

APPLICATION DENIED
SEPARATED PALESTINIAN FAMILIES
TELL THEIR STORIES



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INTRODUCTION

This booklet of interviews with Palestinian families has been compiled for al-Haq's international campaign "Stop Separating Palestinian Families!" The campaign's aims are to publicise the issue of the denial of family reunification of Palestinian families living in the Occupied Territories by the Israeli authorities, and to effect a change in Israeli policy on this subject.

The case studies selected for this booklet are not exceptional; on the contrary, they represent official Israeli policy which is to accept "the minimum possible number of applications" (H.C. 106/86) for family reunification. After the 1967 occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip, tens of thousands of Palestinians left their lands, and fled to other countries. As a result of military orders and regulations introduced by the Israeli authorities in the immediate aftermath of the war, these people lost their right to residency in their homeland. The only way for them to regain it was through the procedure known as family reunification.

After the 1967 census, conducted by the Israeli authorities, only those people who had been counted in the census were eligible for an identity card. Possession of an identity card subsequently became a condition for the right to reside in the Occupied Territories. This identity card is not, however, proof of nationality and cannot be used for travel abroad. It gives the holder the right of residency in the Occupied Territories, and the right to work without a work permit. However, even holders of identity cards possess them subject to certain conditions. If a resident travels abroad, he is only permitted to stay out of the country for a certain period of time. If he fails to return within this period, or to renew his travel document, he forfeits his identity card.

Since 1967, 29 military orders have been issued introducing and amending regulations concerning the registration of the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories. The most significant of all the changes, implemented in September 1987, is that only those children born to a mother who is herself a resident can themselves be registered and thus become residents of the Occupied Territories (Military Order (M.O.) 1208, an amendment to M.O. 297). Since March 1989, it has been compulsory for all Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories to have an identity

card; previously, only male residents were obliged to hold one (M.O. 1232, amending M.O. 19).

All these military orders and procedures reflect an Israeli policy of preventing Palestinian families from reunification; it is thus a mistake to look at any one case in isolation. The case studies presented here are part and parcel of the policy to alter the demographic make-up of the land, and to deny the existence of a Palestinian people.

This policy violates basic human rights protected by international law. By denying the majority of applications for family reunification as a matter of policy, and failing to scrutinise individual cases, the Israeli authorities are contravening the fundamental right of the family unit to protection. Moreover, by making the right to an identity card (and thus the right to residence in the Occupied Territories) conditional, rather than absolute, Israel is violating Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees the right of any person to leave and return to his country freely. In this way, the Palestinians are being denied their natural right to live with their families in their homeland.

Certain aspects of Israel's policy towards family reunification should be highlighted in this introduction, for a clearer understanding of the problems described in the case histories which follow.

Firstly, and above all, Israel does not consider family reunification for Palestinian residents in the Occupied Territories to be a right, but only a privilege. In the eyes of the authorities, it is a privilege to be granted or withheld according to criteria decided upon by the authorities (but not made public), rather than the individual merits of the case in hand.

Secondly, the granting of family reunification applications (and visitor's permits for those who are refused reunification), has been used in a number of cases which have come to al-Haq's attention to pressure people into collaborating with the authorities, so that a person may be asked to betray his people and homeland in order to be able to see his wife and children.

Thirdly, in the cases where the authorities deny family reunification, but allow a wife to live with her spouse in the Occupied Territories on an indefinitely renewable visitor's permit, the authorities have, in effect, placed a tax on the right of a family to be together, which can, in some cases, amount to as much as \$US 4 a day, due to travel expenses and

the fees for renewing a visitor's permit.

Fourthly, the right of residency, even when granted, is always conditional. A person loses his identity card if he travels out of the Occupied Territories and remains outside for more than an allotted period of time (usually between 2-6 years).

Fifthly, amendments to the laws of registration of newborn children have effectively deprived large numbers of Palestinian children from the right to live permanently in the place where they were born, or where their father is legally resident.

In preparation for the campaign, al-Haq fieldworkers interviewed 1609 Palestinians, all of whom had had their applications for family reunification rejected. Questionnaires were completed for each interviewee; the questions included personal details about the applicant and the person wishing to live in the Occupied Territories, the reasons for the application, and what reasons (if any) were given for the rejection. These 1609 individuals are still only a relatively small sample of the total number of people who have had applications rejected. The exact figures are not known, and al-Haq's request to the Israeli authorities for up-to-date, reliable statistics has not yet elicited any information. Figures given by Israeli sources in the past have been contradictory; for example, in reply to a letter of 6 November 1989 from MK Yossi Sarid, former Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin indicated that over 85,000 applications had been submitted between 1967 and 1987, but only partial statistics, concerning approximately 38,500, were available; of this number, slightly less than 13,000 applications had been approved. However, in a speech to the UN General Assembly on 26 October 1977, Chaim Herzog gave the number of successful applications at around 48,000.

Out of the 1609 interviews conducted by al-Haq, 15 were chosen to be included in this collection of case studies. They were selected because, between them, they illustrate many of the diverse aspects of the problem. In particular, these cases illustrate the humanitarian side of the story—the side which the statistics cannot tell. Five of the case histories are cases where husbands have applied for their wives, and five are cases where wives applied for their husbands; four cases are of mothers who are applying to be reunited with their sons or daughters, and there is one case of a mother who has applied for her grandchildren

to be allowed to live with her in the Occupied Territories.

This sample of 15 case studies is also representative of the bigger picture because of the broad range of reasons for the separation of the families. In particular, the sample includes cases where a person was out of the area at the time of the September 1967 census conducted by the Israeli military authorities; where persons were born in the Occupied Territories and never left, *and* were present during the census, but were not counted in it and therefore never received an identity card; where a person had an identity card, but lost it when s/he travelled abroad and failed to fulfil the conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities in order to be able to return as a resident (i.e., overstayed the allotted period outside the country); where children who were not registered on their parents' identity cards as a result of new regulations introduced by the Israeli authorities; and, above all, the cases where a resident spouse marries a non-resident spouse and the couple want to live together as a family in the Occupied Territories.

All of the case studies share recurring themes. Primarily, there is the emotional pain inflicted by actual separation or threat of separation from loved ones and from the homeland. For many Palestinians, however, this emotional pain is compounded by the economic hardship suffered because of separation from a wage earner, and/or the inability to survive economically outside the supportive network of one's village or refugee camp. Lastly, there is the anger and frustration caused by the apparently arbitrary denial by a military bureaucracy of family reunification and even visitor's permits, especially in those cases where no possible security considerations exist.

Al-Haq's sample of 1609 cases revealed the following statistics:

- 907 (56%) cases out of 1609 were cases where husbands applied for their wives to come and live with them;
- 308 (19%) were cases where wives applied for their husbands to join them;
- 255 (16%) were cases where mothers or fathers applied to be reunited with their children;
- 139 (9%) were cases where other relatives wanted to enter;

- in 118 cases (7%), people had been counted in the census, or otherwise acquired an identity card, but had had the right of residency withdrawn;
- in 46 cases (3%), applications were approved, but the approval was later withdrawn;
- in 418 cases (26%), the applicant had applied twice; in 249 cases (15%), the applicant had applied three times, and in 255 cases (16%), the applicant had applied four times or more. In total, 3932 applications had been submitted by the 1609 people interviewed, an average of 2.44 applications per case.
- in 310 cases (19%), children were separated from one parent;
- in 1435 cases (89%), the applicants had never been arrested, charged or tried for any offence;
- in 1560 cases (97%), the application was rejected without reasons.

The case histories which follow are the result of lengthy interviews with the individuals concerned. The stories are told in the people's own words, taken under oath, with only minor editing to make the text more readable in translation. It is hoped that these stories will give the reader an insight into the humanitarian side of this story—the story of Palestinian families who are denied one of the most basic rights of all, the right to live with their family in their homeland.

Part One:
Husbands Seeking Family Reunification
for Their Spouses

If the Price is Collaboration, I Will Let My Wife Stay Abroad Forever

The case of Mr. Walid Younes Yousef As'ad, 25 years of age, a resident of Irtas village in the Bethlehem district, shows clearly the complex procedures and deliberate obstacles used by the Israeli authorities to make Palestinians in the Occupied Territories feel hopeless regarding the possibility of obtaining family reunion and visitor's permits for their families. When Walid tried to obtain a family reunion permit for his wife—his cousin Injad Isma'il—he was told that his wife should be in the West Bank in order for her application to be considered; at other times, however, he was told that she should be abroad. Although each time he followed instructions, and although he made several attempts, the Civil Administration rejected all his applications. The same thing happened when he tried to obtain a visitor's permit for his wife, though he finally succeeded.

Person Interviewed: Walid Younes Yousef As'ad
Date: 18 October 1990

I was born in Irtas village on 23 December 1965, and have lived there all my life. I work as a plumber in Israel. I married my cousin Injad on 17 October 1988. Injad was born on 14 January 1966, and her family emigrated to Jordan after the 1967 war. I met her during her occasional visits to Irtas with her family. Our wedding took place in Irtas while she was here with a visitor's permit.

On 28 April 1987, while we were still engaged, I applied for a family reunion permit for my fiancée at the Civil Administration office in Bethlehem. The application was rejected after a few months. After we married, I tried several times to apply, but each time they refused to accept the application, sometimes telling me that Injad should be in the country here, and sometimes that she should be abroad. The first time I went to apply, my wife accompanied me. Her visitor's permit was about to expire. Officer Yoval told me that he would accept my application only after my wife left the country. So she left on 11 December 1988. Then I went to the same officer, but he refused to accept my application,

saying that he would accept it only after my wife returned on a visitor's permit.

After that I tried four or five times to get a visitor's permit for my wife, but in vain. I finally succeeded by using a trick. I asked a lady living in our village with a Jerusalem ID card to apply for a permit for my wife, pretending that she is her sister as the family names are similar. She did, and the permit was obtained. My wife came in September 1989. I went to the same officer to apply for family reunion, but he refused the application because my wife is in the West Bank. During this period, my wife gave birth to our child Iyad, whom the authorities refused to register because his mother does not have an ID. My wife left to Jordan on 9 February 1990 after her permit was renewed twice.

The problem of obtaining a visitor's permit for my wife recurred again and again. Once I was asked by the Civil Administration to meet Captain "Abu Nader," the security officer in charge of our area and village. He lectured me for around 45 minutes about the importance and advantages of collaborating with the authorities, saying that those who collaborate will get help from the authorities. He pledged that if I cooperate with them, he would get me a family reunion permit within five or six months. He told me that he didn't want an answer right away, and gave me a week or two to think it over. But I gave him the answer immediately, telling him: "If the price for bringing my wife here is to collaborate with you, then let her stay abroad for ever." I met him twice afterwards, and the same conversation was repeated. When my father applied for a visitor's permit, Abu Nader summoned him and asked him about me, then he summoned me. When I went, he told me: "Do you think we are fools? We know that you asked your father to apply after your application was rejected. Go away, there is no permit. If God gives you a permit, then I would give you one."

