

WHAT IS "CANADA PARK"?

In 1973, Bernard Bloomfield, president of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) of Canada, spearheaded a campaign among Canada's Jewish community to raise \$15 million to fund the establishment of a recreational park "in Israel" for Israelis. The money was donated by hundreds of Canadian Jews, and over the course of the following few years, trees were planted, lakes were created, and Bloomfield's vision was realised. The JNF brochure for Canada Park describes the park as "a proud tribute to Canada and to the Canadian Jewish community whose vision and foresight helped transform a barren stretch of land into a major national recreational area for the people of Israel."

One detail that the JNF neglected to mention to its potential donors, however, was that the park would not be established in Israel, but in occupied territory in the Latroun area of the West Bank, on the land of the Palestinian villages of 'Imwas and Yalo. Nor did the JNF mention that the park was built on the back of the extensive destruction of property by the Israeli army (which razed the civilian villages to the ground upon its occupation of the West Bank in 1967, despite having been met with no resistance by the villagers), the forcible transfer of civilians, and the appropriation of their land, all of which are war crimes amounting to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Instead, the JNF has, with the support of the Israeli authorities, involved itself in a much more disturbing project than mere aesthetic or environmental improvement. Having physically erased the Palestinian villages in the area (the villagers remain displaced to this day), they sought to erase from public consciousness the entire Palestinian history of the area. In a recent interview with *Our Land of Israel* newspaper, Michal Katorza, the individual responsible for signposting in JNF parks and forests, affirmed that "a large portion of the JNF parks are located on the lands where Arab villages existed in the past. *The forests are there to disguise the matter.*" More than 30 years after the establishment of the park and despite the controversy and adverse publicity over the origins of the land on which the park was built, the JNF of Canada still omits any mention of the fact that it is situated in occupied Palestinian territory, choosing instead to refer to it as "Israel's Central Park."

The donations which funded, and continue to fund, the establishment, development and maintenance of Canada Park are subsidised as tax-deductible by the Canadian government by virtue of the charitable status of the JNF in Canada. As commendable as environmental regeneration projects may be under normal circumstances, the planting of forests and the development of recreational parks on the ruins of destroyed villages in occupied territory raise alarming moral questions and are synonymous less with charitable activities and more with complicity in violations of basic principles of public international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The Canadian authorities have failed to amend the charitable status of the JNF, despite repeated appeals to this end. Thus, by indirectly supporting the establishment, maintenance and expansion of a recreational park on occupied territory, Canada is ignoring its positive obligation to put an end to the illegal situation created by Israel in this part of the West Bank. Canada is also responsible for breaching its duty of non-recognition of that illegal situation, and is complicit in consolidating an unlawful fact on the ground and prejudicing the realisation of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Once a Village, Now a Park: Planting Trees to Cover Up War Crimes

"All we did was take the area that was here, reconstructed it, enhanced it and improved it ... The area is much, much nicer now than it was before."

- Benny Mushkin, JNF official, Canada Park



1958



1968



1978



1988

Four pictures taken from the same place, with the Abu-'Abaydah shrine in the foreground, showing 'Imwas in 1958, the village completely erased by 1968, and the area forested with the development of Canada Park, 1978/1988.

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