According to statistical records taken in 2001, a question on religion asked for the first time showed that the number of Muslims in UK was 1.6 million people. However, if we take the number of Arab Muslims in UK to be 500,000, not 800,000, as the president of the Arab Club in UK has estimated, and that this number represents 20 per cent of the number of the Muslims in Britain, we can conclude that the total number of British Muslims is at least 5.2 million.

Whatever it is, the fact remains that Islam is the second largest religion in UK as well as in the European continent.

### **Organizations of the Muslim Community in Britain**

#### **► The Muslim Council of Britain**

This organization represents Muslims at the British national level. It registers 500 regional and local organizations, mosques, charity societies and schools. The main objectives of this council are to coordinate Muslim affairs, encourage efforts which aim to realize benefits for the Muslim community, founding a strong status based on the respect of rights of Muslims in British society and working against discrimination against Muslims. With the presence of more than 250 Islamic organizations from around the UK, this council was founded in November 1997.

The Muslim Council of Britain, in as far as the Palestinian community is concerned, is considered a very important institution for organizing activities in support of the Palestinian people's rights and for organizing great numbers of Muslims to participate in demonstrations against the atrocities committed by the Israeli occupation and the Israeli violations of human, political and legal rights of Palestinians. In 2003, in cooperation with a number of British organizations and labor unions, the council organized a number of demonstrations against the war waged in Iraq, as well as other demonstrations supportive of the Palestinian cause.

Dr. Muhammad Abdl-Bari of Bangladesh is the president of the Muslim Council of Britain. His predecessor was Sir Iqbal Sakrani, who was born in Malawi, but originated from the Indian subcontinent.

### ► Other Islamic Institutions

#### 1. The Islamic Cultural Center

The center, located in Regent Park in London, is a large mosque inaugurated in 1977 with financial support from King Faisal ibn Abdul-Aziz, of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan Al Nuhayan, president of UAE. The center includes a library for reading and a shop which sells Islamic books in both Arabic and English. The center offers such services as supervising marriage contracts and prayers for the Muslim dead, together with giving guidance to those who wish to convert to Islam.

#### 2. The Muslim Association of Britain

This is an openly political organization and is much smaller than the Muslim Council of Britain. This association, which was founded in 1997 and has been connected to the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, urges Muslims to vote for those who support Islamic and Arab issues and struggles against British policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as against the British government's support for Israel in persecuting Palestinians.

#### 3. The Muslim Public Affairs Committee



This committee tries to provide decision makers with the Islamic point of view and works on convincing Muslims to adopt non-violent *jihad* and encouraging them to become involved in political activities. It was criticized, however, for supporting David Irving, the British historian and the established expert on WWII history, for denying the Jewish Holocaust by the Nazis.

#### 4. Al-Tahreer (Liberation) Party

This is a minority party which calls upon Muslims in Britain to boycott the election process, and also calls for the re-founding of the Islamic Caliphate to extend from Indonesia to Morocco.

In spite of the many followers of this party in universities, most of the Islamic organizations keep away from it.

#### 5. Islamic Relief UK

This is a charity organization which helps the poorest people in the world. Located in the city of Birmingham, and having a 7-figure budget today, it was founded by Dr. Hani Al-Banna.

Manchester, the second largest city in Britain, has more than 22 Islamic institutions, including a large number of mosques, social welfare organizations and schools.

Although Arabs form a good percentage of British Muslims, they have not been actively involved in the British political arena the way Muslims of the Indian subcontinent have. The latter, as mentioned earlier, have had from among them members in the two houses of parliament. They have also been active in the three major political parties: the Labor Party, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Through their organizations, Muslims can be quite influential in the general elections and, wherever they form a relatively high percentage, they can enable certain candidates to win. That is why, in certain regions, their influence cannot be ignored and candidates are bound to listen to them.

### **The Islamic World Festival in Britain**

This study on the Muslim community in Britain is incomplete without mentioning the greatest festival in the world dedicated to Islamic culture, sciences and philosophy staged in May and June of 1976. This festival presented Islamic civilization in its depth, variety, spiritual, materialist, humanitarian and scientific accomplishments. It was presented to the British public in an unprecedented way at various London museums, galleries and showrooms.