In my last attempt, I was told that a security officer called "Kamal" was then in charge of the issue of permits. I asked him about the reason for rejecting my applications. He suggested that I go to visit my wife in Jordan. So I did, leaving to Jordan in May 1990. After I returned, I went to Yoval to apply again for a family reunion permit. He asked where my wife lived; when I said that she lives in Jordan, he told me to apply for a visitor's permit first, then he would accept the application

for family reunion. After four attempts, I got approval for the visit. That was when the authorities declared that they would allow the wives to come back and stay with a visitor's permit.

My wife always came here legally and she never stayed longer than the period allowed. This last time she arrived on 26 June 1990, and was given a three month permit. The permit was renewed for one more month. On 24 September 1990, I went to Yoval to apply for a family reunion permit. This time also he told me: "When your wife goes to Jordan, you come and apply." I went crazy. I shouted at him: "Every time I do what you ask me to do, and you still refuse to accept the application." He said: "This is not true. You always misunderstand me." I left telling myself that I'll never apply unless I feel that they will look into my application seriously. I don't know why they do this to me. I was never arrested, nor have I violated the law. I wonder when they are going to allow me to live with my wife and child in my homeland with my relatives.

"Why Did You Kick My Mother Out? I Want To Shoot You"

Mr. Sameh Muhammad Abu Khdeir, from Jenin, was married in 1981 to a Palestinian woman in Lebanon. In 1984 he was arrested on his return to the West Bank and sentenced to one-and-a-half years in prison. He and his wife have three children who are registered in his ID. He has faced many problems in order to obtain visitor's permits for his wife. At times, she was forced to stay away from the children for a year. The separation was so difficult that once she attempted suicide. Her husband applied twice for a family reunion permit, at great expense, but without success. The intelligence service tried to blackmail him to collaborate in exchange for a permit for his wife.

Person Interviewed: Sameh Muhammad Abu Khdeir

Date of Interview: 10 November 1990

I was born in Jenin in 1961. I grew up there, so I have an ID. In 1980, I travelled to Lebanon, and in 1981 I married Hayat Ahmad Sa'id al-'Abed, who was born in Lebanon to a Palestinian family that had emigrated to Lebanon after the 1948 war. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, I went with my wife to live in Jordan where our first son Sa'id was born.

In 1984, we decided to return to the West Bank and my family prepared a visitor's permit for my wife, who was pregnant at that time. I was arrested at the Israeli checkpoint on the bridge, and was sentenced to one-and-a-half years in prison. My wife came continuously to the West Bank on successive visitor's permits until 1986. Sometimes she left and returned on the same day, using a new permit. On 2 December 1986, the date her permit expired, she was about to deliver a baby, so we managed with the help of the Red Cross to renew her permit for one more month. On 3 December, my wife gave birth to our third child, Hana'. When Hana' was 40 days old, my wife applied and received a permit for three months and she left to Jordan in order to come back on the same day with her new permit. However, the authorities did not allow her back into the West Bank, and told her that she could

only come back after three months, and that she could stay only for one month. They threatened that if she exceeds the month, she would be fined 500 U.S. dollars. During her absence, my sisters-in-law took care of the newborn child.

One month after her next re-entry to the West Bank, Hayat left to Jordan without taking any of the children. She hoped to return soon with a new permit. I tried for a year to obtain a permit for her, but without success. About 15 applications were rejected. Meanwhile, I obtained, with difficulty, a permit for our baby and sent her to her mother, while my other two children, Sa'id and Ala', stayed with me.

At last, after one year, I was able to obtain a permit for my wife. But for a whole week, soldiers at the Israeli checkpoint at the bridge told her to go back to Jordan. When we complained to the Red Cross, the authorities claimed that she was not allowed in because her permit was torn. Finally, she was able to enter with a three month permit. She exceeded the period and when she left, she was fined and paid JD 30 (approximately \$US 42). She stayed in Amman for eight months because I could not apply for another permit until December 1988, when she came for the last time.

In Jordan she stayed with my friend and his family, as she knows nobody there except my uncle with whom she cannot stay because he has a big family and his house is small. But my uncle and his wife, along with my friend, helped her a lot, and this was hard on her because she felt that she was dependent on them. Once she tried to commit suicide by swallowing pills, and was taken to hospital for treatment. I have a medical report to that effect. I also had difficulty taking care of the children, because my sisters-in-law cannot always look after them, as they each have six or seven children of their own. I carry a picture of my four-year-old daughter Ala' feeding her two-year-old sister. This is really hard to take, for how can a child who herself needs somebody to take care of her, be responsible for another child. This forced me to take a second wife; unfortunately, she did not treat my children properly, so I divorced her after several months of marriage.

In addition to the visitor's permits, I have applied twice for a family reunion permit: on 16 October 1986, and on 16 October 1987; both permits were rejected four months after submitting them. During a

radio interview with an Israeli General, he said that we were given the permit. I was told about this by the Mayor of Jenin, yet it was all lies. How can a General do that?

I sell vegetables on the streets; I had a vehicle on which I used to sell ice-cream, but I leased it to someone. During the Intifada, an accident took place between a military bulldozer and the vehicle which totally destroyed it. I went to the income tax office to cancel its registration. To my amazement, I was asked to pay JD 480 (approximately \$US 676), which I paid because it was necessary to get clearance in order to obtain a permit for my wife. When I went another time, I told them that I paid the amount, but they needed a receipt, which I hadn't been given. So I went to Abu-Ma'rouf, an employee at the income tax office, who testified in front of his director that I paid the amount. In spite of that, the director told me that I had to pay the same amount another time, which I did in order to obtain the clearance.

During the last year, I was wiped out financially because I had to pay almost JD 100 (approximately \$US 138) monthly to obtain or to renew a permit. When the permit is rejected that means that I lose my money. As a result of the complicated procedures one goes through in order to get a clearance before getting a permit, I was forced to take two days leave from work each time. Moreover, I faced hardships after I lost my vehicle, and now I am in debt for about 18,000 shekels (approximately \$US 9000). The permits and my wife's travel expenses cost a lot. An employee at the ministry cannot afford such costs; how is a vegetable seller meant to support his children with such expenses?

I believe that they have placed these obstacles in front of me as a mean of blackmailing me into collaborating with them. The intelligence officer, Captain Uri, summoned me several times and tried to pressure me to collaborate, saying that then I would get the permit I wanted. He told me that he wants one of us—meaning one of the six men from our family—to work with them. He thought that I was the weakest because I need the permits. He told me that nobody would know and that he would take good care of me. He asked me to think it over, taking into consideration the fact that I need a family reunion permit for my wife. Of course, for me this matter was out of the question.

The fact that my wife does not have an ID made us decide not to

have more children, although we would like to, because the authorities recently decided that children who are born to mothers without ID's will not be regarded as residents. We did not want to add more to our already existing problems.

My wife must obtain a family reunion permit so that she can live with me and the children, especially as she has no news of her family in Lebanon since 1982. (The Red Cross could not help us locate them.) It is important for the children to have her beside them as it will make them feel secure. During her absence, they always look at her photographs in the album. While playing with their cousins, they call their grown up cousin "Mama."

An incident that really affected me occurred with my son Sa'id when he was four years old. I was standing at the entrance of my brother's shop, when I saw a crowd at the other side of the street. When I went to see what was happening, I was astonished to see Sa'id, my son, grabbing a soldier's rifle and shouting at him: "Why did you kick my mother out, I want to shoot you." When I tried to take my son, the soldier told me: "Go teach your son good manners." Then he knocked him down with the rifle, injuring him on his lip, while the crowd was wondering with tears in their eyes about the child's mother. The soldier then took my ID, and knocked me with his rifle on my back and ordered me to stand aside, in front of my son. If my son did such a thing at this age in order to avenge his mother, what do you think he will do when he grows up, if his mother's problem is not solved?

A Tale of Two Women

Mrs. Su'ad Ahmad Muhammad Da'dara, 24 years of age is a resident of al-Fawwar Camp in the Hebron district. She is married to her cousin, and is a mother of four children. Her father died in Jordan a few months after the 1967 war, and her mother remained in Jordan, remarrying one year later. Su'ad was the only child, and has been in her grandmother's custody in al-Fawwar Camp since she was 18 months old. She has never left the West Bank since she was born. However, her grandmother hid her when the Israeli authorities conducted the residents' census in 1967, because she was afraid that the authorities would take Su'ad as her parents were not present during the census. The census was the basis for the distribution of identity cards, so Su'ad did not receive residency. After Su'ad married in 1983, her husband, upon the request of the authorities, applied for a family reunion permit for her. The application was rejected.

*Person Interviewed: Sakina Hamad Muhammad Da'dara (grandmother) and Su'ad Ahmad Muhammad Da'dara
Date: 8 October 1990*

Grandmother Sakina: My grandchild Su'ad was born in al-Fawwar Camp on 2 January 1966. Her mother Yusra and her father Ahmad, who is my son, lived with me. Ahmad was drafted in the Jordanian army just prior to the 1967 war. As a result of the war, he went to Jordan alone, where he died. In the same year, his wife left to stay with her family in Jordan, and the child Su'ad stayed with me. After a year, Su'ad's mother remarried in Jordan, and never returned.

When the Israeli authorities conducted the general census in 1967, I was living with the child alone in the house. The official who was conducting the census asked me if there was anybody living with me, and I answered that I lived alone. In fact, Su'ad was sleeping in a hidden corner of the house. I said that in fear that they might take her because she had no parents. I was ignorant at that time, and never thought that this act would create problems for the girl in the future, and that the occupation would last that long. If I knew the future, I would have never have done what I did.

When Su'ad grew up, she went to school until the third preparatory class. Then I had to take her out of school, because there were no secondary classes in the camp and I did not want to send her to school in Hebron. I bought a sewing machine for her and she started sewing clothes for money. We lived on the help given to us by UNRWA, since we are refugees from Beit Jibrin village, and on the help given to us by the good people of the camp. In 1982, Su'ad married my grandson, her cousin, Abd al-Karim Muhammad Salama Da'dara. I had never applied for family reunion for her, or tried to register her, because I did not feel it was necessary. The problem arose only when she married and became 16 years old, the age when one must have an ID. I am very close to Su'ad, and she still lives with me, as her husband worked as a teacher in Saudi Arabia until the start of the Gulf crisis. I am not ready to give her up, because I raised her in the same way I raised my son. Moreover, her children are very fond of me. They spend more time with me than with their mother. I have to look after them, as I looked after their mother. When she was a child I used to take her to bed in the same way I am taking her children now. This is because of my deep love for her late father.

