Violating Freedom of Movement

Youth Policy Paper

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are of the youth and do not necessarily reflect the views of the four organizations.
Violation of the Right to Freedom of Movement and its Impact on the Fragmentation of Palestinian Identity

Overview
This policy brief aims to contribute to mobilizing international support for Palestinian rights in order to stop Israeli violations relating to freedom of movement. It addresses international organizations in order to realize this fundamental right guaranteed by international conventions and treaties. The paper argues that violations of the right to freedom of movement are a major cause of fragmentation of the Palestinian national identity, as they prevent geographical contiguity and create ghettos and disconnected identity groups such as the Palestinians of 1948, Palestinians of 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza, and Jerusalemites. Each of these groups is exposed to different kinds and varying degrees of occupation policies and systems that are used to "divide and rule" the various Palestinian groups, and ultimately entrench occupation over land and people and fragment the distinctive Palestinian identity.

Paper Methodology
A group of Palestinian youth distributed across the different geographical regions, including the 1948 lands, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, worked as one group to produce this paper. Each regional group presented the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement in its respective region and explored their impact on the Palestinian public and fragmentation of national identity. This paper contains basic information about international conventions and treaties that guarantee freedom of movement, and considers a sample of Israeli obstructions, including the apartheid wall; West Bank checkpoints; the land, air and sea blockade on the Gaza Strip; the revocation of Jerusalemites' identity cards; and settlement activity. It further contains recommendations and practical proposals to contribute to achieving Palestinian rights with regard to freedom of movement. As such, the paper not only attempts to relay the history of Israel's violations of the freedom of movement over the years, but also presents concrete recommendations to specific international bodies in order to make real change on the ground.

Human Rights Council and Human Rights Commission
The United Nations' Human Rights Council and Human Rights Commission will receive our recommendations and be targeted in campaigns and lobbying efforts in order to realize Palestinian rights. The youth group researched many international trade unions and academic institutions and chose the United Nations and its Human Rights Council and Human Rights Commission. The Council
receives complaints from groups and individuals alike, which renders the need for approval by Palestinian political bodies irrelevant, while the Commission assesses the commitment of member states, including Israel, vis-à-vis the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Therefore, after the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) ratifies the ICCPR, we will be able to hold Israel accountable for violating the Palestinian people's right to freedom of movement. Below is a brief description of these institutions, demonstrating their importance for campaigns emerging from the "Palestinian Youth for Change" project.

The Human Rights Council receives individual and group complaints for all violations of human rights guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations, including the right to freedom of movement. The Council may be approached through various lobbying and advocacy means, including letters.

The Human Rights Commission monitors the commitment of member states to safeguarding the rights guaranteed by the ICCPR, including the right to freedom of movement. Member states are those that have signed and ratified the ICCPR, including Israel, which ratified the Covenant in 1991.

**Right to Freedom of Movement in International Law**

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) guarantee the right of peoples to freedom of movement, a fundamental civil and political right. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War underscores the importance of respecting persons' humanity and refraining from violating fundamental rights. It provides that "protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated." The various declarations and treaties that guarantee the right to freedom of movement under the IHRL include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ICCPR. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that:

- Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

- Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

- The ICCPR, which is legally binding for all states that have signed and ratified it including Israel which signed it in 1966 and ratified it in 1991, details the civil and political rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 12 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of movement as follows:
• Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.

• Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.

• The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.

• No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.

Violations of freedom of movement affect a wide range of fundamental rights, such as the rights to education, healthcare and work, which are economic, social and cultural rights. The legally binding International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) guarantees the right to work (Article 6), the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 11), the right to access to healthcare (Article 12), and the right to education (Article 13). Israel signed the ICESCR in 1966 and ratified it in 1991.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CEFRD) was the first multilateral human rights treaty to be adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1965, and has 175 signatory countries, including Israel. Article 2 of the CEFRD clearly prohibits racial discrimination, defined in Article 1 as: "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, guarantees indigenous peoples in Article 1 "the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law." Article 2 of the Declaration provides that "indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity."
Israeli Violation of Palestinian Rights: The Situation on the Ground

Israel violates the rights of Palestinians living under its occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and exercises several forms of racial discrimination against Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1948. Israel also prevents the return of Palestinian refugees who were forcibly displaced and expelled from their homes. Violating the Palestinians' freedom of movement is one example of discrimination, and is the focus of this project and subprojects. In the Gaza Strip, this restriction of the freedom of movement is used as a means of collective punishment. In the West Bank, it manifests in settlement expansion, checkpoints, and the apartheid wall, to name but a few elements. In Jerusalem, this violation involves stripping Jerusalemites of their identity.