### **Islamophobia**



In recent years, the atmosphere changed against Muslims and the phenomenon of Islamophobia emerged after the Islamic revolution took place in Iran in 1979, followed by a deterioration of relations between Iran and the West. The enmity increased with the rise of Al-Qaeda and due to the various terrorist acts that were carried out by its agents, like the explosions at the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The worst, however, were the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States. Then, on July 7, 2005, came the explosions at the London underground and buses, which were also attributed to Al-Qaeda. Naturally, the atmosphere in Britain became tense especially since the culprits were all Muslims originally coming from the Indian subcontinent, but all born in the UK. The slaying of some Western and non-Western hostages in Iraq, which were also claimed by Al-Qaeda and shown on TV, helped heighten the enmity toward Muslims in Britain.

This has driven the British government to be exceptionally strict in applying anti-terrorist laws and in dealing with immigration. Searching for reasons driving some British Muslims to participate in terrorist actions against and inside 'their' country took on special importance. This also raised the question of whether Britain is actually a multi-cultural society and if everybody must stick to a unified mode of values.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Palestinian Community in the United Kingdom**

As outlined before, there is a painful relationship between Britain and the Palestinian people. It started when Britain was still an empire which was powerful enough to give homelands to others than the indigenous people. This is precisely what the Balfour Declaration did when it granted the Zionist organization the right to turn Palestine into a homeland for immigrant Jews.

With the exception of the limited number of Palestinian students who came to Britain for studying, especially during the period between the two world wars, there was no tangible presence of Palestinians in Britain. When the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe) occurred in 1948, some Palestinian students, as well as those working at the BBC, had to stay in the country until the situation was clarified.

### **Number of Palestinians in the UK**

There are no precise statistics on the number of Palestinians in the UK, and all figures available, which range between 20,000 and 30,000, are estimates only. Some sources of error stem from the fact that many Palestinians are categorized according to the nationalities they have, not according to their Palestinian origin; British statistics do not include a special category for Palestinians.

For the purpose of reaching the maximum possible number of Palestinians in various places in the UK, the author of this study tried to ask friends and acquaintances to write down the phone numbers of their Palestinian friends so that he could arrange lists and repeat the same request with those whose names were received. Unfortunately, this plan did not work, probably for the lack of a group of full-time individuals who could follow up with this endeavor personally or by phone. Being absorbed in their daily work in a city where transportation consumes a lot of time, volunteers for this task could not be motivated.

The author of this study was able to write down the names of 327 Palestinians whom he knows well, while the number could go up to 400 with more strain on memory. He, however, has been living in the UK since 1966; therefore, the number of his acquaintances may far exceed those of someone who has been here for only 20 years, for example. The process followed involved writing down the name of the head of the household then adding his wife and children as a number, not by name. For example, writing 'Ahmad Mansi + 2' means the man, plus his wife and daughter/son, and the total becomes 3.

The ideal method, perhaps, would be to ask the executive committee of the Association of the Palestinian Community in the UK to shoulder the task of obtaining the statistics. The advantage is that this association, stationed in London, is in touch with other regional institutions for Palestinians in the UK and the databases of these institutions can be used. This, however, demands financing and planning to recruit a group of enthusiastic young men and women and supervised by people with experience in statistics.

## **A General Note on the Beginnings and Waves of Immigration**

The immigration of Palestinians to Britain is considered a recent phenomenon when compared, for example, to that of the Yemenis, who came to the UK in large numbers decades before limited numbers of Palestinians started to arrive. Palestinian immigration increased during the past four decades only, after the June 1967 war, when the Israeli army occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At that time, some students came to continue their studies, while a small number came for work.

Late in the 1970s through the 1980s and 1990s, consequent to the Lebanese civil war (April 1975-October 1990), the number of Palestinians tangibly increased. Three immigration waves took place. The first was in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, the second after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the third in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and later on after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a disaster for Palestinians working there, for most of them lost their jobs and businesses and had to leave the country in the tens of thousands. Some of them chose to reside in Britain, where they used to spend their holidays or send their children for study at the universities.

The Palestinian refugees are of two categories: the refugees of 1948 and those of 1967 (called *naziheen*-immigrants). A study on Palestinians in Britain adds another category, whereby the Palestinian immigrants are divided into two types:

1. Educated immigrants who integrated into British society
2. Uneducated immigrants who came from Lebanon. **11**

## **The Palestinian Community under the Leadership of Fateh**

Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, felt disgraced after the June 1967 defeat. In 1968, however, the battle at Al-Karama fought by the Jordanian Army and the *fedayeen* (freedom fighters), resulted in a historic victory and gave hope to the Palestinians and the rest of the Arabs. As a consequence of the battle, thousands of Palestinians joined the National Palestinian Liberation (Fateh) and Palestinians became more aware of their national Palestinian identity.