Su'ad: As my parents left me when I was 18 months old, I do not know them at all. When I was a child I thought that my grandmother was my mother. But when I became 10 years old, my grandmother began to talk about my parents and how they left and other details about their life. So I knew that I was living with my grandmother. I also knew that my mother was 19 years old when my father died and that her family preferred that she remarry, and that I stay with my grandmother. I did not feel bad to know that my grandmother was not my real mother, because I did not know my parents and she was everything to me since childhood.

In 1982, I married my cousin 'Abd-al-Karim Da'dara, who was born in al-Fawwar Camp in 1954. He has an ID. When we married he was working in Jordan as a teacher. In 1987, he was sent by the Ministry of Education to teach in Saudi Arabia. He worked there until the Gulf crisis, which erupted when he was in al-Fawwar Camp. When he tried to get back to his job, he could not leave Jordan. So he took a leave without pay for one year and came back to the West Bank. That was in

September 1990. Since then he has been working as a substitute teacher in Hebron.

Since my marriage, I never left the camp. I only saw my husband during his summer vacations, after which he returned to his job. I could not leave with him because I have no ID, a fact that restricts me always.

A few months after getting married my husband tried to obtain an ID for me, but he was told that I have no record in the registration department, and that he must apply for a family reunion permit. In 1983, my husband applied, but his application was rejected. In 1986, my husband prepared an application and gave it to me before he left. When I went to submit it, the authorities refused to accept it, saying that my husband should be the one to apply.

Although I do not have an ID, I was never subject to any harassment, because the soldiers never asked me for my ID. I have three boys and a girl; all are registered in their father's ID. The oldest was born in 1983 and the youngest in 1989. Because I have no ID, the registration department refused at first to register them, but when my husband came back to the country he went and registered them.

I am in need of an ID to be able to move freely without fear of being stopped by soldiers. I also need it to be able to go with my husband when he must leave the West Bank to work. I also would like to go and see my mother in Jordan. She cannot come here, because she has no relatives to apply for a visitor's permit for her, and I cannot apply because I have no ID. We exchange news about each other through the people who come and go from Jordan. They told me that she misses me a lot and that she would very much like to see me. I recently sent her, upon her request, photographs of me and my children, so that she would know how we look at least. Now I am 24 years old and don't know what my mother looks like.

Frankly, I am frightened that the authorities will deport me one day as they did with the other women who stayed without having an ID. I know nobody outside this country; if I get deported I cannot live outside the camp, for I have never lived anywhere else. All the camp residents would testify to that. Is it reasonable that a person can be threatened at every moment with being uprooted from the place where she was raised only because of an error of registration? How long am I going to stay

like this without an ID? When am I going to have my problem solved
and end the nightmare of deportation?

A Family Divided

Mrs. Nabila Muhammad Ahmad 'Abed, born in Jordan in 1959, is of Palestinian origin from Beit Nabala village. The residents of Beit Nabala fled as a result of the 1948 war and the village was later destroyed. Nabila is married to a resident of Deir 'Ammar Camp near Ramallah. She has six children, the oldest of whom is 7 years of age. Her husband applied five times for a family reunion permit for her, but all the applications were rejected. (The authorities actually approved the first application in 1982, but then withdrew their acceptance a year later.) Her four older children are regarded as residents by the authorities, but the youngest two are not. On 26 September 1989, during the campaign to deport women whose stay exceeded the period stated in their permits, the authorities deported Nabila and her children to Jordan. They then allowed her to return on 14 June 1990 on condition that she renews her visitor's permit on a monthly basis.

Person Interviewed: Nabila Muhammad Ahmad 'Abed

Date: 5 September 1990

After leaving Beit Nabala in 1948, my family resided in Jordan. In 1981 I married 'Afif Ibrahim Kayed Zeid who is a resident of Deir 'Ammar Camp and who has an ID. I entered the country by means of a visitor's permit. In 1982, my husband applied for a family reunion permit at the Civil Administration in Ramallah. After three months, I was invited with some other families who had similar applications to a special meeting with the Village Leagues,* where I was informed that the application was approved. They stamped our visitor's permits, renewing them for one more year and asked us not to leave the country for one year, after which we would receive ID's. After a year, they gave ID's to four cases from Deir 'Ammar Camp and to two or three cases from Jalazon Camp, but I was not given an ID. They told me that my application was rejected without giving me any reason. We went to an

*Village Leagues were established in 1978. Their membership is armed and paid by the military government. Their role has been described by official Israeli sources as an alternative Palestine Liberation Organization. Many applications for permits and licenses require the approval of the local branch of the Village League.

Israeli lawyer in Jerusalem who said that he would work on the case and that there was hope because I have approval in writing. But after two months of checking with the lawyer, he informed us that our application was rejected.

Two years later I went to Jordan and came back with a new visitor's permit because we were told that the authorities do not consider family reunion applications unless the applicant has a valid permit. My husband applied another time, but the application was rejected this time also. I stayed in the country for about three more years. Then I left to Jordan. When I attempted to come back, I was not allowed to enter because the authorities said I had to stay for three months in Jordan before coming back. When I came back my husband applied for the third time but the application was rejected after two months. On 25 October 1989, my husband applied for the fourth time at the Civil Administration in Halmish, but on 2 January 1990 we were informed that the application was rejected. The last time we applied was in August 1990 and until now we have not received a reply. We have never received an explanation for our applications being rejected; I have no idea why we are always rejected, as my husband was never arrested.

On 26 September 1989 at about 5:30 a.m., moments after my husband left for work in Israel, five army vehicles and a civilian car came to my house together with the village *Mukhtar*. The soldiers knocked at the door. When I opened it, one of them (later I heard them call him Kubi) asked if I was Nuha. I said: No. He said: "You are Nabila?" I said yes, and he then said: "Come with us." I said: I can't, I am pregnant and about to deliver. He said: "I know, but you come with us and tell the commander who will give you permission to stay." I argued with them for about half an hour; then they forced me to go with them after I woke up my children. They refused to let me dress and wash the children; they even refused to let my mother-in-law and my neighbour come and help me. My children were taken bare-footed. I had to throw on some clothes quickly after I asked the soldier to leave the room. They took us to the woods in Halmish [an Israeli settlement with a Civil Administration office]. There I spoke to the officer, but he insisted that we have to leave to Amman. We stayed in the woods until 10 a.m., then they asked for a taxi to take us to the bridge at our expense. I had to pay JD 60

(approximately \$US 83), and another woman who was also taken with me from the camp had to pay JD 20 (approximately \$US 28). On our way to the bridge, I asked the taxi driver to stop so that I could buy slippers for my children, but he refused, saying that the officer warned him not to stop when he gave him our passports and papers to give to the officer in charge at the bridge. However, after much pleading, he finally stopped and I bought slippers for my children. We were delayed until 5 p.m. at the bridge because my children, who are registered in their father's ID, had to have permits to leave from the bridge. At the bridge they were angry because we did not have these permits. They put a mark on my passport, meaning that I cannot come back at all.

My husband immediately began trying to help me to come back to the country with a visitor's permit. He applied for three permits; the first two times, when I came to the bridge the authorities sent me back to Amman, but the third time, on 14 June 1990, I was allowed to enter.

During my stay in Jordan I gave birth to a baby girl. I badly needed my husband to be beside me. I also faced the problem of putting my children in school: because they were registered in their father's ID, they were not accepted in school because they are not Jordanians. They missed one school year. I argued with the school administration, saying: Why should you regard them as foreigners? The Egyptians, Iraqis and Kuwaitis are admitted in your schools, why then are Palestinians refused. They divided my children into Jordanians and Palestinians. I tried to list my children in the temporary passport but they refused because they are not listed in the regular passport. They told me that the only solution is to give up my Jordanian passport and take a Palestinian passport. I said: We have no Palestinian state yet, and if we took a Palestinian passport, then the Israelis would send us back from the bridge, and the Jordanians would not accept us because we had given up our Jordanian passport.

This situation continued until we were finally able to go to Deir Ammar with a visitor's permit. In Jordan we stayed in a room which was arranged by my family, and my husband also sent me money. When I was on the bridge, with the same lady who was deported with me, on our way back, the officer told me: "Are you one of the women who were deported because you exceeded the period stated in the permit?" I said

yes, and he warned me and the other lady that if we do that again we would never again be allowed into the country. Now we are renewing the permits on a monthly basis. The first time my husband had to pay 260 shekels (approximately \$US 130), but after many families protested, the amount was reduced to 149 shekels (approximately \$US 75) for the next month. While the permits are renewed for some families for three months for the same fee, other families, including us, have to renew the permit every month.

It is very important that I obtain a family reunion permit. When we were in Jordan my children were always crying and asking for their father. We lived in a hilly area called Na'our, which overlooks the Jerusalem mountains. When my relatives said to my son Muhammad, "look, there is your father," pointing towards Jerusalem, he would start crying and calling for his father for about ten minutes. Then he would say that 'his father does not answer. Then all the children would start crying. When my husband came to visit us in Jordan, the children clung to him and begged him to stay with them and not to leave. Also my husband suffered a lot when we were away; when he saw the children's pictures and clothes he would cry and could not bear to stay in our home in Deir Ammar as it felt so deserted with the children gone.

I call on public opinion and on all those who read what I have said to help find a solution to this complicated problem, which we face with many other families. I am looking forward to the day when I can live undisturbed with my husband and children in my country.

“We Have a Prison Inside and a Prison Outside”

Mr. Fayez Ibrahim 'Umar 'Ali Khmour from Bani N'eim village in the Hebron district was born in 1959. He is married to Fadwa Yousef Mousa Ya'qoub who was born in 1962. She is also from Bani N'eim village, but has been a resident of Jordan since 1967. They have two children who are not registered in their father's ID. The husband applied three times for family reunion permits but all applications were rejected. For two years, the wife and the children were denied permission to come to the West Bank by a visitor's permit, and the husband was denied permission to go to Jordan. The authorities gave no reason for either denial. The authorities finally permitted his wife to come by means of a visitor's permit on 4 September 1990, two days after she was turned back for not having a photograph on her permit.

Person Interviewed: Fayez Ibrahim 'Umar 'Ali Khmour

Date: 22 August 1990

On 25 November 1985 I was married to Fadwa Yousef Mousa Ya'qoub in Bani N'eim village while she was here from Jordan on a visitor's permit. She had been working as a teacher in Jordan. On 13 March 1986, I applied for a family reunion permit for her, but the application was rejected after seven months. On 8 January 1987, I applied another time but this was rejected after five months. I did not lose hope and I applied for the third time in 1988, but this too was rejected in the same year. When I checked with the Civil Administration, I was told to write a letter explaining how many times my applications were rejected. I wrote two letters but I received no answer.