The blockade on the Gaza Strip, especially since 2007, has had numerous effects, including a sharp decline in the economic well-being of citizens, an increase in poverty and unemployment rates reaching more than 30% in 2013, an increase in food insecurity affecting 57% of the population, and the dependence of 80% of the population on aid.

Also, some 4,000 citizens have been directly affected due to a ban on fishing beyond three nautical miles. In addition, 70% of the population of the Gaza Strip suffers power outages and only have access to electricity for limited periods. As for water resources, more than 90% of extracted groundwater is not fit for drinking.

As such, the entire population of Gaza lives under siege and is isolated from the rest of the Palestinian people and the entire world; the Gaza Strip has become an open air prison. The psychological impact of consecutive aggressions against the Gaza Strip, most recently in the summer of 2014, will last for decades and have a lasting impact on basic human rights.

In the West Bank, Israel has built 150 settlements since 1967. Their current population is 563,546 settlers, 49.2% of whom are in Jerusalem.

Although the settlements are built on 3% of West Bank territory, the Palestinians cannot use 43% of the West Bank because it is allocated to settlements' local and regional councils. This situation denies them the right to move freely in their own land since these lands are effectively beyond their control. The settlements are the main reason for the construction of the Apartheid wall beyond the Green Line, including in East Jerusalem. Upon the completion of the wall, nearly 80% of settlers will live in settlements situated on the western side of the wall.
As for the laws applicable to the occupied territories, Israeli civil law applies to settlers while Israeli military law applies to Palestinians. Thus, two separate legal systems apply, leading to discrimination against the Palestinians. Moreover, nearly 540 internal checkpoints and roadblocks as well as other obstacles exist in the West Bank and hinder the physical movement of Palestinians.

The Israeli army also erects hundreds of flying checkpoints in the West Bank. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented about 256 mobile checkpoints in December 2013. Israel also uses physical obstacles such as dirt walls, concrete blocks, iron gates and channels. The number of these physical obstacles varies but in 2012, a monthly average of 445 of such obstacles was documented. Israel has designated 65.12 km of the West Bank roads for the exclusive or semi-exclusive use of Israelis, particularly the settlers, while denying the Palestinians access to 72.6 km of roads within the city of Hebron.

Israel began to build the Apartheid Wall in 2002: When completed, it will be 723 km long (more than double the Green Line's length). The bulk of its route - 87% - lies inside the West Bank, and 9.5% of West Bank land falls between the wall and the Green Line.

As a result, 11,000 Palestinians living in 32 localities between the wall and the Green Line require permits and special arrangements to live in their homes. The fact that 80% of settlers live in settlements situated in the area between the Wall and the Green Line confirms that the first and foremost objective for building the wall is not "security" but the annexation of more Palestinian land and further dismemberment of the West Bank.

As of the summer of 2014, 62% of the wall was completed, 10% was still under construction, and 28% of the work was pending. A survey conducted on a section of Qalqilya Governorate found that the number of Palestinian greenhouses dropped from 247 in 2003 to 149 in 2010. To take another example, once the construction of the Wall is completed to the west of the city of Bethlehem, this area will be disconnected from its agricultural lands. The Wall will also limit the access of more than 23,000 people living in 9 Palestinian residential communities to the city of Bethlehem, their major center for health and education services, markets and trade.