The branch of Fateh in Britain started leading activities of the Palestinian community. Various political and exploratory visits of a number of movement leaders were arranged, and a monthly magazine, titled *Free Palestine*, was published, with the late Dr. Abdul-Wahhab Al-Kayyali as its first editor-in-chief.

### **► Two Big Cultural Festivals**

In 1982, Fateh supervised the arrangement of a Palestinian cultural festival that was unique in its kind and comprehensive nature. A few prominent poets, like Mahmood Darwish, Mu'een Bsaiso, Sameeh Al-Qassem and Adonis participated, together with artists such as Ismaeel Shammoot and his wife, Tamam Al-Ak-hal, and other writers and political analysts. A photography exhibition and Al-Dabkeh Folklore dances were performed by Al-A'ashiqeen Folklore team. Attracting a large audience of Palestinians, Arabs and British, the activities continued for a few days. The same was repeated November 28-December 1, 1983, after the Sabra-Shatilla massacres were committed by the Israelis in Beirut.

### **► Palestinian Ambassadors: Their Roles and Periods**

With no exception, all ambassadors of the PLO in the UK were members of Fateh. Saeed Hamami was the first representative of the PLO in London where he assumed his duties in 1973. In addition to his Palestinian and Arab friends, and thanks to his excellent command of English, he was soon able to establish a deep friendship with a number of British journalists, MPs and officials. Although Prime Minister Harold Wilson was a well-known pro-Zionist, Hamami was able to arouse his interest with his suggestions and diplomatic initiatives, especially his proposal to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, side by side with Israel.

At that time, Hamami met with the left-wing MK and journalist, Uri Avneri. However, Saeed Hamami was assassinated by the Abu-Nidhal group on January 4, 1978. His body was flown to Beirut (where PLO then had its headquarters) and then to Amman, Jordan, where he was buried in the Martyrs Cemetery. The assassination of Hamami was a shock to his friends and acquaintances as well as the entire Palestinian community. His assassination, it was doubted, was by orders of the Iraqi regime at the time, as a war of assassinations between Fateh and the Iraqi regime was in high gear. As a result of the wide circle of friends Hamami had, the British newspapers wrote long obituaries about him, commending his person and activities.

Although it was not easy to find a person with the character and abilities of Hamami, Nabeel Ramlawi, his deputy, was able to assume PLO office duties. Ramlawi left London late in 1982 to take up the duties of PLO representative at the UN in Geneva. The late Faysal Uwaydah became in charge of the London office until he was moved to Vienna.

A'fif Safiya, the most successful of the PLO ambassadors to the UK and the Vatican, assumed his office in August 1990 and remained until October 2005. His presence in the UK had a great influence on British public opinion, for he spoke English fluently and wrote with eloquence. Besides English, he spoke French equally well. All that enabled him to give lectures and participate in general debates. In addition to his diplomatic activities and attention to the community's affairs, he frequently used to participate in debates on radio and television, and write articles in British newspapers. He also wrote booklets explaining the Palestinian cause and its historical development.

The community was fortunate when Safiya was succeeded by Prof. Emanuel Hasasyan. This academic was deputy president of Bethlehem University, and worked with the late Faysal Al-Husseini at Bayt Ash-Sharq (Orient House) in Jerusalem and at the Negotiations Affairs Department. Ambassador Hasasyan, like his predecessor, was active in his positive actions in talking to the British media about the cause of his homeland.

## **The Advent of the Community Association, its Constitution, History and Chairmen**

Fateh had a close connection with the formation of the nucleus of the Association of the Palestinian Community in the UK early in the 1970s. The founding of this association, however, was possible only after a few long years in the hands of a few activists. The author of this study has a copy of the first letter, dated November 18, 1991, declaring the birth of this association. It was written in English and signed by Munib Al-Masri, the first president of the association. The letter had the name of the association, and on top was a request to forward all correspondence to the secretary at the address: 4 Clarville Grove, London, SW7

5AR. The letter declared that the honorary sponsor of the community association was the head of the Palestinian diplomatic mission, A'fif Safiya. The members of the executive committee were named as follows: Munib Al-Masri, President; Fathi al-Qalla, Deputy President; Emile Al-Jawzi, Secretary; Bassam Abu-Rudayna, Treasurer; and Riyadh Khuraysha, Muhammad Marrar, Omar Murad, Ya'qoob Ghattas, Basem Al-Masri, André Bullata, members. The following were chosen as members of the committee: Abdul-Bari A'twan, Rose Awad, Layla Fanoos, Sari Al-Barghoothi Al-Khalili and Patricia Mantoora. The letter mentioned that, following the initiative of a group of Palestinians who had formed among themselves a preparatory committee to found an association, and after having received the approval of the chairman of the PLO mission in the UK, Mr. Faysal U'waydha, and the approval of Mr. A'fif Safiya, they wished for a declaration to be made stating the formation of the Association of the Palestinian Community in the UK.