In 1987 my wife entered with a visitor's permit and she stayed for three months. She came another time in January 1988. She was pregnant and was in danger of a miscarriage as a result of a car accident that she had in Jordan. She gave birth to our son Tal'at on 27 April 1988, and the doctors advised her not to travel for four months after delivery. After staying with me for seven months, she left to Jordan. On the bridge, the Israeli authorities entered her name on the computer

to prevent her from coming back to the West Bank because she had exceeded the legal period of three months. In 1989, her sister who lives in the West Bank applied twice to bring her to visit. Both permits were approved, but she was not allowed to enter by the Israeli authorities on the bridge. I asked her sister to apply for the permits because I was afraid that if I applied I would receive no approval because I myself was denied a permit to go to Jordan, even when I received an urgent phone call and a letter from my wife explaining that my daughter Nisrin was ill and was taken to hospital.

In August 1990, I made another attempt to get a visitor's permit for my wife. I prepared the application which cost me 400 shekels (\$200) and gave it to a local man who collaborates with the authorities, so that he could work on the matter with the security service. On the same day he brought me a notification for a meeting regarding the visitor's permit. The security officer, Jalal, pretended that he knew nothing about my past applications. He took the new application and did not give it back at the end of the meeting. He told me during the conversation: "We have a prison inside and a prison outside. You stay in the inside prison and let your wife stay in Jordan in the outside prison." I told him that if he has anything against me he should tell me about it. He said that I must tell him what I had to hide; I told him I have nothing to hide except that my wife's application for a permit has been blocked for three years. I also told him that I lived in the U.S.A. for three years and that there they are very precise about everything: if a name is misspelled, the whole application would be rejected. But Israel punishes a person for something that he has not done. Supposing you have something against me, why should you punish my wife, and prevent her from coming. He told me: "We are not like other countries, we can do whatever we like. It seems you don't want to tell the truth. Take your ID and go home." I refused and insisted that he tell me what he has against me, but he forced me to leave.

I continued to check with Captain "Kubi" from the Civil Administration about my wife's permit. He asked me to write letters explaining why my wife stayed longer than the period stated in the permit. I wrote three letters and each time I enclosed medical reports about her condition at that time. I also explained why it was absolutely necessary that

my family should be with me, as my daughter was ill and my son was in hospital for two months, and my wife cannot look after them on her own. At last Captain "Kubi" informed me that there was no security charge against me and that the authorities decided to permit my wife to come. Immediately I applied for a permit, which was approved. She is allowed to visit as of 2 September 1990 and I hope she can make it.

When my wife left the last time, my son Tal'at was four months old. I do not know him well. I only know about him through letters and through the people who come from Jordan. They tell me he does so and so, and he says so and so. My daughter Nisrin once hit a child because he cursed her father. She told him: "Don't curse my father. The Jews do not allow him to come here. I don't want to go by bus to visit my father, because we are returned by the Jews, therefore next time I want to go by car, maybe they will allow us to go in and live with my father."

**Part Two:
Wives Seeking Family Reunification
for Their Spouses**

"My Nine-Year Old Daughter Does Not Know Her Father at All"

Mrs. Amna Isma'il Abu al-Kas was born in Gaza city, and is married to her cousin Hamad Muhammad Suleiman Abu al-Kas, who lives and works in Jordan. He is not a holder of an ID. Amna gave birth to seven children; all are registered in her ID and are considered residents. She applied six times for a family reunion permit for her husband, but without success. In 1985, her husband had an accident which led to almost total paralysis of his left hand, which has prevented him from working normally since then.

Since 1985, the Israeli authorities rejected five applications for a visitor's permit submitted by his wife, thus causing an almost total separation of the family. It is impossible for all the members of the family to go and visit him in Jordan, as they cannot afford the travel expenses due to their worsening economic situation.

Person Interviewed: Amna Isma'il Abu al-Kas

Date: 7 November 1990

I was born in Gaza city in 1949, and have lived there all my life. My family came to Gaza from Beit 'Affa village after the 1948 war. I married my cousin Hamad Muhammad Suleiman Abu al-Kas on 1 October 1974 during his visit to Gaza. My husband was born in Gaza, but does not have an ID: during the 1967 census he was in Saudi Arabia, where he had gone in 1965 in order to work. After the 1967 war, he went to Amman where he works as a house painter. I stayed in Gaza after our marriage, and my husband visits, using a visitor's permit. We have seven children: six girls and a boy. They were all born in Gaza, and all are registered in my ID.

Since 1979, I have applied six times for a family reunion permit for him; the last time was in 1985. The first application was submitted to the Civil Administration in Khan Younes; the other applications were in Gaza city. Each time I received a refusal without giving me any reasons.

In 1985, my husband fell from a ladder on the third floor while he was working. He was in hospital for several weeks and stayed under

treatment for a whole year. His left hand was broken, requiring a surgical operation during which some parts of his leg were used to mend his hand, but with no success. He underwent another surgical operation in which they placed a wire in his hand. His hand is almost paralyzed; he cannot use it to work. Since then, my husband can only work occasionally as a painter, and sometimes he sells vegetables to make a daily income of JD 2 to 3 (approximately \$US 2.8 to 4.2).

Since 1985, the Israeli authorities have not allowed my husband to visit. I applied five times for a visitor's permit; the last time was in June 1990. All were rejected without giving explanations. Several days after applying I would go for the reply; each time I got back the permit crossed out, meaning that it is refused. Each application cost me about JD 100 (approximately \$US 138). After receiving the refusal I would sell the stamps which I had used for the application, losing 10% of their value. I am really astonished that they have rejected my applications, especially because my husband was never arrested and never broke the law.

As a result of these rejections, I went to visit him in Jordan about eight times, including three times when he was ill. During my visits, I took with me two or three of my children, because I cannot afford to take all of them. My husband sends me JD 50 (approximately \$US 69) per month out of his limited income. He deprives himself of many things to send us this amount, which covers very few of our needs, as six of the children go to school, and we must pay their school expenses. Was it not for the help I get from my sisters and other good people, we would not be able to manage. In spite of this, we still cannot cover many of our needs. For example, sometimes for a whole month we do not eat meat or chicken. Yesterday, my daughter told me that when she sees meat and chicken on her way to school, she misses eating them. I told her that I can afford to buy mainly tomatoes, egg-plants and green peppers. Anyway, I cannot spend more than I have. Yesterday I cooked *Mulukhieh* for the kids, but without any meat; I used a Maggi soup cube to make it taste good. When my five daughters go to school, I give them one shekel (approximately \$US 0.50) for all of them. Sometimes they spend it in two days. Some months we do not receive any help, so we try to survive on the JD 50 that my husband sends.

As I said earlier, due to our difficult situation, I only take two or three of my children with me to Jordan. The permit costs 300 shekels (approximately \$US 150) and 65 shekels (approximately \$US 32) for each child. I always take my son because he is the only boy and his father always wishes to see him; I usually take one or two of the older girls who know their father well and miss him much. I leave the rest of the children with my sisters who urge me to go to Jordan and help in paying the expenses. Each time I want to travel, the girls fight among each other over who is going to accompany me. For example, my nine-year-old daughter, Ikhlās, does not know her father at all, because each time her sisters persuade her to stay behind. My five-year-old daughter, Thawra, used to ask me if her father looks like other men who wear trousers. When I took her recently with me to visit her father, and while we were sitting in his room in Schneller camp, she asked "Why is that man here, make him leave." When I took my daughter, Amani, with me, she embraced her father for more than 15 minutes. I stood surprised, not knowing what to do, until one of the neighbours came and separated them. It was really a moving scene.

My husband's presence with us is very important, especially in our society. The father has a role that the mother cannot replace. His absence affects the children psychologically. The children are always asked by their peers about their father, in the neighbourhood and at school. Once a girl from the neighbourhood told my daughter, Thawra, during the feast: "My father gave me a shekel, what did your father give you? You do not have a father, he is dead." Thawra came to me crying and asked me to take her to her father. I told her that the Israeli authorities do not allow him to come. She asked me to take her to the authorities so that she could speak to them. At that moment a military vehicle was passing by. I told her, go ahead, go speak to them. She said: "No, I am frightened, now they will shoot me." If my husband was dead, it would be much easier, as the children would accept his death. But now it is very difficult. I wonder for how long are we going to face this problem.

"I am a Stranger in My Country Where I Was Raised and Lived All My Life"

Mr. Na'el Muhammad Salim 'Oda, 32 years of age, was born in Huwwara village in the Nablus district. In 1978 he went to the U.S. to study, and then worked there. In September 1985, Na'el went to the Israeli Embassy in New York to renew his travel document, which was about to expire. He was told that he could stay in the U.S. as long as he wishes, and whenever he decides to go back to his country he can have his travel document a week prior to his trip; he was also told that he would not lose his ID or his residency in the Occupied Territories. In January 1987, wanting to return to the West Bank, he went to the Israeli Embassy, and his travel document was stamped. However, when he went to the ID office in Nablus, he discovered that the stamp which was put on his travel document was a permission to enter Israel as a tourist, and was not a renewal of his travel document. Thus his ID was taken from him. His wife applied twice to obtain a family reunion permit for him, but both applications were rejected. Na'el is bitter about being forced to come to his own country as a tourist.

*Person Interviewed: Na'el Muhammad Salim 'Oda
Date: 23 August 1990*

I was born in Huwwara on 3 September 1958; my ID number was 954215265. In 1978, I went to the U.S. in order to study. I left through Jordan and entered the U.S. with a visitor's permit. I returned to my village in 1980 and took back my ID, which is usually taken from a person as he leaves the country. After that I went several times to the U.S. using an Israeli travel document. I returned every year to the Occupied Territories to renew it. In the summer of 1984, I married Florenda Sa'id 'Abd al-Qader, who is from my village, Huwwara. We travelled together to the U.S. on 20 September 1984, using an Israeli travel document. At that time, I had finished my studies and started my own business—a supermarket—in New York.

On 1 September 1985, ten days prior to the expiry of my travel document, I went to the Israeli Embassy in New York to see if I could renew it there without going back to my country, because my work did

not permit me to leave. I spoke to an official named "Vardi." I told her that I was ready to go back if there was a risk of losing my ID and my right to residency. Although she did not renew my travel document, she told me that I could return any time to my country without losing my ID. She told me that I have only to check with her one week prior to my departure and she would renew it for me. So I felt that there was no problem. As regards my wife, she returned often to the West Bank and renewed her travel document there.

