

Study: Refugee solution to cost billions

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A solution for the Palestinian refugee issue will cost between 55 to 85 billion dollars, a study released ahead of the Annapolis conference concluded.

The study was conducted by The Aix Group, which was founded in 2002 in cooperation with the Peres Center for Peace and the DATA center for studies and research in Bethlehem.

The group's research was focused on four main areas of great economic importance, which were economic cooperation in Jerusalem under different scenarios, economic aspects of resolving the question of the Palestinian refugees, cooperation on infrastructure issues, and three issues defined as "fast track" which focus mainly on Palestinian employment in Israel, trade agreements and development of the Jordan Valley.

In regards to the refugee issue, the group suggested that the refugees choose their preferred alternatives they were offered according to the layout drafted by former US president Bill Clinton, through an election supervised by an international agency.

The group's members also said that the right of return to a Palestinian state, even if it is only partially implemented with other steps such as rehabilitation and compensation, is a vital component of a final status agreement.

Three solutions were offered by the group for Jerusalem's final status. One being a physical border between the Israeli and Palestinian parts of Jerusalem, another was that Jerusalem will be an "open city" with freedom of movement for all and the third solution was that Jerusalem will be "partially open."

The study also concluded that lack of cooperation in areas of transportation and energy will cost both sides much more than cooperation.

On matters defined as "fast track" the group suggested that a new trade policy should be adopted with a permanent area of free trade and including the Jordan Valley as a part of the West Bank.



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