This suffering is compounded by the division of Palestinian families as a result of the construction of the wall. After the occupation of what remained of historic Palestine in 1967, Israel annexed Jerusalem and established a registry to record the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem. The authorities registered them as permanent residents in Israel provided that they could prove their residence in the city and that they were physically present in the city during the registration process. This was the first
step in reducing the ratio of Palestinians in the city, as the right of residence was limited to those present in the city during the census. This automatically excluded Jerusalemites who were living abroad at the time, including all those who were residing outside the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality as delineated by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior in June 1967. Consequently, Jerusalemites who did not meet the criteria set by Israeli authorities have been denied permanent residence and return to their homeland.

*Between 1967 and 2012, a total of 14,268 Jerusalem identity cards have been revoked.*

Since then, Palestinians who leave Jerusalem to live elsewhere, whether outside the city borders or abroad, for a relatively long period, face the risk of losing their right of permanent residence in the city, especially since the Entry into Israel Regulations of 1974 empower the Minister of the Interior to revoke permanent or temporary residency permits.

In the Palestinian territory occupied in 1948, about one-and-a-half million Palestinians live as Israeli citizens and hold Israeli citizenship. However, Israel exercises a policy of racial discrimination against them in most aspects of life, including freedom of movement. According to the Israeli Citizenship Law, those who resided inside the Green Line (the Palestinian territory occupied in 1948) on July 14, 1952 (i.e. when the Israeli Knesset approved the Citizenship Law) became citizens. This law closed the door in the face of Palestinian refugees who have been unable to return home and cannot cross into the state of Israel as citizens or local residents. The number of Arab recipients of Israeli citizenship in 1952 was about 167,000 out of 350,000 Palestinians, of whom more than 700,000 were expelled during the Nakba (Catastrophe) in 1948 in a systematic process of ethnic cleansing.

It is important to bear in mind in this context that all Israeli policies are geared toward isolating its Arab citizens from the Palestinian sphere through laws and regulations that criminalize entry to the West Bank and Gaza. These policies also break apart Palestinian families who have members that hold Israeli citizenship and other members that are West Bank Palestinians. This effectively amounts to revoking their identity cards. As a result, about 25% of Israeli Palestinians have become displaced and are prevented from returning to their villages and lands as part of Israel’s efforts to diminish the spaces within which the Palestinians in Israel may move.

This builds on previous efforts. For instance, the villages Israel destroyed in 1948 were declared closed military zones under the emergency regulations that Israel inherited from the British Mandate. These regulations remain in effect and are extended every few years in Israel and constitute the legal reference of the military regime in the occupied territories. For example, British Mandate emergency
regulations nos. 110, 111 and 124 have enabled the military regime to limit citizens' freedom of movement.

Within Israel, British Mandate emergency regulation nos. 125 and 109 have enabled the military governor to prevent the entry of citizens into areas declared as closed. These regulations prevented the refugees from returning to their homes and villages, even those who remained in what became Israel and received Israeli citizenship. The Israeli High Court of Justice, for example, issued a decision in 1951 regarding the entitlement of the population of Iqrit and Kafr Berem villages to return to their villages and reclaim their property. However, that decision has not been implemented to this day for fear that the villages of Iqrit and Kafr Berem would constitute a precedent for the return of all refugees to their original homes, especially those who remained within Israel. Indeed, the Palestinians who left their homes during the 1948 war (Nakba) but remained within what became the state of Israel are considered "present absentee" and are prevented from returning to their homes, which have been expropriated and placed under state ownership like the properties of Palestinian refugees in the Diaspora; these are estimated at about 300,000 dunums of land.

According to Israeli law, the displaced are considered absentee simply because they left their villages even though they continue to live on their land. Israel enacted about 30 laws to transfer private ownership of mostly Arab-owned land into state ownership. Under the 1948 emergency regulations governing the property of absentees, the properties of refugees were placed at the disposal of the "custodian of absentees' property." According to these regulations, the definition of absentee also includes the displaced. The custodian of absentee's property was given interim authority to dispose of these properties. In order to legalize full control over these properties, the Absentee Property Law was enacted in 1950, empowering the custodian to dispose of these properties at will unless absentee prove they were not absent, which is almost impossible.