In January 1987, when my circumstances allowed me to travel, I went to the Embassy and met the same official. She stamped my travel document. I did not pay attention to the stamp, assuming it was the stamp required for renewal. After two weeks, I left to my country. During my stay, I went to the ID office in Nablus where I gave back my travel document and took back my ID, as is always the case. Immediately, I applied for a new travel document. Two weeks later, when I went to take it, they took my ID, and gave me the U.S. re-entry permit, on which they stamped a stamp other than the one required for a travel document. When I asked about the change, they told me that they made a mistake by giving me back my ID because I had lost it as a result of staying in the U.S. for a period longer than that permitted by the travel document. They also told me that the stamp which was issued by the Embassy in New York was not a renewal stamp—as I had thought—but a visa to enter to the country as a tourist. I was shocked, and felt that I was in a nightmare.

In the same year, I left to the U.S. and asked a lawyer to check the matter with the Israeli Embassy. He called the official "Vardi" and questioned her about my problem and told her that she was the cause of my problem. She told him that I was a liar and denied the conversation that had taken place between us when I went to renew my travel document. She asked him not to call the Embassy another time, saying that I had lost my residency in my country, and then she hung up on him.

In 1987, my wife applied to obtain a family reunion permit for me at the Civil Administration in Nablus. The application was rejected. On 2 August 1990, another application was submitted by my wife, but was also rejected. Now I feel that I am a stranger in my country where I was raised and lived all my life. I feel insulted because I have to come as a

visitor to my homeland. I live away from my wife, son, mother, father, aunts, and from my country. I don't want my son to be raised in the U.S. I want him to be raised in his country and in accordance with our customs and traditions. I hope that this situation will not continue, and that we will be reunited in our country.

He Lost His ID and His Vision, Will He Lose His Family Too?

Mrs. Nawal Wajih 'Abd-al-Qader 'Atallah is a resident of Gaza city, married to 'Abd-al-Hamid Hammouda 'Abd-al-Qader al-'Ushi. She is the mother of eight children, of whom the eldest is ten years old; all are registered in her ID card and have ID numbers. Her husband, however, does not have an ID although he was counted in the 1967 general census. Mr. al-'Ushi left the country to Jordan with a visitor's permit issued by the Israeli military authorities; he then overextended his stay by two years. When he attempted to return to the Occupied Territories, he was denied entry by the Israeli military authorities and was returned back to Jordan. Since this loss of his residency in the Occupied Territories, he has been coming to Gaza on a visitor's permit. In 1987 he lost sight in both of his eyes as a result of illness, but in 1990 he regained sight in one of his eyes after undergoing an operation. The family faces financial difficulties, and cannot afford paying travel expenses to Jordan in order to visit the father, nor keep paying for visitor's permits to him to come to Gaza. Although the family receives financial help from others, they can barely cover their daily expenses.

Person Interviewed: Nawal Wajih 'Abd-al-Qader 'Atallah
Date Interviewed: 7 November 1990

I was born in Gaza in 1952; in 1979, I married 'Abd-al-Hamid al-'Ushi, who was born in Gaza in 1944. Although he was here during the 1967 census, he does not currently hold an Israeli ID. My father-in-law died when my husband was still a child. After the census, his mother and brothers decided to go and live in Jordan, while my husband preferred to stay in Gaza. A few months later, he went to visit his family in Jordan. While he was there, his mother became sick and was paralyzed, thus needing somebody to stay with her and take care of her. 'Abd-al-Hamid, my husband, being the youngest of his brothers and not yet with any responsibilities, stayed in Jordan for two years without renewing the visitor's permit given to him by the Israeli military authorities. At that time 'Abd-al-Hamid did not realize the importance of renewing the

permit. When he attempted to come back, he was denied entry because he stayed two or three years in violation of the permit, and had thus lost his ID.

After this incident, 'Abd-al-Hamid began coming to Gaza on a visitor's permit prepared for him by his sister and aunt who reside in Gaza. His aunt, who is a neighbour, introduced him to me because she wanted him to marry a girl who holds an ID, hoping that 'Abd-al-Hamid would be able to come back to live in Gaza through a family reunion permit. After we married, I applied nine times for family reunion permits but without success. My husband continued to come to Gaza with visitor's permits, and was therefore able to spend most of his time with us. His visitor's permit was valid for three months, after which he would leave for a few days and then come back into the country with another visitor's permit, and so on. I visited him in Jordan only twice, and spent a week each time. Now we have eight children; all are registered in my ID and considered residents.

During his stay in Jordan, my husband worked in a shoe repair place, and while in Gaza he used to help me in the shop, which we opened in one of the two rooms in which we live, and in which we sell refreshments and candies. Another room is about to collapse, so we do not sleep in it and we are all living in one room.

In 1987 my husband was diagnosed with Cataract in his eyes, and told that he could not be operated on until a period of time had passed. His vision failed, and I therefore needed to be with him in order to take care of him and take him to the bathroom. He could only recognize the children by their voices. When our sons, Ahmad and Muhammad, used to fight, he would know them from their voices and would say Ahmad be quiet or Muhammad stop quarrelling.

In April 1990, he underwent a surgical operation in his left eye at Rafah clinic in Gaza. The operation was a success and he was able to see in that eye. The doctor asked him to stay for some more months so that he could operate on his right eye. The operation costed JD 100 (approximately \$US 138), an amount which we did not have, and therefore we borrowed it from our neighbours. The only income that we have is what we get from our small shop. This is not enough. We rely much on the aid we get from generous neighbors.

It is important that my husband gets a family reunion permit to help me manage our daily affairs and raise the children properly. To tell you the truth, I cannot control the children the way their father does. Moreover we cannot go and live with him in Jordan because we do not have an income there, and because my children would not be accepted at schools in Jordan because they are Palestinians. Now my children go to school in Gaza. It is very hard on us to keep paying for permits and travel expenses. In addition, all of us are residents and have ID cards; it is only my husband who is in need of one. At least in Gaza we can manage to live from the income we get from the shop, but in Jordan it would be too difficult.

Mahmoud Resides in Jordan, But His Heart is in Bal'a

Mr. Mahmoud Muhammad M'alej Khalil, 62 years of age, was born in Khdeira village in Palestine. After 1948, Mahmoud lived in Toulkarem refugee camp; he left the camp in 1960 and went to Kuwait, where he worked as a driver. He lost his job due to poor eyesight, and has been unable to find another, as he is ill, illiterate and elderly. Mahmoud does not have an ID. Since 1984 he has been living in Jordan, away from his wife and five children who live in Bal'a village in the Tulkarem district, and who are registered in the population registration department. His wife, Mrs. Fawziyya Muhammad Najib Zreiqi, has applied four times for a family re-union permit for her husband since 1976, but in vain. The family lives in extremeley difficult economic and social conditions, but has no alternative other than living in the Occupied Territories where the wife has managed to find a continuous source of income to cover basic needs. The continued separation of Mahmoud from the rest of the family contributes greatly to their plight.

*Person Interviewed: Fawziyya Muhammad Najib Zreiqi
Date: 30 October 1990*

I was born in Bal'a village in 1944. I travelled to Kuwait in 1969 to visit my brother who was working and living there with his wife and children. During that visit, I met Mahmoud Muhammad M'alej Khalil, to whom I was later married in 1975. My husband is a Palestinian and was born in Khdeira village in 1928. After the 1948 war, he and his family lived in Toulkarem refugee camp. Then in 1960 he left to Kuwait where he worked as a driver. When the Israeli authorities conducted the census in 1967, he was abroad, so he is not regarded as a resident and does not hold an ID.

At first, I lived with my husband in Kúwait. I returned to the Occupied Territories once every one or two years and stayed for about two months. During my visits, I would register my children at the population registration department. My husband was keen on this matter, and sometimes he urged me to go to the West Bank to register the children in spite of our financial difficulties. He didn't want his children to be

deprived of their homeland, as is the case with him. He used to tell me: "Go and register the children, because if anything happens to me, or if I die, where would you go with your children?" Since 1976, I have applied four times for a family reunion permit for my husband. The last application was in August 1990. The first three were rejected and I am expecting to receive the reply to the fourth application in October 1990.

We stayed in Kuwait until 1984 when my husband stopped working as a driver due to poor eyesight. We left to Jordan, where we rented a room in al-Husun Camp. My husband is illiterate and has no other qualifications, so he found no job in Kuwait or in Jordan. After staying for a month in Jordan, I left with my children to my village, Bal'a, where we stayed with my mother. My husband stayed in Jordan because he could not come without an ID. I applied for him to come by means of a visitor's permit. He came seven times, the last time in July 1990.

Besides the fact that we are separated, our living and economic conditions are very hard. I live with my children and mother on the income from a piece of land which is planted with olive trees and from another where we grow wheat. Sometimes we get some help from my brother who works as a blacksmith. We also receive aid from the *Zaka* fund (alms). All my children attend the village school. The oldest is in the third preparatory class. I sold my gold for JD 500 (approximately \$US 694) and gave the money to my husband who went into partnership with another person in Jordan. They started a workshop for repairing and painting damaged cars. However, his partner betrayed him and we lost our money. Due to my husband's bad health, which started to deteriorate in 1969 from diabetes and the effects of a surgical operation that he underwent, he cannot do hard work. In order to support himself and pay rent and the water and electricity bills, he buys vegetables from the wholesale market and sells at a retail price, making a small profit of no more than JD 2 (\$3) per day.

Because of our difficult financial situation, we can no longer go to visit him and he cannot come to visit us; it is too expensive to pay for the visitor's permit and for the travel expenses. It is also impossible to go and live with him in Jordan, because he cannot support us. Here we have a steady income, no matter how little it is. At least here our family and relatives can help us. But there nobody would look after us. In the

homeland, a person may live under a tree. Here we are growing wheat, and in my mother's house there are two wells of water, and I have a goat that gives us milk for my children. In other words, here we can manage, but abroad we might die of starvation.

It is important that my husband gets a family reunion permit, because he would help me raise my children. I find it difficult to look after them. They do not obey me in the same way they obey their father. He has more authority over them. Also, if he gets an ID, we would be able to get the monthly rations from the UNRWA, as he is a registered refugee. We could claim back the two rooms that he once had from the UNRWA prior to his leaving for Kuwait. I tried several times with the UNRWA to obtain the rations and the two rooms, but they refused, saying that we can get them only when my husband gets his ID. I am badly in need of these rooms because, in light of the Gulf crisis, my sister-in-law with her nine children might come and live with my mother. She has more right to live with my mother after my brother died two years ago. I cannot rent a house because it would be too difficult for me to pay the rent. If my husband gets a family reunion permit, this will make us feel better and will solve all our problems.