The author also has a letter, dated 27/2/1992, written by the chairman of the PLO mission to the UK, A'fif Safiya, addressing 'the brothers and sisters, members of the Palestinian community in the UK', advising them that Chairman Yasser Arafat and His Eminence Sheikh Abdul-Hameed As-Sayeh, speaker of the Palestinian National Council, have agreed to have an elected member of the community participate in the forthcoming meeting of the Palestinian National Council.

The constitution of the association was written by two legal experts, Prof. Eugene Qatran, a judge, and Dr. Anis Al-Qassem, an advocate. The following people assumed the executive chair of the association in chronological order: Munib Al-Masri, businessman; Dr. Anis Al-Qassem, advocate; Prof. Khalil Al-Hindi; Dr. Ghada Al-Karmi; Michel Abdul-Maseeh, advocate; Mr. Rajab Shamlakh, businessman (2003-2008). In the wake of the elections of February 24, 2008, Judge (retired.) Prof. Eugene Qatran became chairman of the community, with Saeed Shihada as Deputy Chairman; Maher Uthman, as Secretary; Sarah Al-Jundi, as Treasurer; Ghada Hammad (Umm Ali) as an honored member with the title 'A'meedet Al-Jaaliya' (Lady of the Community); Dr. Shaikh Abdus-Salam Abu-Shukhaydem; Dr. Kamel Hawwash; Muhammad Fuhayd; Ziyad Al-badareen; Talal Ad-Deeb; Wa'el Shaweesh and Muhammad Masharqa as members.

Lately, the Association of the Palestinian Community has suffered hardships when it could not convene general congresses or perform elections, as per its constitution. The difficulty was overcome, however, when the general elections were held in February 2008.

## **The Effect of a Young Community on its Political Activity**

Compared to the Jewish community in Britain which goes back 350 years, the Palestinian community is considered young and recent. This means that British Jews have had enough time to become deeply ingrained in British life, actively

participating in political parties, as well as being widely involved in the various daily activities like practicing law, business, arts, information, etc. All this has lent importance to the Jewish community and enabled it to efficiently defend Israeli interests in Britain. In fact, the Jews have long been represented in the House of Commons in a much greater proportion than their actual population. With a population of not more than 500,000 (out of a total British population of 58 million), their membership in the House of Commons sometimes exceeds 50 MPs, distributed among the three largest parties, the Labor Party, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

The recent existence of the Palestinian community means that the ratio of those who were born in the UK is not high enough. Their involvement in various walks of life, particularly in politics, will take a few more decades, at least. This does not mean the absence of the first steps forward, for there are many Arabs, including Palestinians, who have joined political parties on an individual basis. They try to coordinate their activities and form consolidated groups which will gain influence in the future.

Atallah Saeed, an activist in the Labor Party, tells of the formation of the 'Arab Group' within the Labor Party in 2002, with an elected executive committee, the members of which are Atallah Saeed, Adnan Shaherli, Izzat Darwazah, Abdun-Nasser Saymeh, Dr. Rajaa Kumeen, Muna Nashashibi and Sawsan Isfari.

## **Other Palestinian Organizations in Britain**

In addition to the Association of the Palestinian Community which is stationed in London, there are others such as the one in Birmingham, another in Manchester and a third in Scotland. The mother association in London tries to create close connections with these associations, accepting their representatives in its executive committee.

In addition to these associations, the General Union of Palestinian Students has branches in the UK. The community association is well aware of the importance of coordinating its activities with the students and recognizes the value of student activities which have always been highly rewarding in the service of the Palestinian cause. Therefore, an observer from the student union is included in the executive committee of the association. *Al-Awda* (Return) Center, chaired by Majed Al-Zeer, is considered one of the most important Palestinian institutions in the UK. It has a permanent location in the heart of London, at Euston. Other organizations are: the Jerusalem Support Society, the Friends of Bir Zeit Society, Deir Yaseen Remembered. There are British organizations which support Palestinians, the most prominent of which is Medical Aid for Palestine and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

One important British charity for helping the Palestinians is the Foundation for Al-Quds University Medical School. This is an independent charity registered in the



UK for the purpose of advancing the interests of the medical school, a faculty of the Palestinian University of Jerusalem, and medical education throughout Palestine.