In addition, the movement of Palestinians is restricted through attempted political schemes aimed at confiscating land and gathering Palestinians in certain localities. Such schemes include the Bill on the Arrangement of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev, or the Prawer Plan, and the Judaization of the Galilee plan, which aims to increase the Jewish population of the Galilee, the largest area of Palestinian concentration inside Israel, through confiscating land and building settlements which the Palestinians may not even approach. Moreover, Israel imposes arbitrary policies that restrict movement of spouses in mixed marriages when one spouse is from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. It is worth mentioning that Israel has divided its Palestinian citizens by geographic
areas (the Negev, the Triangle and the Galilee) and dealt with them separately, especially during the period of military rule between 1948 and 1966.

**Palestinian Identity and Fragmentation**

The violation of the right to freedom of movement affects access to numerous economic, social and cultural rights guaranteed by international law, including the rights to education and health care, the right to marry and create a family, the right to work, the right to food, and the right to freedom of worship. The violation of the right to freedom of movement has affected communication between the Palestinian populations in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, creating psychological barriers and stereotypes that have contributed to the fragmentation of the distinctive Palestinian identity and its confinement into truncated spaces that thwart the unification of discourse and collective work. Consequently, the Palestinian national identity has become fragmented and torn between the immediate demands of individual groups and the Palestinian public discourse.

Based on our findings, Palestinian identity is being confined to specific geographical regions and regional identity has prevailed over national identity, with a growing number of Palestinians identifying themselves as "Ghazawi, Dхаffawi, Min Addakhel" (I'm Gazan, I'm a West Banker, I'm from inside the Green Line). This is not a surprise given the disjointing of entire Palestinian generations, and the lack of a representative political framework that upholds the Palestinian national identity above secondary identities.

The weakness and fragmentation of the overall Palestinian identity has opened the door wide to internal Palestinian disputes. Israel's policy of "divide and rule" includes granting "privileges" based on different types of identity card. Israel pretends that holders of Israeli citizenship enjoy civil rights, and that holders of the Blue Card enjoy more rights than those living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel constructs this illusion based on geographical partitioning, which harms our distinctive Palestinian identity and focuses the debate on "who is the Palestinian and who is the victim? The West Banker, the Gazan or those inside the Green Line?" - even though all of these subgroups constitute the Palestinian people and are victims of the occupation and its policies.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In light of the growing violations of the right to freedom of movement and the silence of the international community, this policy brief proposes the following:
• Networking and coordinating with human rights organizations, including Al-Haq and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in order to document and report complaints regarding violations of the right to freedom of movement to the Human Rights Commission. The complaints must be written in English, French, Spanish or Russian and cite all relevant information, including description of the civil and/or political rights being violated, the complainant, the order of events, and all attempts by the complainant to confront the violation.

• Calling on the Human Rights Commission, which monitors member states' violations of binding rights guaranteed by the ICCPR, to abide by the human rights principles enshrined in the Covenant. To this end, a targeted audience should be identified and a petition launched on www.avaaz.org and ultimately submitted to the Human Rights Commission as a lobbying tool.

• Writing letters on the violations of the right to freedom of movement, their manifestations and impact on communication amongst the Palestinian people. The letters serve as a tool for lobbying against the violations of the right to freedom of movement, with signatures solicited from international bodies, including trade unions, teachers' associations and human rights organizations. The letters will be sent to the Human Rights Council and will urge the Council to hold Israel accountable for the blockade it imposes on Gaza as a means of collective punishment, the construction of the apartheid wall, settlement expansion, erection of permanent and mobile checkpoints and revocation of Jerusalemites' residency cards, policy of deeming the travel of Palestinians inside the Green Line to Arab states as "communication with the enemy" and all the colonial means pursued by the occupation in order to divide and dismember the Palestinian people into isolated cantons.