Residence Permit Requires the Existence of Exceptional Humanitarian Reasons

Mrs. Rabiha 'Abd-al-Karim Muhammad Muhammad was born in 'Ibwein village in the Ramallah district. In August 1976 she married Tamim Muhammad Husein al-Teir from the same village. Mr. al-Teir does not hold an Israeli ID. He resides in Kuwait where he had been working since 1965. At present he is still in Kuwait but he is unemployed, ill and lives away from his wife and seven children who are living in their village with no one to support them in a very difficult situation. Rabiha applied three times to obtain a family reunion permit for her husband, but all three applications were rejected. Now she refuses to apply another time because she has lost hope, and because she cannot afford to pay the application fees. The situation is especially bleak for this family because the father and most of the children suffer from mental retardation.

Person Interviewed: Rabiha 'Abd-al-Karim Muhammad Muhammad

Date: 23 October 1990

I was born in 'Ibwein on 2 July 1954. I studied until the 6th grade, then I left school to help look after my six younger brothers, so as to give my mother the chance to help my father in agricultural work. In August 1976, I married Tamim Muhammad Husein al-Teir, who was also born in the same village. He came to the village using a visitor's permit, as he does not have an ID, since he has been living with his family in Kuwait since 1965. From the time we married until the start of the Gulf crisis, he worked as a janitor at the Ministry of Education in Kuwait, earning a salary of about JD 180 (approximately \$US 250) equivalent.

Two months after marriage I followed my husband to Kuwait. Since then, I returned to my village four times, staying two to three months each time. My husband came two times on a visitor's permit which I always applied for as soon as I arrived here. I gave birth to four boys and three girls in Kuwait; each time I returned to the West Bank, I registered my new children at the population registry. The last time I returned to the West Bank was on 15 June 1990. My husband arrived on 11 July

1990, and left on 10 September 1990. I stayed with my seven children in the village in a small house consisting of two rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom with a toilet outside the house. We bought the house back in 1985 for JD 300 (approximately \$US 417) from its owners, who lived in Kuwait. Originally one big room, my father paid for the building of another room, a kitchen and the bathroom to the house. This cost him JD 850 (approximately \$US 1180). I promised to pay him back as soon as our situation improved. In fact I paid him JD 200 (approximately \$US 278) after I sold my two gold bracelets which my husband gave me on my wedding day. I sold them after I saw that my family's financial situation was difficult because my father was old and could no longer work. Moreover, my brothers are married and have children and their income is barely enough for them.

I did not return with my husband to Kuwait this last time, because he left after the Gulf crisis started, and he thought we should wait until he knew what is happening with his job. He also was forced to leave as he could not afford to pay the fees for renewing his permit. Now it is very hard for me to buy flour or vegetables to feed my children. I must go to Ramallah and I have only 10 shekels (approximately \$US 5) for transportation and for the children. I do not like to complain because complaining to a person, not to God, is humiliation. When my husband left, he borrowed JD 100 (approximately \$US 138) from my father and JD 60 (approximately \$US 83) from his grandfather. He left us JD 20 (approximately \$US 28). When school opened, I could not buy all the school supplies for my children. My brothers paid some of the school fees—the rest have not been paid yet—and they bought the pencils, copy-books, bags and clothes for my children. I depend on my poor family to support my children. If I were living abroad, instead of in my village with my family, nobody would have thought of helping me and my children. My husband and I need the family, on whom we can depend when we are in need.

I applied in 1978, 1982 and 1986 to obtain a family reunion permit for my husband. All the applications were rejected without explanation. Since then, I have not applied again, as the cost of the application is more than JD 100 (approximately \$US 138), and I have lost hope. However, if I would be assured that I would get an approval, I am ready to borrow

the amount to pay for the application fees.

A few days ago, my cousin came from Kuwait and informed me that my husband lost his job and has not been able to find another. Now he is in the hospital with high blood pressure and problems in his digestive system. He also suffers, as the medical reports show, from mental retardation. This prevents him from running his daily affairs properly and reduces his chances of finding work. What makes things worse is that three of my children are, to a certain degree, mentally retarded, and the others are always tense and nervous. I don't really know what's the matter with them, because I am unable to take them to a doctor. Now I am facing a big problem: my husband is abroad, unemployed and sick, and I am living with my children without a bread winner. And because we have no money, we cannot go to see him and stay with him in Kuwait. He also cannot come and stay with us in our village. I am very worried and feel very small and powerless. I feel very bad especially when I look at my children who do not have a future because of their mental disabilities. They do not understand the situation, and they keep asking for many things which I cannot afford to buy. I think a lot about my husband, and wonder whether he is hungry or has any clothes. He must be thinking about us too, and he must be sad. I can feel that he is exhausted like me. I wish he could obtain a family reunion permit, so that he can come and live with us. At least he can manage to do some manual work like building stone fences and can earn 10 shekels (\$5) a day which we can spend on the children.

**Part Three:
Mothers and Grandmothers Seeking
Family Reunification for Their
Children and Grandchildren**

Between Suicide and Sweets: A Mother's Dilemma

Ihab Radi Saleh al-Najib was born in Kuwait in 1973. His parents are both residents of the West Bank and have identity cards. Ihab has been living in the West Bank with his family since 1975; he has never left his village Deir al-Ghsoun since returning when he was a year and a half old. His mother Fatma As'ad Mas'oud Hasiba, who was divorced from her husband in 1982, applied twice for a family reunion permit for her son, without success. Now Ihab is confined to living with his mother and other brothers. He cannot leave the village to work or for any other purpose in fear that he might be asked for his ID by the army, and then deported, leading to permanent exile from his family, village and country.

*Person Interviewed: Fatma As'ad Mas'oud Hasiba
Date: 30 October 1990*

I was born in 1946. In 1972 I married Radi Saleh al-Najib who is from 'Attil village, but has been living and working in Kuwait before 1967 as a janitor at the Ministry of Education. On October 15, 1973, I gave birth to my first son, Ihab. After staying for two years in Kuwait, I returned here to 'Attil. I was eight months pregnant at that time. I never went back to Kuwait. In 1975, I applied to obtain a family reunion permit for my husband. After seventy days they approved the application and gave him an ID number. After that he visited us in the Occupied Territories every year for two months.

In 1982, after I had already given birth to three children and was again pregnant, I was divorced from my husband, who married another woman in the same year. After the divorce, I left his family's house and went to live with my mother in Deir al-Ghsoun village. In the meantime, I gave birth to my daughter. I registered all my children who were born after my first child at the population registration office in Toulkarem, but Ihab, who was born in Kuwait, I did not attempt to register until he was over 15 years old. The Civil Administration refused to register him, saying that I should have registered him when

he was less than 5 years old. As a result, I applied to obtain a family reunion permit for him in August 1988. The application was rejected. I talked to a person from the village, who is known for his collaboration with the Israeli authorities. He promised to help me if I gave him JD 350 (approximately \$US 486); he took the money, but then informed me that he had failed in his attempts to help me. He did not give me my money back, although I was badly in need of it. In August 1990, I applied another time to the Civil Administration in Toulkarem. I expect an answer in October 1990, as written on the receipt, but I am not optimistic about the matter, especially as they refuse to give family reunion permits in general.

Regarding my son, he has never left the Occupied Territories since he was one and a half years old, when we came back from Kuwait. He went to school in 'Atiltl and then in Deir al-Ghsoun. He studied until the seventh grade, but then I took him out because he was not good at school, and because I wanted him to help me take care of his brothers and my old mother whose house we are living in. Ihab is now unemployed, unfortunately. I am facing difficult financial conditions, and cannot meet the needs of my family from my work in agriculture. Three years ago, I also had to take my other son out of school, and since then he has been working in a pickle factory. He is now 15 years old, and earns about 400-500 shekels (\$200-250) a month. My other son and daughter are still at school. My children's father does not help us at all. We do not know anything about him, although the Shari'a Court ruled that he should pay JD 8 (\$12) for each of his children each month. Due to our difficult situation, the Social Affairs Department supplies us with 75 kilograms of flour every 2 months.

Because my son does not have an ID, he is confined to the village for fear that he might be asked for his ID by the soldiers. Thus he cannot go out to look for work. He even doesn't go to Toulkarem, which is only a few kilometers away from our village, except perhaps once a year, and only with me and when it is very necessary. When we leave the village we always feel very frightened. When the army comes to the village, I hide him in the house, or make him escape to the fields and I run after him to protect him.

If he isn't given an ID, he will be subject to deportation. He cannot

live abroad because he has nobody to help him there. He has no choice other than staying with me and his brothers so that we can help each other. I need my son because I worked hard to raise him and the rest of my children. I have many scars on my hands as a result of working in the fields to feed my children. I cannot imagine them living away from me. If they deport him, I will commit suicide; if he gets an ID, I will give sweets to everybody in celebration.

For the Twentieth Time: "Sorry, Application Refused"

Mrs. Rifqa Ya'qoub Ibrahim Habash, 70 years old, lives alone in Ramallah since the death of her husband and other near relatives. Her sons and daughters have settled in the United States because they could not stay with her as residents. She applied twenty times, without success, to obtain a family reunion permit for her son George, who is married to a woman who holds an ID. In bad health after suffering a heart attack two years ago, she has stopped working and now she is in need of someone to look after her.

Person Interviewed: Rifqa Ya'qoub Ibrahim Habash

Date: 10 September 1990

I am 70 years old, and until two years ago, I worked as a teacher in a nursery. Originally, I am from Birzeit, but I rent a house in Ramallah where I live. I live alone because all my sons live in the U.S.A., except for George who lives in Kuwait. My husband died 30 years ago, and my sisters and brothers have also passed away. George, my son, is ready to come back and live here and look after me. I arranged his marriage with my niece who has an ID, so that he could get a family reunion permit.

I applied twenty times—the last time on 20 July 1989—for a family reunion permit, but without success. In 1967 the authorities approved an application, but when George was at the Israeli borders about to enter, they denied him entry on the pretext that I lied to them that he was a student, and they found out that he was an employee. In fact, I did not lie, because before the 1967 war he was a student. When he was denied entry, he went crazy because he came especially from Kuwait for that purpose. Now he works as an electronic engineer. His wife applied three times for him, but her applications were rejected too.

I did not lose hope whenever I got a refusal, although it is costly to keep applying. First of all, to fill in the application costs 25 shekels (approximately \$US 12). Then the application must be taken to different departments: the tax office, the police, the municipality and the Village Leagues. I had to pay 10 shekels (approximately \$US 5) for each of the

last two. Next I had to buy stamps costing 400 shekels (approximately \$US 200) from the post office for the application. Then I had to take the application to the Civil Administration which would look into it, then give me the answer: "Sorry, application refused," without giving me an explanation.

Once I heard that a certain person, if given money, could help me obtain a permit. He asked for JD 1000 (approximately \$US 1380). I told him that this was too much, but I was ready to give it to him after I obtained an approval. He refused, saying that the charge was for his efforts and that he could not guarantee the result.