There are few enterprises in Palestine which can have such beneficial long-term results as providing medical education with standards subject to international examinations and graduates trained in skills relevant to the needs of their community. Support for these enterprises must come from all those concerned for the future of the Palestinian people.

## **Midlands Palestinian Community Association (MPCA)**

Kamel Hawwash, originally from Jerusalem, was one of three founding members of the MPCA and its chairman since its launch. He works at the University of Birmingham and has been in the UK for over 30 years. In a meeting attended by George Galloway, along with a group of trade unionists who had just returned from Palestine, they spoke of the experience of visiting the occupied territories after the invasion of the West Bank in 2002. They said they had discussed ways of developing strong links with Palestine and that the idea of twinning (linking) Birmingham and Ramallah emerged. Soon after that, they called a meeting to discuss the proposal and after a few meetings, Kamel Hawwash was elected chairman of the Birmingham Ramallah Twinning Committee (now the Birmingham Ramallah Twinning Initiative, [BRTI]).

### **► Launching the MPCA**

Kamel Hawwash and two other Palestinians he knew agreed to launch the MPCA. They put an advertisement in the Birmingham *Evening Mail* and encouraged people who knew Palestinians to ask them to join the first meeting. Around 20 people attended a presentation on the vision of the MPCA. This was both to bring Palestinians together and to connect with other communities, especially the host community, and to help raise the issue of Palestine. The attendants agreed that it would be a non-political and non-religious organization.

They made progress over the next couple of years with activities including iftars, Eid parties, children's sports activities, trips, *dabka* group and a women's social club. In addition, they developed a profile in the city and beyond which was far larger than expected.

### **► MPCA Activities**

The MPCA worked on a number of events with the Birmingham-Ramallah Twinning Initiative (BRTI) and helped to raise funds to build a library in the Dir Ammar refugee camp, with some members helping with cooking at a number of falafel evenings. Richard Burden (the MPCA chair and local



MP) said that the work in Birmingham was a model for other Arab organizations to follow. This was in the context of major criticism that governments have of the Arab community in that it does not have successful organizations or at least not enough that are properly constituted and run.

### ► **Leadership of the MPCA**

Currently, the MPCA has a nine-member management committee which was elected in February 2008. Kamel Hawwash is chairman and Nilly Abuarqub is vice chairperson, other members hold the roles of MPCA treasurer, secretary, external relations (with other communities and organizations), community liaison, fundraising and media. The MPCA is an independent body and not a branch of the APC in London. It is noteworthy that there are around 50 Palestinian families in the Birmingham area.

## **Integration or Safeguarding the Identity?**

It can be seen that integration of the Palestinian community into British society does not necessarily mean losing the national Palestinian identity and an affiliation with Arab culture. On the contrary, in an environment of such wide freedoms in the UK, partial assimilation may help serve national Palestinian goals, especially those supported by UN resolutions and/or international law. One may say with a degree of certainty that those who were born in Britain to two Palestinian parents cannot forget that Palestine, like Britain, is also their homeland. Those whose fathers are Palestinian and their mothers are non-Arab may be less enthusiastic, though not necessarily so, about their Palestinian identity. But in most cases, they will defend the Palestinian cause and rights.

In a study on the Palestinian community in Britain conducted by Majed Al-Zeer, he says that in interviews with a number of Palestinians about their identity, they were asked to choose among the following identities: British, Palestinian, Arab or Muslim. Some of them considered themselves as British Muslims, others Palestinian British and a girl considered herself as Palestinian. With one exception, all the Palestinians he met, who did not have British nationality, did not choose British identity. The common identity among all of them, according to Al-Zeer, was Palestinian. One of them said he was a Palestinian Arab, while another chose the four identities together.

## **The Right of Return**

Like all other Palestinians around the world, the Palestinians residing in the UK discern and stick to the right of return to their homeland, in accordance with UN Resolution 194. Although Palestinians in the UK understand the present political situation between the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians and Israel, they watch

the Palestinian national situation, for the presence of unity is what supports the right of return, while disunity weakens their hopes. They also watch the Arab situation and whether the Arab states are ready to support the right of the refugees to return to their homeland. They are watchful of the chances of an independent, Palestinian state in the near future, and the role it may play in achieving the return of refugees, or obstacles in their path.

The presence of Al-Awda Center, with Majed Al-Zeer as its director, works on ensuring the right of return for Palestinian refugees, together with their offspring, to their homeland, and their right for being compensated for the great disaster which was inflicted upon them and the wretched conditions they have encountered throughout their diaspora. The goals and objectives of this center are worthy of the support of Palestinians.

