

# The Refugees Land Records – Quality and Volume

*This is a summary of the work of the Commission's Land Expert on the Identification and Valuation of Arab Refugee Immovable Property Holding in Israel, including the final products/documentation held at the UN Archives, prepared by Dr. Adnan Abdelrazek, former United Nations political affairs officer in New York. A full report on the Land Expert's work can be found in the UN document A/AC.25/W.84.*

(<http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/e11790721615c5aa052565f600543580!OpenDocument>).

Based on resolutions 194 (III) and 394 (V), the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) requested in 1952 that the United Nations secretary-general set up a special staff to undertake first the identification, and then the valuation, of Arab immovable property holdings in Israel for which compensation might be claimed.

Accordingly, under the direction of Land Expert [Frank E. Jarvis], the Commission's Office for Identification and Valuation (I.V.) was established at the end of 1952 to carry out the project both at headquarters in New York and in Jerusalem. The purpose of this project was to provide reliable, detailed and complete information on the bases of which: (a) individual claims for compensation could be verified; (b) an accurate assessment of each property owner's holdings could be made on the basis of prices prevailing in 1947; and (c) an aggregate figure could be prepared as a global value, which would be arrived at by the simple addition of all individual assessments. The UNCCP submitted in April 1964 to the General Assembly document A/AC.25/W.84, describing the work of the I.V. Office and indicating the end of its work. This work could be summarized as follows:

The **Identification** work involved the establishment of lists of all parcels of land, giving the overall area of each parcel, the description of the property, the name or names of its owners and the proportion of their shares and any mortgage or other encumbrances on the share of each individual.

**Valuation**, according to the Land Expert, involved two aspects: the determination of the value of each individual's holdings for the actual payment of compensation, and the aggregate figure which these findings could produce and which would represent the maximum amount of compensation that may have to be paid.

Coming to determine the areas in which Arab properties/lands were located, the I.V. Office decided to include the territory held by Israel under the 1949 Armistice agreements, the no-man's land in the Jerusalem-Ramle area, the demilitarized zones in the northern region and the Beersheba Sub-District.

For reasons of cost and time considerations, the Office decided to use the following official resources as the bases for identifying and valuating abandoned Arab properties in Israel.

**Registers of Title** – British records of registered Titles (settled land)

**Registers of Deeds** – The British Register recorded details of transactions in “non-settled” land.

**Tax Distribution Lists** – Tax lists were prepared by the Tax Distribution Committees for rural properties in “non-settled” areas.

**Field Valuation Sheets** – The working sheet of the taxation authority in urban areas.

**Schedule of Rights** – This document was published under the Land (Settlement of Title) Ordinance on which the Registers of Title were based.

**Parcel Classification Schedules** – The document setting out the tax category in “settled” rural areas.

**Village Maps and Block Plans** – A map showing the boundary of the village, the fiscal block division and also registration block divisions.

According to the Land Expert, the information that was extracted from the above records included name of village; block and parcel numbers; names of owners and shares in the case of co-owned parcel; area of parcel; description of property; and rights effecting parcel. This information was extracted from the various records as follows:

The basic operation was to prepare in an RP/1 form containing information extracted from the various sources above with respect to every single Arab refugee-owned parcel of land. In addition, RP/3 forms — schedules of the parcels for which RP/1 forms were not prepared — were filed. The idea was that the RP/1 and the RP/3 forms should contain between them all the parcels of land which make up a village. The total areas on the RP/1 forms and RP/3 forms should together make up the total area of the village.

In his working paper, Mr. Jarvis indicated that, by the end of the identification work, a total of 453,000 basic RP/1 forms were prepared. A total of 1,705 fiscal blocks and 10,324 registration blocks were included in the identification, making a total of 10,324 blocks outside of the rural area of the Beersheba Sub-District.

**The Valuation Work:** In the procedures of valuating the identified refugees’ property, the Land Expert ascribed to each parcel of Arab-owned land a value equivalent to the price which might have been realized on a sale of the parcel in the open market on November 29, 1947. It was based, according to the Expert, on a broad estimate of overall value, based on knowledge of the existing use of broad categories of land, and had led to an estimation of the value of each individual parcel taking into consideration its market value on November 29, 1947. The final working paper of the Land Expert described the method of valuation applied by the Office under two categories: a) urban lands and b) rural lands.

**Index of Owners:** At the end of the project, the UNCCP authorized the I.V. Office to compile an index of owners, which would enable the property holding of any particular owner to be readily ascertained.

After concluding the work and upon the request of some UN Member States, the Technical Representative was made available for receiving and answering inquiries of a technical nature and also was prepared to answer inquiries from Member States about the basis of the work and such questions as might lead to clarification of this work. This exercise was available until September 30, 1966, after which the entire products of the I.V. Office were stored at the UN Archives.

## The Final Products at the Archives

In total, the UN Archives carry over 1.2 million pieces of paper (pages and index cards), including photocopies of the 453,000 RP/1 forms containing information concerning parcels owned by Arabs, including type, size, value of the parcel and the identification of the owner/owners and their whereabouts; 210,000 owners index cards referencing the holder's name and value of parcel; and 5,625 cadastral and other maps of the villages and towns where the Arab properties are located; and over 3,400 rolls of 19mm and 35mm films, reproducing 2.88 million pages of the British and Ottoman land registries of Palestine.

*N.B.* The refugees' property documents in the UN Archives are not open to the public. However, after their sealing, the UNCCP gave permission to several governments and entities to copy parts of them — the RP/3 papers in particular. These are Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Committee on Palestine and the Arab League. Between 1998 and 2000, all the documents in the archives were converted into electronic format and were sealed again.