My son George came here four times through a visitor's permit. The last time was in July 1989. My applications for visitor's permits were never rejected.

Two years ago, when my sister-in-law was visiting me, she saw that I looked pale and sick. She insisted on taking me to the hospital. At St. Joseph's Hospital, I was put in the intensive care unit; I'd had a heart attack and was about to die. She called my sons and told them to come and see me before I die. They came two days later: my daughter Hiyam, my son Jamal and grandson Ibrahim. They remained with me until my life was out of danger. Then they left, except for my daughter Hiyam who stayed to look after me. When she was sure that I could take care of myself, she left. Since then, I have been taking sixty pills of "Icacol" per month for which I pay 60 shekels (approximately \$US 30). I also take thirty pills of "Lanoxine" per month from the UNRWA clinic free of charge.

Now I am badly in need of somebody to be with me and look after me, for I might have another heart attack at any moment. If this happens, nobody would know because I have no phone. Death is inevitable, but I need somebody to be with me when I die. I am also frightened to live alone, especially after I heard that thieves broke into my neighbour's house and stole her money after they assaulted her. Now I lock my house every night and am anxious until the next day.

I don't wish to stay with my sons in the U.S.A. or in Kuwait, because I only want to live in Ramallah. I once stayed for a year in Kuwait, but I was not comfortable there, and felt like a stranger. I prefer that my son comes and lives with me; he also prefers to do so as his wife and

children have ID's.

Because I am old and had a heart attack, I stopped working although I had a very active life in the past. I worked as a teacher for children at Beni school in Bethlehem until 1956 when my husband died. Then I worked at Abu-Victor's school in Ramallah until I became sick. Also, while I was working as a teacher, I made woolen clothes in order to save some money and to be able to pay for the family reunion applications, although my sons send me some money from time to time. This money helps me cover my expenses, especially since my savings in Jordan are about to end.

I shall continue my attempts to obtain a family reunion permit for my son George until the last day in my life. I am very worried about him because of the Gulf crisis. I don't know anything about his situation. I am hopeful that one day I will succeed after twenty years of attempting to bring my son George and his family to come live with me. I keep weeping because my son cannot come to his homeland to look after his mother in the last days of her life.

When Will Our Dream Come True?

Mrs. Amna 'Abd-al-Hadi Husein Jouda, 75 years old, lives with her daughter Sa'diyya in al-Nuseirat Refugee Camp. Her son Muhammad, who did not hold an ID card, died in Jordan, leaving behind three children; the oldest is 14 year old. The children live alone in a room in Schneller Refugee Camp in Jordan, because their mother divorced her husband before his death and does not wish to take care of the children. The children depend on aid from charitable individuals. Their grandmother Amna and their aunt Sa'diyya applied three times to the Israeli Civil Administration to get family reunion permits for them, but without success. Amna was not even able to bring the children to the Occupied Territories by means of a visit permit. The fact that they are living alone away from their relatives constitutes a danger to their future, due to the lack of any guidance or support.

Person Interviewed: Amna 'Abd-al-Hadi Husein Jouda

Date of Interview: 12 November 1990

I am 75 years old and live with my daughter Sa'diyya in al-Nuseirat Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. I am originally from Ashdod. In the 1948 war we escaped with our lives, leaving our home and property. We would have never survived had it not been for the aid we got from the UNRWA.

In 1967, my son Muhammad was 20 years old, and had left the Occupied Territories to Jordan before the census took place. Thus, he was unable to return, and settled in Schneller Refugee Camp in Jordan, where he worked as a labourer.

In 1973, Muhammad sent a letter informing us that he was about to get married to a Palestinian girl, who is also a refugee. Her name is Zeinab Barakat. My husband and daughter Sa'diyya went to attend his wedding. In 1975, I went with Sa'diyya to visit him in Jordan and stayed there for a month. I was very happy to be with him after eight years of separation, and I felt very sad about leaving him when I returned back home.

My daughter-in-law, Zeinab, gave birth to three children: Nisrin, born on 2 February 1976, Hisham, born on 24 September 1977, and

'Abdallah, born on 20 March 1979. I missed my son and his children a lot and asked God to help me see them before I die. More than once I thought of applying for a family reunification permit for my son and family, but was discouraged by neighbours and relatives from doing so, because there is very little hope that I will get it and I would only lose my money on the applications.

In 1981, my daughter-in-law and her children visited us in Gaza on a visitor's permit. They stayed with us for about two months. I was full of grief when they returned to Jordan. In May 1983, my daughter-in-law was divorced from my son Muhammad after claiming to the Shari'a court that he had become impotent as a result of diabetes. She gave up all her rights, among them the right of keeping the children. May God forgive her, the children stayed with their father. In the same year, he and the children came to visit us by means of a visitor's permit, and stayed for two months.

After the divorce, my daughter Sa'diyya, who refused to get married in order to look after me and her father, went to Jordan every now and then to look after the children and provide the motherly love they lack. Each time she stayed only two months, and then returned to Gaza, because the Jordanian authorities would not allow her to stay longer.

In 1985, my son Muhammad married another Palestinian girl who lives with her family in Jordan, in the hope that she would take care of the children. However, the new wife did not treat the children well, and my daughter Sa'diyya was obliged to travel continuously to Jordan in order to take care of them. Poor children, if their mother did not care for them, how can we expect a stepmother to do so! My new daughter-in-law gave birth to twins, but, thank God, they passed away immediately after birth, otherwise they would have further complicated the problem.

In October 1987, my husband died. He was 75 years old and suffering from diabetes. My son Muhammad came and stayed with us for ten days, after which he went back to his children. When he left, my daughter and I felt very sad, especially because our home now lacks a man who can protect us. My other son, Mahmoud, works in Saudi Arabia, and is married with nine children. He comes to visit us every four or five years.

In January 1988, my daughter Sa'diyya applied for a family reunion

permit for Muhammad and his children, but the application was rejected. In May 1988, we received very bad news: Muhammad passed away suddenly as a result of a blood clot in his brain. He was buried without our knowledge. Whenever I remember my son, I cannot help crying. Are not the miseries that we have experienced enough, was it not enough that my husband died? Why, God, did you take away two of my loved ones within a very short period? I am very sad for my grandchildren, who are left with no one to care for them, God help them.

Following the death of my son, Sa'diyya went to visit the children. She learned that some neighbours took the children to their mother to take care of them after being left alone by their stepmother. When the mother knew that Sa'diyya was in Jordan, she sent the children to Sa'diyya, saying that her family does not want her to keep the children and wanted her to marry again since she is still young. The children, therefore, settled in their father's home, which is one room made of bricks in Schneller Refugee Camp. Sa'diyya stayed with them for a month, and before leaving she asked some neighbours to look after them. Now they are living under harsh conditions. They exist on the contributions donated by charitable people. My daughter visits them four times a year. They only get hot meals when Sa'diyya is staying with them; otherwise they eat only falafel, hoummous and French fries. Since Sa'diyya crosses the borders often to Jordan, a Jordanian officer summoned her for interrogation. When she explained the situation, and told him about the needs of the children for someone to take care of them, he told her: "I am not responsible for them, I am not their God." The Jordanian intelligence also summoned her twice for interrogation and she was questioned on the same matter in a similar manner.

Sa'diyya applied for a family reunion permit for the children at the Civil Administration office in Gaza, but the application was rejected. Officer "Benyamin" told her that she has no right to apply, since she is not a very close relative. Her explanations about their condition and her presentation of documents to prove her point were not accepted. In January 1990, I applied another time but also without success. On March 1990, I applied at the Civil Administration in Deir al-Balah. I went several times to receive a reply to my application, but each time they told me to go back home, and that they would let me know.

In June 1990, I applied for a visitor's permit for the grandchildren, because I wanted at least to see them and I am too old to travel. The application was rejected. They told me that since I applied for family reunion, my grandchildren cannot come here as visitors. The same answer was given to me in August 1990 when I applied once more for a visitor's permit.

I sometimes cry after these rejections because I feel that I lost my money and effort in vain. My daughter and I have never violated the law, why do they treat us in this manner? I feel very sad for every day that passes without being able to help the children. My daughter is exhausted from the continuous travelling to Jordan, especially as she suffers from diabetes and back pains. I think about the children day and night. I keep asking God to send to them good people who can help them and stand on their side. And I always pray to God to make the Israeli authorities approve my application for family reunion, so that the children can come and live with me during the few remaining years of my life, and so that I can see through them my own son who died while away from me. I wish I could see them in my house and hold them in my arms. The children dream of the day when they can come and live with us; they are looking forward to the day when their misery ends. When will my wish and theirs come true?

From Sinjel to Venezuela, Back to ...

Mrs. Khadra Yousef 'Abd-al-Jawad 'Elwan was born in 1931 in Sinjel, a village in the Ramallah district. In 1959 she joined her husband in Venezuela, where he was working as a driver. There, she gave birth to three children.

In 1976 her husband died, leaving the family without a breadwinner. Life became so difficult that Khadra decided to return to Sinjel with her children, and the Arab community in Venezuela helped pay for their return tickets home. Since 1976, the family has been living in Sinjel in her late husband's house. Khadra's mother, Mis'ada Yousef Darwish 'Elwan, 80 years of age, applied many times to the Civil Administration in Ramallah—the most recent application was in 1987—asking for family reunion for her daughter and grandchildren, but all the applications were rejected. Members of the family have had difficulties with the authorities who regard them as staying illegally. However, given their situation, Khadra and her children have no alternatives but to remain in their village.

*Person Interviewed: Khadra Yousef 'Abd-al-Jawad 'Elwan and
Mis'ada Yousef 'Abd-al-Jawad 'Elwan*

Date: 18 August 1990

In 1959, I left for Venezuela to join my husband Muhammad Suleiman Ahmad, who had been there for the past eight years working as a driver for a company. I gave birth to three children: Sara, Suleiman and Kheizaran, born in 1965, 1966 and 1972 respectively. All of us carry Venezuelan passports. My husband died in 1976, when my children were still very young. With the death of our only supporter, life became very hard. The Arab community felt pity for us and collected some money after the funeral and helped us buy our return tickets to my village Sinjel; that was in late 1976. We entered through the Israeli airport using our Venezuelan passports.

Since then, I have stayed in my husband's house in the village. At the beginning, I covered the family expenses from the aid I received from the people in the village and from the money I earned doing house work. Later, I stopped working because I had problems with my hand and eye.

Now I support the family by cultivating the two dunums of land which my brother-in-law gave us. These yield about one qintar of wheat (300 kgs.) per year. I also lease part of my house to the charitable society, In'ash al-Usra, for a kindergarten and a tailoring project, at a rent of JD 60 per month (approximately \$US 83). My daughter, who supervises the tailoring project, earns JD 60 per month (approximately \$US 83) with which she helps the family. Before her present job, she used to work at home on her wool machine; the machine cost JD 300 (approximately \$US 417), and was bought for her from contributions from relatives after she finished her training in tailoring.