The attitude of Palestinians in Britain is greatly influenced by political reactions in the region and by the kind of Palestinian leadership at any period of time. They are worried about the status of the PLO — whether it is being weakened or strengthened — and what became of its charter. They wonder if all or only some of the Palestinian organizations are under its flag. The present geographic rift between Gaza and the West Bank, as a result of the differences between Fateh and Hamas, is a most important issue now. This situation has a detrimental effect on the morale of Palestinians in Britain, the same way it has everywhere.

## **Summary**

Britons have a relatively high level of education and general knowledge, including knowledge of world affairs; they are ready to listen and understand. If it were left to ordinary people, Britain would probably have refrained from taking part in the war against Iraq in 2003, or in the aggression against Egypt in 1956. It seems, however, that once people elect their deputies to parliament, they leave major problems to the cabinet to decide. That is why they may be unwillingly dragged into unjust wars, like the action against Egypt waged by Anthony Eden's government, or the alliance of Tony Blair with American President George W. Bush, in spite of the greatest demonstrations in British history in protest of the war on Iraq.

The policies followed by British governments, however, are subject to a few factors, like the personal viewpoint of the prime minister, British economic interests and what is described as a 'special relationship' with the US. This special relationship, however, seems to work only one-way: from Washington to London but not the other way round. The general policy of the European Union towards the Arab-Israeli struggle and the Palestinian cause is also one of the factors that influence the British government's stance. With regard to the Palestinian problem, however, even the EU seems to prefer taking a backseat to the Americans. In short, such prime ministers as Harold Wilson and Tony Blair (both from the Labor Party), who were known for their strong support of Israel,

had the strongest say regarding the policies towards the Palestinian cause. In spite of this, many British ministers in the past four decades have been known for taking noble stances towards the Palestinian cause. The same can be said about the majority of MPs who belong to the various parties. This is true, despite the fact that the relative number of Jews in the House of Commons far exceeds their ratio in British society.

Although Britain, historically, was a country that welcomed immigrants from Europe and the rest of the world, and people seeking political asylum, the immigration of colored people always instigated racial tendencies on the part of white Britons against this kind of immigration. This was heightened by the fact that the majority of these immigrants were economic migrants in the sense that they were merely looking for a standard of living better than that in their countries. They come, therefore, seeking better jobs or, at least, to be granted free lodging and assistance salaries from the government, expenses that are financed by the taxpayers.

In the first months of 1958, for example, debate on immigration renewed as a result of a sudden increase in the number of immigrants from India and Pakistan. In February of that year, newcomers from these two countries formed 30 per cent of the total number of immigrants in the previous year. Immigration officials noticed then that most of these immigrants belonged to an uneducated class of laborers who did not speak English. Lord Alec-Douglas Hume, secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, believed that most Indians and Pakistanis who arrived in Britain were mostly unsuitable and could not be assimilated. He had no reason to think that the public, in general, would show them the same degree of tolerance that was generally shown to the citizens of the West Indies, who were literate Christians, spoke English and who were mentally and physically fit.

British society has recently become multiracial and multicultural. From 1940 to 1990, the ratio of foreigners has increased from 1 per cent to 6 per cent. By 2025, Asians and blacks are expected to form 10 per cent of the population. According to documents on foreign immigration to Britain, it is believed that the oldest immigrant Arabs to the British Isles came from Yemen, particularly from South Yemen, which was under the British colonial rule, as well as from Somalia. Prior to the independence of Arab countries from the two major colonialist countries, Britain and France, the number of immigrant Arabs in Britain (students are obviously not included) was small, yet this number started to increase after independence. France received a greater number of immigrants from the countries that were under its rule, namely Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Lebanon, than those Arabs who immigrated to Britain from its own colonial countries. Desire to escape civil wars or other kinds of violence, as well as to seek better economic opportunities led many Iraqis, Egyptians, Lebanese and others to immigrate to Britain.

Some Iraqis, for example, resided in Britain after the fall of the Iraqi royal regime in 1958. However, the greatest influx of Iraqis took place after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, when Shiites in south Iraq and Kurds in the north were persecuted. The international verdicts on Iraq increased the rate of Iraqi immigration to Britain. Other waves of immigration took place after 2003, the year of the American invasion of Iraq.

It is clear that among the Iraqis in Britain there is a great number of highly qualified professionals, intellectuals and artists. The number of Iraqis who officially reside in Britain – many have obtained British nationality— is estimated to be approximately 100,000 persons.

