

# The 1969 Israel-Paraguay Plan

In 1969, Israel launched a secretive initiative to encourage the voluntary emigration of Palestinians from Gaza to Paraguay, targeting 60,000 individuals as a demographic strategy following the 1967 Six-Day War. Formalized through Decision Shin.Taf/24 on May 29, 1969, the plan involved high-ranking officials, including Prime Minister Golda Meir and Mossad Chief Zvi Zamir, and promised Palestinians a new life abroad with financial incentives, land, work, and cultural integration support. However, only 30 individuals were relocated before the plan collapsed in 1970, following a violent incident that exposed its failures. For the Palestinians involved, the experience was marked by profound deception: promised a future in Brazil, they were instead abandoned in Paraguay, left without the promised resources or support. This article centers on their accounts to illuminate the human cost of this ill-fated policy.

## The Plan's Framework and Promises

The initiative, brokered by Mossad and coordinated through the Israeli travel agency Patra, owned by Gad Greiver, offered Palestinians in Gaza an enticing package: a one-time payment of \$100 (about \$750 today), fully covered travel expenses, immediate residency in the host country, a path to citizenship within five years, agricultural land, employment opportunities, and support for cultural integration, including language assistance. Paraguay, under dictator Alfredo Stroessner, agreed to accept the emigrants for a payment of \$33 per person, with an upfront \$350,000 for the first 10,000, envisioning them as labor for agricultural development.

For Palestinians, the promises were particularly alluring. Gaza in 1969 faced economic stagnation and the pressures of Israeli occupation, making the prospect of a fresh start in Brazil—a country often highlighted in Patra's recruitment efforts—highly appealing. Agents marketed the program as a structured relocation with jobs, land parcels, and assistance to learn Portuguese or integrate culturally, targeting individuals desperate for stability. The promise of Brazil, with its established Arab diaspora and economic opportunities, contrasted sharply with the reality that awaited.

## Palestinian Accounts: Deceived and Abandoned

Palestinian accounts reveal a stark betrayal. One vivid narrative comes from Mahmoud, a Palestinian recruited through Patra with assurances of work and land in Brazil, complete with support to learn Portuguese and integrate into a vibrant community. He received documents and a plane ticket, only to discover upon arrival in Asunción, Paraguay, that he had been misled. There was no Brazil, no job, no land, and no cultural integration support—only a meager \$100 payment and residency papers that offered little practical value.

Mahmoud's story is emblematic of the deception faced by the few who participated, who found themselves abandoned in an unfamiliar country with no resources or community.

Other accounts echo this sense of abandonment. The 30 Palestinians relocated were left to navigate Paraguay's linguistic and cultural landscape—dominated by Guaraní and Spanish—without the promised language support. The agricultural land they were assured never materialized, and no employment programs were established. Participants felt “tricked” into leaving Gaza, their expectations of a structured relocation shattered by the reality of isolation and neglect.

The promise of cultural integration, critical for adapting to a new society, was entirely absent, leaving individuals to fend for themselves in a country with no Palestinian diaspora to offer support. This abandonment deepened their sense of betrayal, as they realized they were part of a geopolitical maneuver rather than recipients of genuine opportunity.

## The 1970 Embassy Shooting: A Reaction to Broken Promises

The plan's collapse was catalyzed by a dramatic incident on May 4, 1970, at the Israeli embassy in Asunción. Two Palestinian emigrants, Talal al-Dimassi and Khaled Darwish Kassab, shot and killed Edna Peer, an embassy worker, in an act often labeled the first instance of Palestinian terrorism abroad. However, the context suggests a more complex story. The Palestinians sought assistance from the embassy after a promised Mossad agent—responsible for arranging the real estate and work opportunities—failed to appear. When the ambassador turned them away, dismissing their pleas, their frustration erupted into violence.

This incident raises questions about the “terrorism” label. The men's actions, while tragic and unjustifiable, appear rooted in desperation over the unmet promises of land, work, and support. Feeling abandoned by both Israel and Paraguay, their attack was less a planned act of political violence and more a reaction to betrayal and neglect. The shooting exposed the plan to international scrutiny, prompting complaints from Arab states to the United Nations and halting the initiative. It also underscored the depth of Palestinian disillusionment, as the broken promises fueled resentment and desperation.

## The Human Cost of Unmet Promises

The unmet promises left a profound impact on the Palestinians involved:

- **Economic Devastation:** The \$100 payment was woefully inadequate for establishing a livelihood in Paraguay, where no jobs or land were provided. Participants like Mahmoud faced immediate hardship, with no means to sustain themselves.
- **Cultural and Social Isolation:** Without language support or cultural integration programs, the Palestinians struggled to adapt to Paraguay's Guaraní- and Spanish-speaking society. The absence of a Palestinian community exacerbated their isolation, unlike the promised integration into Brazil's Arab diaspora.

- **Psychological Betrayal:** The deception—being promised Brazil but sent to Paraguay—eroded trust. Realizing they were pawns in Israel’s demographic strategy left participants with a sense of exploitation and loss, compounded by the inability to return to Gaza.
- **Forced Displacement:** The “voluntary” nature of the program was dubious, as Gaza’s economic pressures coerced participation. Being misled about their destination and abandoned upon arrival deepened the sense of displacement.

These accounts, though limited by the plan’s small scale, highlight a pattern of exploitation. The plan’s failure stemmed from its inability to deliver on these commitments, leaving Palestinians stranded and Paraguay wary of further involvement.

## Ethical and Geopolitical Implications

The plan’s ethical flaws were glaring. Critics, including Palestinian advocates, argue it verged on forced displacement, exploiting Gaza’s desperation to reduce the Palestinian population. The involvement of Mossad, which brokered the deal and ceased Nazi-hunting in Paraguay around the same time, added to perceptions of manipulation. The secrecy of the agreement, hidden until the 1970 shooting, fueled accusations of unethical conduct. Paraguay, fearing backlash from Arab nations, quickly distanced itself, with Stroessner aborting the plan after the incident.

For Palestinians, the experience reinforced a narrative of displacement and broken trust. The plan’s small scale—relocating only 30 individuals—did little to achieve Israel’s demographic goals but left lasting scars on participants. The human toll reflects the consequences of a policy that prioritized strategy over humanity.

## Legacy and Lessons

The 1969 Israel-Paraguay Plan remains a footnote in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but its impact on the few who participated is profound. Palestinian accounts of being promised a future in Brazil—complete with land, work, and cultural support—only to be abandoned in Paraguay reveal the human cost of geopolitical experiments. The 1970 embassy shooting, sparked by the absence of a promised Mossad agent and the ambassador’s dismissal, reflects the desperation of those betrayed, challenging simplistic labels like “terrorism.”

As discussions of similar migration proposals emerge, these stories serve as a warning. Policies driven by demographic goals must prioritize transparency and genuine support to avoid repeating the failures of 1969. For the Palestinians involved, the plan is a stark reminder of promises unkept, their voices a call for accountability in the face of displacement and deceit.