• Holding meetings with actors abroad to join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign (BDS).
Towards an Overarching National Identity

Youth policy paper

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Towards an Overarching National Identity:
Defying Disconnected Spaces, Confronting Violations of the Right to Return

Overview
This policy paper addresses the necessary steps to challenge the disconnected spaces and violations of the right to freedom of movement, which affect the ability of Palestinians to intercommunicate. In other words: How can we, as Palestinians, restore our distinctive national identity? The main challenge is how to create an inclusive institutional framework for realizing the right to freedom of movement as well as safeguarding and enhancing an overarching Palestinian national identity to respond to rapid changes and establish a new foundation for the future based on Palestinian youth and their aspirations. This paper presents four policy recommendations that build on the field work of the campaigns of the "Palestinian Youth: Together for Change" project as well as advocacy and lobbying in order to join wider efforts geared toward reforming Palestinian representation by creating a unifying body defined primarily by young people. This body will unify Palestinians around the globe at the levels of decision-making, planning and identity.

Methodology
A team of Palestinian youth distributed across the different geographical regions, including the 1948 lands, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, worked as one group. At first, the team reviewed the literature relating to the factors defining Palestinian identity, and then developed a set of questions to be asked at the local grassroots level as well as the political party and institutional levels in the three Palestinian regions within historic Palestine. These three levels have been selected because they form the backbone for change. In order to move forward, we must understand the disparities and differences with relation to identity, its fragmentation or unity, from the viewpoint of the different actors in these three groups. This paper is not intended to offer solutions to the identity crisis and fragmentation even though it presents a set of policy recommendations. It rather argues that the absence of an overarching institutional framework that defines, advocates for and realizes the right to freedom of movement has negative and destructive effects on Palestinian national identity.
What is identity?

Identity is the collective feeling of a nation or people existentially interconnected. Identity is the totality of spiritual, intellectual and emotional traits distinguishing a society as well as lifestyles, value systems, traditions, beliefs, and economic and cultural production modes. Many scholars believe that the Palestinian identity began to take its modern shape in the middle of the 19th century and crystallized in the beginning of the 20th century under successive occupations and colonial eras. Hence, a national identity does not automatically mature and politically crystallize as a collective and institutional feeling; it is rather the product of complex processes that unfold over a period of years and involve numerous intertwined factors, actors and variables. In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s in particular, political and social expressions of identity emerged such as political parties, trade unions, federations, associations and media.

One of the chief outcomes, and perhaps achievements, of the contemporary Palestinian national struggle was the building of different facets of national identity: political expression; formal and informal institutions, social organizations and trade unions; cultural and artistic expressions; and a comprehensive national agenda. In addition to the occupation's policies of fragmenting Palestinian identity, these achievements began to fade and disappear with the signing of the Oslo Accords, which stipulated the dismantling and containment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the most prominent Palestinian political expression and one of the key components of national identity. The results of dismantling and containment are evident in the disintegrated relationship between Palestinians in the homeland and those awaiting return in the Diaspora. Over the decades, the PLO, with its program, charter and institutions, had been the unifying force among Palestinians, and unity among Palestinians at home and abroad was one of the most prominent elements of national identity building. Today's reality shows growing estrangement between the various segments of the Palestinian people with the Palestinians abroad beginning to search for representative mechanisms given the regression and disintegration of the PLO's institutions.

The failing absence of the PLO's effective and representative institutions has rendered the organization unable to fulfill its obligations towards the Palestinian people. "The sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" became an empty and meaningless slogan. Naturally, this has had an effect on the unions emerging from the PLO, disabling them as leaders of the Palestinian people with many or most of those inside Palestine transforming from mass professional organizations into civil society institutions after Oslo, while Palestinian unions abroad became meaningless
factionalist structures devoid of the legitimacy endorsed in their by-laws. This has ultimately undermined the overarching framework of the PLO and its institutions, and has led to its inability to fulfill the aspirations of Palestinians and defend their rights. Examples of these unions include the Youth Union, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, the General Union of Palestinian Students, the General Union of Palestinian Journalists and Writers, the General Union of Teachers, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, the Higher Council of Youth and Sports, the Palestinian Scout Association and sports unions.

