

# OVER 5 MILLION PALESTINIAN REFUGEES WHAT ABOUT THEIR BIRTHRIGHT?

The Global Disapora Forum taking place today has shamefully invited **Gidi Mark, the CEO of Taglit-Birthright Israel**, to be a speaker at this event.

Birthright Israel – part funded by the Israeli state – brings thousands of young Jewish people from around the world to Israel every year, teaching them that all Jewish people have an exclusive right to Palestinian land, and that when they go home they must vocally defend Israeli apartheid. Such visits are virtually impossible for most young diaspora Palestinians - those descended from the refugees of the 1948 Nakba – who wish to visit or live in the homeland they have never seen.

It is particularly offensive that the Birthright CEO would be invited to speak on 15th May, a day on which Palestinians all over the world will commemorate Nakba Day, remembering the expulsion of over 750,000 indigenous Palestinians by Zionist forces from what became the State of Israel. These refugees and their descendants, now numbering over 5 million people, have been denied their UN mandated Right of Return to their homeland for 65 years.

## **As the international Jewish group ‘Renounce Birthright’ has stated:**

The establishment and maintenance of an exclusively Jewish Israel — through forcible displacement, land theft, occupation, segregation, institutionalized racism and systemic discrimination — is political at its core, and is supported and reinforced by Birthright.

Eg, during the trip, approximately 10,000 Birthright participants visit the Ahava cosmetics factory each year; Ahava is located in the illegally-occupied West Bank settlement of Mitzpe Shalem. Ahava directly profits from the exploitation of Palestinian Dead Sea resources.

Moreover, disturbing accounts of explicit racism have arisen in recent years; former participants often recount how the language used by Birthright personnel demonizes Palestinians. One past attendee said her Birthright tour guide told her group that “Arabs have wanted to kill Jews forever, that they are ‘like mosquitoes’ we must swat away”

Zionism is a political project, and Birthright is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of that political project outside Israel. As such, we must recognize our engagements with Birthright as a question of politics, and not just “a free vacation.”

## **Another person who went on one of the Birthright trips says:**

From the moment our plane landed and we were given a map without the Green Line or any acknowledgment of a border between Israel proper and the occupied territories, to the moment we stood at the edge of the Negev seeing Palestinian towns in the distance and were told to appreciate the beauty of the Judean Hills, it was impossible not to come away with the message that Eretz Israel, the Greater Land of Israel, rightfully belongs only and exclusively to Jews. This message was not delivered with much subtlety.

**Gidi Mark, the CEO of Birthright who is speaking today, has stated that the organisation is “the most successful Zionist project in the Jewish world”** and has contributed over €430 million to the Israeli economy. This money of course helps to fund the occupation of Palestine and oppression of its people.