



Status of preparations for the "great return march"

March 27, 2018

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip **are carrying out intensive preparations** for the "great return march." The first event will be held beginning at **10:00 on Friday morning, March 30 2018**. Palestinians will be brought **to six locations along the border security fence** (see below). A media center will be set up on **the Palestinian side of the Erez crossing**. Buses will leave from all the mosques in the Gaza Strip beginning at 10:00 to bring participants to the six tent camps along the border. In addition to civilians, members of Hamas and the other organizations will participate. Local committees have been appointed to organize the events in the various districts of the Gaza Strip. They are responsible for recruiting the masses, organizing transportation, and providing food, water, portable toilets and medical services. **The activity will peak on May 15, 2018, Nakba Day.**



Post to Facebook page of Issam Hamad, represented as deputy chairman of "the international coordinating committee of the 'great return march.'" It says buses will begin taking participants to the march on March 30 at 10:00 (Facebook page of the "great return march," March 27, 2018).

Timetable, Location and Types of Events

► According to plans, **events will begin on the morning of Friday, March 30, 2018, at 10:00**. People will be brought to gather at **six locations along the border security fence**. A **media center** will be set up on the Palestinian side of the Erez crossing in the northern Gaza

Strip (Facebook page of Hanan Hassan Saleh, March 23, 2018).¹ Reportedly, **buses will provide transportation, leaving from every mosque in the Gaza Strip beginning at 10:00 and the Friday sermon will be given near the fence** (Paldf, March 27, 2018). Portable toilets will be set up and meals will be provided for all participants. **According to Imad Salim, spokesman for the "supreme national authority of the return march," the activities will peak on May 15, 2018, Nakba Day.**

► Imad Salim also said **civilians would remain in the camps day and night, and every day activities would be held in all the camps.** He repeated they would not call for face-to-face clashes with IDF forces, and that the activities would be popular and non-violent, and without weapons or confrontations. He called on the participants to obey the orders of the national authority and **not allow the "occupation" [i.e., Israel] to carry out "a stupid act."**

► According to Salim **the national authority has already begun leveling the ground in the areas where the tents will be erected and building access roads leading to the tent camps.** A camp will be built in every district in the Gaza Strip, equipped with running water, portable toilets and medical services. It was reported that bulldozers had begun leveling the ground in six areas near the fence, including the **Khan Yunis district, the Rafah area, the central Gaza Strip district, Gaza City, and the northern Gaza Strip** (Safa, March 25, 2018).

► On March 25, 2018, **the first tent camp was erected in the village of Khirbat Ikhza'a, east of Khan Yunis** in the southern Gaza Strip. Bulldozers began leveling the ground and water pipes were laid (Palinfo and the Facebook page of the Shehab news agency, March 25, 2018). At the same time, the Palestinians began constructing embankments (parallel to what was constructed by the IDF), **as a buffer zone between the Israeli security forces and the demonstrators.**² **Ahmed Abu Ratima, spokesman for the "great return march,"** said the embankments were not military but rather intended to emphasize the non-violent nature of the march and prevent harm from coming to the participants (Palestine Online, March 26, 2018).

¹**Hanan Abu Saleh** lives in the Gaza Strip. She has an MA in Qur'an interpretation and studies from the Islamic University in Gaza City. According to the posts on her Facebook page, she is apparently affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). On March 23, 2018, she posted "details about the return march and breaking the siege."

²**Imad Salim**, spokesman for the "supreme national authority of the return march" denied the construction of an embankment for military purposes around the six camps (Safa, March 25, 2018).



Preparing the ground east of Gaza City for the tent camps and embankments. The Palestinians claim the embankments are for protection against IDF forces (Palinfo Twitter account, March 26, 2018).



Bringing equipment and water to a location near the airfield, east of Rafah (Palinfo Twitter account, March 27, 2018).