**Continued Israeli violations**

The absence of this overarching framework for Palestinians is compounded by continued Israeli violations of the freedom of movement and the occupation authorities' continued ban on Palestinians' intercommunication through various means. In a clear violation of international law and resolutions relevant to the Palestinian cause, Israel continues to impose a tight siege on the Gaza Strip, isolate and Judaize Jerusalem, separate the West Bank from the Gaza Strip and transform the former into ghettos by means of an apartheid wall and 500 barriers as well as Jewish settlements that contravene international law.

Israel also prevents reunification measures, monitors and prosecutes Palestinians living inside the Green Line for communicating with other Palestinians and Arabs in general, and discriminates against its Palestinian citizens in terms of their right to education and housing while at the same time expecting them to fulfill their duties as citizens. These are merely a few examples of the structural and psychological barriers that the occupation creates. The "Mit7arken [Moving] Campaign" is a clear example of the need to challenge these policies which primarily aim to create a state of continuous separation amongst the Palestinians.

This continued violation of Palestinian rights contravenes the right to freedom of movement, which is a basic right guaranteed under international law. International charters on human rights clearly provide for this right. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Article 12 of the ICCPR stipulates that "everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own. The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or
morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country."

Israel realizes that Palestinians' unity is one element of their power, and thus strives to perpetuate their division and fragmentation. However, we ought to face the fact that Palestinians themselves also perpetuate this division, as is starkly exemplified by the internal split between Fatah and Hamas. In this case, young people hold more responsibility than others to hold both parties accountable for perpetuating the current division and state of fragmentation, which has a substantial negative impact on the overarching Palestinian identity. Moreover, young people must bridge the gap that the division has created over the years between the Palestinian people.

**How Palestinians communicate and build relationships**

In discussing identity, several differing and overlapping arguments are worth noting. Some believe that the Palestinian national identity crystallized due to the conflict with the Zionist project as a collective feeling and set of institutions. This identity was formed in the midst of a bitter struggle the Palestinian people waged against the occupier to prove their existence and national identity. Hence, the Palestinian people, with their historical Arab identity, would not have needed a Palestinian national identity if it were not for the Zionist settler occupation. The Palestinian identity is essentially about struggle, and could be endangered if Palestinians forsake their struggle.

Meanwhile, others believe that some Islamic movements' use of religious discourse as a basis for the conflict with the occupation harms the national identity alleging that a religious identity fragments while a national identity unites. The division of people based on their religious identities and describing the struggle against the occupier in religious terms will systematically dismantle the national identity and replace it with religious, sectarian and subsequently tribal and familial identities, which is what the Oslo Accords and its Palestinian Authority sought to strengthen.

Others believe that the "normalization school" is the strongest threat to the Palestinian identity. The call for coexistence with the occupation and condoning the ethnic cleansing taking place since the Nakba in various forms erases the national identity and dictates a new identity seeking coexistence under oppression, occupation and a system of racial discrimination. Without a doubt, the "Israeli neighbor" discourse that Oslo strongly advanced has provided the foundation for this stage of normalization, which harms the identity and existence of the Palestinian collective.

This is more applicable to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip whereas Palestinians living in the territories occupied in 1948 face other challenges. Compulsory military service, the
separation of curricula and the creation of nationalities based on sectarian differences are reasons for the formation of different identities in different geographic areas. In addition, some Arab parties and movements inside the Green Line are trying to impose their agendas on their constituents based on coexistence and adaption to the de facto Zionist rule, to the extent of forsaking the role of Palestinians in the national liberation movement. In contrast, other parties refuse to coexist or recognize the legitimacy of the Zionist entity. However, these may have contributed to undermining the national identity by remaining unable to formulate a practical agenda addressing the everyday demands of the people.

The challenge is, therefore, how to transcend mere “rejection” to actually work toward creating a national practical, and perhaps pragmatic, alternative in the short-term and a national radical alternative in the longer term. This will close the door on those attempting to obliterate the Palestinian identity of Palestinians inside the Green Line and distance them from their right to freedom and independence by focusing on their citizenship in Israel. Making a distinction between the struggles of one people based on their different locations without linking them together or stressing their shared destiny contributes to legitimizing the occupation and shredding the Palestinian national identity. This further tears apart the Palestinian political fabric in particular, and the Arab political establishment in general, which fails to support the Palestinian cause, and so aids the increasing obliteration and Judaization of the overarching Arab Palestinian identity.