Thousands of Yemenis have been living in the Midlands since the first half of the 20th century, in cities like Birmingham and some ports like Liverpool, as well as in Wales. In Britain, there is a large number of Egyptians and Moroccans in addition to a smaller number of Algerians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and Tunisians. Historically, it can be noted that the number of citizens of oil-rich Arab countries having permanent residency in Britain is very small, and members of this small community either belong to the opposition in their countries or possess their own houses and run their businesses. Their residency in Britain is intermittent.

With hundreds of mosques and organizations, the Muslim community can be found everywhere in the United Kingdom. Most of the British Muslims come from the Indian subcontinent, but Arabs also form a tangible part of it. While 43 per cent of British Muslims originate from Pakistan and 17 per cent from Bangladesh, 21 per cent are of Arab, Iranian, Kurdish and Turkish origin, 9 per cent of Indian origin, 6 per cent of African origin and another 6 per cent are white Britons.

There are no precise statistics on the number of Palestinians in the UK, and all figures available, which range between 20,000 and 30,000, are estimates only. Some of the sources of error stem from the fact that many Palestinians are categorized according to the nationality they have, not according to their Palestinian origin. British statistics do not include a special category for Palestinians.

Late in the 1970s through the 1980s and 1990s, consequent to the Lebanese civil war (April 1975-October 1990), the number of Palestinians tangibly increased. Three immigration waves took place. The first was in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, the second after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the third in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and later on after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a disaster for the Palestinians working there, for most of them lost their jobs and businesses and had to leave the country in the tens of thousands. Some of them chose to reside in Britain, where they used to spend their holidays or send their children for study at the universities.

It can be seen that integration of the Palestinian community into British society does not necessarily mean losing Palestinian national identity and affiliation with Arab culture. On the contrary, in an environment of such wide freedoms in the UK, partial assimilation may help serve national Palestinian goals, especially those supported by UN resolutions and/or the international law. One may say with certainty that those who were born in Britain to two Palestinian parents cannot forget that Palestine, like Britain, is also their homeland. Those whose fathers are Palestinian and their mothers are non-Arab may be less enthusiastic, though not necessarily so, about their Palestinian identity. But in most cases, they will defend the Palestinian cause and rights.

## Appendix

### Arab and Palestinian Institutions in Britain

- ▶ Awda UK  
(The Palestine Right to return coalition UK) <http://www.al-awda.org.uk>
- ▶ Al-Maktoum Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies  
<http://www.almi.abdn.ac.uk>
- ▶ Anglo Jordanian Society  
Address: 311 Lilly Road, London SW6 7LL.
- ▶ The Arab magazine  
(English language magazine on the most topical issues and under-reported stories in the Middle East & North Africa today): <http://www.the-arab.com>
- ▶ Arab-British Chamber of Commerce  
<http://www.abcc.org.uk>
- ▶ Arab Club of Great Britain  
<http://www.arabclub.co.uk>
- ▶ Arabica- Network of Arab Teachers  
Address: PO Box 150 Altrincham, Cheshire WA15.
- ▶ Arab Lawyer's Network  
Address: 28 Ling's Coppice, London SE21 8SY.
- ▶ Arab Media Watch  
<http://www.arabmediawatch.com/amw>
- ▶ Arab Women's Association  
Address: 211 The Linen Hall, 162-168 Regent Street, London W1R 5TB.
- ▶ Arab Women's Group  
Address: 123 King's Street, London W6.
- ▶ Aranib – The Arab Network in Britain  
<http://www.cs.cf.ac.uk/User/O.F.Rana/aranib/index.html>
- ▶ The Association of Palestine Community in the UK  
<http://www.apcuk.org>
- ▶ Banipal - Magazine of Modern Arab Literature

(Founded in 1998 and published three times a year, Banipal presents today's authors from all over the Arab world in English translation. Illustrated with author photos and paintings by Arab artists):

<http://www.banipal.co.uk>

▶ Birmingham Ramallah Twinning Initiative, BRTI

<http://www.birminghamramallah.org>

▶ British Arab Medical Association

<http://www.arabmedical.org.uk>

▶ British Lebanese Society

<http://www.britishlebanese.org/default.htm>

▶ British Moroccan Society

Address: 35 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE 7JB.

▶ British Syrian Society

<http://www.britishsyriansociety.org>

▶ British Yemeni Society

<http://www.al-bab.com/bys/Default.htm>

▶ The Egyptian-British Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.theebcc.com>

▶ Egyptian Community Association

<http://www.egyptiancommunity.co.uk>

▶ The Egyptian UK Association

<http://www.egyptianuk.com>

▶ Fife Arabic Society

<http://www.fifearabicsociety.org.uk/index.html>

▶ Gulf Cultural Club

<http://gcclub.org>

▶ Iraqi Community Welfare Association

Address: 249 Kingsway, Burnage, Manchester, M19 1AL.