Recruiting Participants

- ▶ The Palestinian media **called on the public to participate** in the events that will take place at a distance of 700 meters from the security fence on March 30, 2018 (al-Aqsa, Filastin al-Yawm, March 23, 2018). **Before the events cars with loudspeakers on the roof will drive through the streets and call on the public to join. Recruitment activities are also planned for the mosques; schools are also holding recruitment activities for students.** The media have also been recruited and **are calling on the public, via radio and TV, to join** (Facebook page of Hunan Abu Saleh, March 23, 2018).
- ▶ **Arij al-Ashqar, a member of the march's committee for women's affairs**, said efforts were being made to recruit as many women as possible to participate in the events and that recruitment meetings were being held to explain their importance to women. He said women were full partners in the struggle and **they would march at the head of the crowds**. He also said children would not participate (alresala.net, March 22, 2018).

- ▶ Filastin al-Yawm **issued instructions for dealing with Israel's so-called "methods of oppression."** **Badri al-Mufdi, deputy director of information in the ministry of health,** advised the public what to do if injured by tear gas. **Yusuf al-Sharqawi, represented as "a military expert,"** called on the public to rush forward until they were face to face with the soldiers, and even to try to take their guns away (Filastin al-Yawm, March 27, 2018).
- ▶ **Similar calls were issued in Judea and Samaria,** although apparently events there will be **more spontaneous and less orchestrated and organized.** The "national forces" in Ramallah and al-Bireh called for extensive public participation in activities marking Land Day, which they also called a **"day of escalation"** in preparation for Nakba Day and the "great return march" (Wafa, March 24, 2018). **Wa'el Abu Yusuf, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee,** said that between March 30, 2018 (Land Day) and May 15, 2018 (Nakba Day), a series of events would be held emphasizing the "right of return." He said they would include mass marches to the border security fence (PNN, March 25, 2018).

Media Coverage

- ▶ The organizers intend to have extensive Palestinian, Arab and international coverage of the events. **The media center will be on the Palestinian side of the Erez crossing.** The Hamas-affiliated al-Risalah news agency erected a tent for the media near the eastern edge of Gaza City (alresala.net, March 26, 2018).



Tent erected by the Hamas-affiliated al-Risalah near the eastern edge of Gaza City to cover the march. Left: Symposium held at the site to discuss the march (al-Risalah Twitter account, March 26, 2018).

Meeting of the Legislative Council Held in a Tent East of Gaza City

- ▶ On March 26, 2018, the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in the Gaza Strip held an ad hoc meeting whose theme was "Yes to the right of return...No to Trump's

decision." **The meeting was held in the tent erected near the eastern border of the Gaza Strip.** According to **Ahmed Bahar, deputy PLC speaker** and senior Hamas figure, the meeting was held near the border to emphasize the "sanctity of the Palestinian rights and basic principles." He also said the PLC had sent a letter to the heads of the Arab, Islamic and international parliaments calling on them to provide defense and political, media and moral backing for the march.

► **Senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash**, represented at the meeting as chairman of "the supreme national authority of the return march," said that **all the forces, headed by Hamas, the PIJ and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, would participate in the "great return march."** He added that they were coordinating the march with the West Bank, but had allowed every Palestinian region the **freedom to choose how they would express their adherence to the "right of return."** He said they were also in contact with **Palestinians in Lebanon and Syria** to hold their own marches and express their opposition to Trump's plan and to "an alternative homeland" (al-Anadolu News and Palinfo, March 26, 2018).



Right: PLC meeting held in the tent. Left: Khaled al-Batash (second from left) (Palinfo and the Border Police of the PLC, March 26, 2018).

Statements Concerning Israel

► In the Palestinian media the organizers of the march repeatedly **claim that Israel is afraid of the march.** That is because Israel is accustomed to demonstrations along the border of a few hundred or a few thousand demonstrators, who disperse immediately after tear gas has been fired. According to the organizers, because of its fear Israel is using various methods in an attempt to make the march fail (al-Aqsa, March 21, 2018).

► **Senior PIJ figure Da'ud Shehab** said all the organizations were giving priority to popular, non-violent marches that would not give Israel excuses to make them fail. He added that Israel would not drag them into a military confrontation (Palestine Online, March 21, 2018).



**Hamas notice #great return march
(alresala.net, March 26, 2018).**