Other questions that must be asked relate to how the Palestinians should build their relationships and communicate amongst themselves now, within the disconnected spaces, under siege and in the Diaspora. Further, what is the vision of the different actors toward establishing better relations? The interviews conducted by the youth team with many young people clearly show that the occupation's physical barriers have also become psychological barriers. The vast majority of young interviewees in Gaza had never visited the West Bank or the territories occupied in 1948, and vice versa. Many interviewees did not have any kind of relations with other Palestinians in places other than their place of residence.

However, social networks, especially in the past four years, have facilitated electronic communication. This mode of communication is often romantic, being part of the dream for cohesion and integration. The challenge is how to convert its romantic nature into an operational one that translates communication on the ground into activities and joint events and not only Skype chats, video conferencing and emails. This highlights the importance of projects designed to break down the
barriers to building an overarching national identity that brings all Palestinians together under one struggle.

Other factors uniting Palestinians include the growing youth movements in the occupied territory soon after the Arab revolutions (the Arab Spring), the upsurge in the popularity and influence of the national/international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign, the rising popularity of the one-state solution, framing the "Arab-Zionist conflict" as racial discrimination and apartheid, the repeated attacks on the Gaza Strip and the choice of most Palestinians to uphold resistance in its broad sense.

The question is when and how will the national movement yield a leadership that represents its people’s wishes and that speaks on behalf of all Palestinians rather than a movement, party or authority of the Bantustans and ghettos. In response to this question, the young interviewees suggested the creation of a comprehensive framework to advance the national movement and level of representation, and inject the Palestinian struggle with a young generation that has the political and policy space necessary for change.

The extra challenge is how to translate this vision into reality. The interviews with youth show that young people in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and the Palestinian territory occupied in 1948 look at each other as an integral part of the nation and Palestinian rights. In terms of their definition of identity, interviews with young people in Gaza indicate a connection between the concept of identity, cultural heritage and belonging to the land and the nation. The word "refugee" emerged in their different definitions of identity as a linkage between the youth's country of origin and the country in which they live.

In the West Bank, interviews show a connection between the concept of identity, land, homeland and history. In some cases the youth could not express their identity. The spirit of belonging to Jerusalem was particularly prominent in the Jerusalemite. There were also cases of close linkage between religion and identity. In interviews with young Palestinians inside the Green Line, the identity had an Arab extension as the majority of respondents identified themselves as Palestinian/Arab or in reverse order.

The interviews also indicated that some institutions have attempted to foster strategic partnerships between Palestinians across the various geographical regions within historic Palestine. These efforts stand in contrast to political parties, which claim that there are legal obstacles and determinants or logistical and organizational considerations preventing inter-party communication that transcends Israeli hindrances. However, in a society that has functioned for decades with transcontinental political
parties, Palestinian youth ought to address the problematic role of political parties as a whole in creating a meaningful political space and its impact on the overarching national identity.

The Oslo Accords and identity crisis
The Oslo Accords and the ensuing political regime have constituted drastic changes in Palestinian society, affecting its political, economic and social life and subsequently damaging the elements of national identity. The PA emerged to replace the PLO and ultimately became a regime subordinate to the Israeli occupation and shackled with security agreements and understandings. Thus, a crucial aim of the Oslo Accords is to dismantle the political establishment of the Palestinian people as one component of their national identity, resulting in detachment between Palestinians at home and in the Diaspora, who are now searching for an overarching representative to fill in for the PLO.

After Oslo, past structures such as the regional, tribal, sectarian and familial quickly spread throughout society along with the rentier systems established by the Palestinian Authority and their ensuing policies to impose a different relationship with the occupier as a neighbor and the normalization meetings of all forms and kinds. The aforementioned factors have collectively contributed to undermining the national identity, not to mention some local institutions and foreign-funded civil society organizations that lack a unified national vision but rather comply with the dictates of their financiers. As a result of the Oslo Accords, discussion of the key elements of the Palestinian cause, i.e. refugees, Jerusalem and the right to self-determination was postponed. These are some points of national consensus that have constituted major aspects of the Palestinian national identity over the years.