Since we came to the village we renewed the Venezuelan passport for my son only, as he moves around the West Bank more than his sisters, and it is likely that he will be stopped by soldiers. A year ago, soldiers rounded up all the youths in the village. My son was arrested, and was questioned at the military headquarters by Captain Aharoni who told him that he should leave the West Bank. My son told her: "Why should I leave when I have been here for fourteen years while others who have come to the country obtained ID's and were able to settle and build without problems? I have trouble even leaving my own house." She released him on the condition that he leave the country within ten days.

After this incident, I went three or four times to the Venezuelan Embassy in Tel-Aviv to renew my son's passport. Each time travel expenses were about JD 30 (approximately \$US 41.7), which the people of the village helped me pay. This year my son's cousin, Kamal, tried to help my son get out of his isolation, so he took him to work with him in an Israeli hotel in Tel-Aviv. After a few days the hotel owner came to Kamal and spoke to him angrily, saying that if he had not cared for Kamal, he would have taken his cousin—my son—to the police because he is not allowed to work. He asked Kamal to take my son home immediately. This incident greatly affected my son physically and psychologically. He stayed at home for a week feeling bitter because he cannot contribute to the household expenses, and must depend on his sister to support the family, whereas other youths work and support their families. He became ill and I took him to the doctor. For the past three days he has been doing some construction work in the village. Those who hired him knew about his problems.

My mother applied several times to obtain family reunion permits for us; the last time was in 1987. The military governor then asked the head of our village council to write to him about our difficult condition. The governor promised to send us a reply at home, but nothing arrived. The authorities never even asked to see my mother, who submitted the application. Each other time we only received a written reply by post [rejecting the application].

My daughters have not been able to marry because of this problem. Each time a person shows interest in marrying one of them, he withdraws when he learns that she does not have an ID. This year one of my daughters became engaged to someone from Jerusalem, who has been trying to solve her problem; the people from the village, however, do not want to take the risk, although they like my daughters.

The military governor questioned me several times about my staying in the country. Once in 1983, an officer called Baruch from the Civil Administration asked the people who were assembled at the Civil Administration for their ID's. I gave him my passport and he confiscated it, saying that I was breaking the law. I told him: "I am not committing any offense; this is my country and I have the right to live in it." I did not try to have my passport returned because I don't want to leave my country. In another incident, a Civil Administration officer told me that I had to leave the country. I began crying and all those present felt for me and began crying too. I told him: "Where do you want me to go? I am ready to come here and clean the place, to wipe the floor, but I am not ready to go to Venezuela. There is nothing that ties me to that country. If you want to force me to leave, you should support me there by sending me a monthly salary." He asked me to return to see him in 20 days. Then he called me and said: "There is no solution, you should leave." I could tell that he was threatening me. So I said: "Shoot me and my children. Only then I will lose hope. Now I am not ready to leave this country and go to Venezuela. I love my country only, and every person likes to be in his country; even when people die they are brought to be buried in their country."

Khadra's mother, a woman in her eighties, speaks of her need for her daughter and grandchildren:

Because there is nobody to support my daughter and her children

in Venezuela, I applied for family reunion permits for them to come to live with me and look after me. I live alone in my house and used to get an allowance from the social welfare which stopped with the start of the *Intifada*. Although I gave birth to 12 children, only two are still alive: Khadra and another son who is 60 years old. He supports a family of twelve and is in a difficult financial position. I live on what is given to me by good people. I need my daughter and her children to look after me, to feed me, to wash me and my clothes. I feel shy to ask my daughter-in-law to do these things; my own daughter is different. When I hear that the army is in the village, I urinate on my clothes out of fear that they will come and take my daughter. I want them to stay with me. I suffered a lot running from one office to another in order to obtain family reunion permits for them. I spent hours at the gates of those offices.

"Ramallah is More Beautiful than All I See in the U.S."

Miss Huda Ahmad 'Ali Suleiman was born in 1946 in the village of Turmus'ayya in the Ramallah district. In 1974 Huda left the West Bank to the USA to visit her sisters and brothers who had been living there for more than 30 years. From 1974 until 1979, she renewed her travel document at the Israeli Consulate in San Francisco. In 1979, the Consulate refused to renew the travel document and told her that she did not need it any more since she was about to obtain a U.S. passport which she can use to enter Israel and stay there when she wishes, without losing her right to residency in the Occupied Territories. However, when she returned to the area in 1983, the Israeli authorities refused to give her back her ID. Since then her 80-year-old mother has applied five times to obtain a family reunion permit for her daughter, but all applications have been rejected without any explanation.

Person Interviewed: Huda Ahmad 'Ali Suleiman

Date: 15 October 1990

I was born in Turmou's'ayya village on 8 July 1946. I lived there until 1974 when I left with my mother, using an Israeli travel document, to visit my four sisters and brothers in San Francisco. My first brother left to the U.S. in 1958 in order to study and the others followed. After they finished their studies, they started their own business there. After staying for one year in the U.S., and before my travel document expired, I went to the Israeli Consulate in San Francisco to renew my travel document. There they took it from me and asked me to get a re-entry permit from the U.S. immigration. I got the re-entry permit in two weeks and went back to the Israeli Consulate where I had my travel document renewed for one more year. My mother followed the same steps to have her document renewed. She then returned to the West Bank after spending two years in the U.S., and was given her Israeli ID without problems. As for myself, I continued renewing my travel document in the U.S. following the procedure I described earlier. This continued until 1979, as I was studying, and for social and personal reasons I couldn't go back to my country.

When I went in 1979 to the Israeli Consulate to renew my travel document, the officials there told me, after they learned that I was about to get a U.S. passport, that they were not going to renew my travel document because I did not need it any more. They told me that with the U.S. passport I could go back to my country at any time and live as an Israeli citizen without any problem. I felt good; I did not know then that this meant that I could not get back my ID and that I had lost my residency in my country. If I knew that, I would have returned to my country, no matter the cost.

In June 1983, I went back to Turmus'ayya as a tourist, using my U.S. passport to visit my mother. After a week, I went to the ID office in Ramallah carrying with me my re-entry permit and the papers showing that I had renewed my travel document at the Israeli Consulate in the U.S. I asked for my ID, but they laughed at me and told me that I no longer had an ID since I stayed for more than five years abroad. I argued with them about what I was told in the Consulate, but in vain. I went to the military authorities and explained my problem, but they referred me back to the ID office.

After the authorities refused to give me an ID card, my mother started applying to obtain a family reunion permit for me; this was especially important for her as I am not married and she needs me because she suffers from heart and lung diseases, as well as from diabetes, and she cannot hear well. She is over eighty. She lives alone (as she and my father were separated in 1965), and she needs somebody to help her, especially because all her children and grandchildren are abroad and no longer have an ID. When she has a coughing fit, she cannot get up to drink water. I stayed with her for four weeks during which time I bought a house for her to live in.

In the summer of 1984, I came back another time to see my mother. She applied to obtain a family reunion permit for me in 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987, but all the applications were rejected. In 1986, after I spent three months with my mother (which is the period I am permitted to stay as a visitor) she became very sick and I had to stay three more days with her. Then I left through the bridge to Jordan in order to come back for another three months legally. On my way out, the authorities on the bridge made me pay 10 shekels (\$5) for the three day delay. I stayed in

Jordan for one week after which I tried to come back. On the bridge they refused to allow me in, saying that I had to stay at least one year outside the country to be able to get in again. They also searched my luggage thoroughly and made me wait from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.; then they told me to go back to Jordan. On the second day, I made a second attempt but the same thing happened to me as on the previous day, except that they turned me back at 1 p.m. After two days I left to the U.S., although I had my ticket and other belongings at my mother's house. I stayed for a year in the U.S., during which I was very worried about my mother, fearing that she might die without having anybody beside her. When my brothers and I telephoned her from the U.S. without getting a reply, we would get very worried and telephone her neighbours, whom we used to ask to go look after her. Some days we called her twice to make sure that she was well.

After the year passed, in the summer of 1987, I came back and stayed with my mother for one year. I therefore exceeded the three month period which I was allowed to stay. So when I left through the Tel-Aviv airport, the officials there asked me about the reason for staying longer. I explained that the cause was my mother's illness. They did not accept that and told me that I would be prevented from visiting in the future. The official then called the security men, who thoroughly searched my luggage before I boarded the plane. On 12 February 1989, my mother visited me in the U.S.; during the period between 1976 to 1989 she came to the U.S. about four or five times. During each visit, she stayed for several months. My brothers and I tried to persuade her to stay in the U.S., but she always refused and insisted on going back to her homeland. She would say everyday: "May God let me die in my country." My brother would tell her that he will buy her a house surrounded by land on which he will start a farm and make it look like the homeland. But she insisted on returning. I lived with her in a luxurious apartment on the beach in the best area in San Francisco. Everyday I walked with her along the beach and passed by the Golden Gate Bridge; we watch the collection of ducks in the lake brought from all over the world. I would then ask her if she was happy, and her answer was always: "Ramallah is more beautiful than all I see in the U.S."

Upon my mother's request, we headed back to our country on 15

January 1990. On the plane my mother had to take special tablets because her heart was beating hard. In Tel Aviv Airport, the official asked me if there was anybody else with us, or if there was anybody who could take care of my mother in the village. Only when I swore that there was nobody was I allowed into the country and granted a three months tourist permit. The woman who was searching us told me that if my mother was not with me, she would never have allowed me to enter into the country. I renewed the permission to stay until 13 July 1990, and I am still trying through a lawyer to obtain a permit to stay permanently with my mother.

I really cannot understand why the authorities treat me in such a manner. I have never been involved in politics and never violated the law or helped a person who violated the law, neither here nor in San Francisco. This does not imply that I do not love my country, but I don't want to give them anything against me. My mother is always in fear for me and she begs me not to leave Ramallah so that I won't be caught and be deported. When I have to go out of the house I lock up my mother in the house and leave the key with our neighbour. Once a girl from Turmus'ayya came to visit my mother and kept knocking on the door for more than half an hour until my mother heard her and told her to get the key from our neighbour.

My mother only wishes that I will be beside her when she dies. All the Jews of the world can come and live in this country without problems, but my mother cannot ask for a family reunion permit for one person—me—out of 30 children and grandchildren that she has living abroad. I pledged in front of God, my mother and my brothers to look after her as long as she lives. I can never leave her under any circumstances, especially as she cannot, for health reasons, travel abroad with me. And above all, I do not want to leave my country; I have the right to stay in my country as a citizen even after my mother passes away.