▶ Iraqi Welfare Association

Address: Welfare House, Suite 105 Empire Way, Wembley, HA9 0EW.

▶ Learning English with the BBC - notes in Arabic

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/arabic\\_elt/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/arabic_elt/index.shtml)

▶ Liverpool Arabic Centre

Works alongside the Yemeni and Arabic speaking communities and those interested in Arabic culture and language in the Liverpool area.

▶ Liverpool Yemeni/Arabic Club (LYAC)

Address: 167a Lodge Lane, Liverpool, L8 0QQ.

▶ Medical Aid for Iraqi Children

<http://www.maic.org.uk>

▶ Medical Aid for Palestine

<http://www.map-uk.org>

▶ Middle East Places in London

(A directory of organizations, institutions and businesses based in London whose work relates to the Middle East. Only available to members of the

▶ London Middle East Institute - see above link for details)

<http://www.lmei.soas.ac.uk/placeslogin/login.cfm>



- ▶ Midlands Palestinian Community Association  
<http://www.mpcauk.net>
- ▶ Middle East UK  
[www.middleeastuk.com](http://www.middleeastuk.com)
- ▶ Moroccan Information Centre  
Address: 61 Golborne Road, London W10 5NR.
- ▶ Morocco London  
<http://www.morocolondon.co.uk>
- ▶ Moroccan Widadia Community Association  
Address: 39 Chippenham Road, London W9.
- ▶ Moroccan Women's Centre  
Address: Bays 4 & 5, Trellick Tower, 4-6 Golborne Road, London W10.
- ▶ Muslim Council of Britain  
(One of the leading groups representing the interests of Muslims in the United Kingdom): <http://www.mcb.org.uk>
- ▶ National Association of British Arabs (NABA)  
<http://www.naba.org.uk>
- ▶ Palestinian Forum in Britain  
Address: PO Box 51825, London, G26 2NW.
- ▶ Palestine Solidarity Campaign  
<http://www.palestinecampaign.org>
- ▶ Saudi British Society  
<http://www.saudibritishsociety.org.uk/main/a1000.htm>
- ▶ Sharq Magazine  
(Sharq is an online British Arab lifestyle magazine. It is a bi-monthly English language magazine that includes exclusive features on a variety of topics including politics, art, travel and food):  
<http://www.sharqmagazine.com>
- ▶ Sindibad Films (Sindibad Films is a leading producer of Arab and Palestinian films. Based in the UK, it has produced both documentary and feature-films for European television (most notably BBC, C4, Arte, ZDF and RTBF) as well as general cinema release.): <http://www.sindibad.co.uk>
- ▶ Syrian Arab Community Association  
<http://www.syriauk.com>
- ▶ Yemeni Community Association  
Address: 2 Thorpe Close, London W10 5XL.
- ▶ Yemeni Community Association in Sandwell  
<http://www.yca-sandwell.org.uk>
- ▶ Yemeni Development Forum  
<http://www.ydf.org.uk>
- ▶ Yemeni Economic & Training Centre  
<http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/cis/shucan/yetc/index.htm>
- ▶ Yemeni Welfare and Advice Centre Address  
Vestry Hall, 43 Attercliffe Common, Sheffield, S9 2AE



## Endnotes

- 1 Harold Wilson wrote a book on Israel, titled, *Chariot of Israel: Britain, America and the State of Israel*. He was known as a friend of Aba Eban and Golda Meir and for his support of Israel. Blair, on the other hand, became acquainted with Michael Levy at the Israeli embassy in London, who promised to finance his personal office with a million pounds and to support him for the leadership of the party and the government. Blair, on his part, paid him back by appointing him as his personal delegate to the Middle East, and as a money-raiser for the party. Then he made him a member of the House of Lords.
- 2 See the original article in: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article3137534.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article3137534.ece)
- 3 See Ian R.G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*, (London: Rutledge, 1997)
- 4 Ibid, p. 6.
- 5 Ibid, p. 8.
- 6 Ibid, p. 74.
- 7 Ibid, p. 91.
- 8 Ibid, p. 92.
- 9 AFP
- 10 This information was taken from Nabih Muqayyad in an interview in mid-March 2008.
- 11 See Mazen Al-Zeer, 'The Palestinian Community in Britain: Features of Exile and Attitudes toward the Right of Return' (The author is the director of Al-Awda Center, London.)