Preserving identity, enhancing communication: What we need
One fundamental question remains unanswered: what configurations do Palestinians envisage that can be built upon to preserve identity and enhance communication? This policy brief argues that there is a need for a single body to encompass and interconnect all actors physically or electronically via different media. One practical suggestion in this context – albeit an ambitious one – is to hold conferences to bring all actors together for convergence, introduction, consultation and formulation of common visions and objectives that serve the nation and community alike. Enhancing communication can be done in person or remotely using social networking sites.

This suggestion requires regular symposiums, workshops and public youth conferences that focus on positive aspects and eliminate divisive factors, with the aim of promoting freedom of opinion and expression and confronting and defeating the occupation to preserve the assets of the Palestinian
people. Hence, there is a need for planning joint programs and mobilizing Palestinian youth around Palestinian identity. Further suggestions to translate this slogan into action include the following:

- Developing youth's capabilities and innovations through specialized teams.
- Promoting participation and voluntary work among youth.
- Supporting and developing youth's initiatives and ideas.
- Promoting participation and cohesion between youth-based organizations.
- Exchanging youth's experiences locally, regionally and internationally.
- Implementing social and sports activities for youth.
- Promoting the participation of youth in decision-making.
- Energizing women's role and participation in public life.
- Extending advice to youth-centered bodies, e.g. institutions, schools, centers, and individuals.
- Preparing youth to assume leading positions in state and society.
- Offering programs and projects that serve to build youth capacities and qualify them to enter the job market.
- Creating equal employment opportunities for young people and respecting their human dignity.
- Developing programs and projects that enhance the steadfastness of Palestinians and drafting a document that garners the agreement of the Palestinian collective and follows a national agenda.
- Devising strategic plans that contribute to the development of young people and solving the problems and challenges they face.
- Coordinating between the various actors working with youth worldwide through the exchange of experiences.
- Setting a quota (30%, for example) for youth engagement in local bodies and institutions.
Policy Recommendations

The ultimate desired goal is to create an overarching institutionalized framework capable of defending the freedom of movement and eventually reuniting Palestinians under one identity. To this end, we envisage the following four steps:

• Revitalizing the PLO as an overarching structure inclusive of all Palestinians through reforming and empowering the organization to defend Palestinian rights. This requires progress on the national reconciliation front, revival of joint activities between the various segments of the Palestinian people and consolidating Palestinian efforts vis-à-vis national public issues. Despite the anticipated disputes on representation in the PLO and the organization's structural flaws, the deep popular desire to restore the PLO's leading role is the primary motivation for making headway in this direction. Youth must play an active role in this effort and create lobbying groups to pressure decision makers to revive the PLO on new foundations taking into account the structural changes that have taken place over the past two decades. The reinvented PLO shall work toward eliminating national bureaucracy, reverse the degeneration of the Palestinian political project and produce new leadership responsive to the aspirations of the masses that works to unite rather than divide the Palestinians as the PA has done since its establishment.

• Forming a coalition of non-governmental organizations active in Palestinian communities to serve as an umbrella for defending and demanding the right to freedom of movement with an eye on reuniting the Palestinian people. This move could clash with the wishes of the government/PA but has the ability to engage and integrate Palestinians inside the Green Line when party and government leaders claim that their capabilities are limited due to the peace agreements and understandings signed with Israel.

• Forming a youth-and-community-based framework that encompasses the Palestinian collective and defends national issues. This means that youth will be the leaders and pioneers of change, and requires learning lessons from past experiences, especially from the past three years. The biggest challenge is how to sustain this youth-based structure and how to garner popular support and legitimacy.
• Forming an array of national community-based institutions that complement the PLO's role and operate in Palestinian communities. These institutions, such as the Orient House in Jerusalem, contribute to the integration and harmonization of national work.

Therefore, an overarching framework is crucial for the Palestinians to defend their cause. This framework will serve as the inclusive body of Palestinians. It shall absorb and enable all Palestinians to participate and defend their national causes.