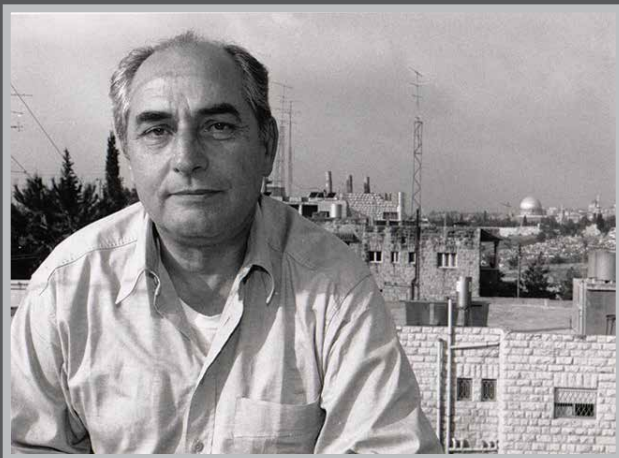




Faisal Hussein (1940–2001)*

Promoting Human Rights, Social Justice, and Unity



Faisal Abdel Qader Hussein was born in Baghdad in 1940, during his father's forced exile from Jerusalem. In 1944, his family moved to Saudi Arabia, where "for a year and a half they had the chance to live together as a normal family," as Faisal often recalled, because his father was present rather than involved in resistance activities, hospitalized, or imprisoned. The parents home-schooled the children, with special focus on nature and poetry; his father wrote the textbooks, his mother created the illustrations. In 1946, the family moved to Cairo where Faisal pursued his elementary and secondary education. From an early age, political awareness of nationalist struggles worldwide was an important theme in the family, and the Jerusalem accent was always deliberately used at home, reflecting a special connection to their Palestinian homeland.

Faisal's father, Abdel Qader Al-Husseini, was a leader in the armed struggle in Palestine and died a martyr, defending his homeland in the battle of Al-Qastal in 1948. When Faisal was 14 years old, he made the decision to become politically active, and he joined demonstrations in Cairo against the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. In 1956, on the last day of the Suez Crisis, Faisal was handed a weapon, having managed to enroll in the Egyptian forces despite being only 16 years old.

Having joined the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in 1958, Faisal participated in the establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Students in Cairo in 1959. Gradually, his political involvement increased, at the expense of his studies. He was responsible for student affairs in the All-Palestine Government in Cairo and took on other

assignments until in 1964 he moved to Jerusalem and became an official in the Palestine Liberation Organization. His activism brought him in conflict with the Jordanian government, and in 1966 he was arrested – choosing this fate over the opportunity to leave. Soon after, Faisal received training at the military college in Syria, and immediately after the defeat of 1967 helped organize a military camp for volunteers operating from Lebanon. Later that year, he returned to his homeland, settled in East Jerusalem, and became an active member in Fatah. His earlier experience in political and resistance work enabled him to lead the political and nationalist struggle against the illegal Israeli occupation, and he soon was numbered among the Palestinian nationalist pioneers who were detained by Israel for their activism in the resistance against the occupation.

Between 1969 and 1979, Faisal pursued various professions. He worked as a farmer, an oil merchant, a hotel receptionist, a radiology technician, and a mobile vendor. His pursuit of a degree in history was curtailed by prolonged home arrests. He founded, along with a small group of Palestinian intellectuals, the Arab Studies Society (1979), which was highly unpopular with Israel and closed several times, and Heled, the campaign to end the Israeli siege of the Golan Heights (1981). He established the Palestine Center for Human Rights and formed the committee for "Confronting the Iron Fist" (1987). For his activism, he was put sporadically under either administrative detention or house arrest throughout the 1980s.

During that time, Faisal began to lean more and more towards peaceful efforts to end the conflict with Israel. In 1991, he led the preliminary talks for the



Madrid Peace Conference with former US Secretary of State James Baker. In 1992, he set up headquarters for the Palestinian Delegation to the peace talks in what became known as Orient House. In addition to being an unofficial center for the PLO in Jerusalem, Orient House encompassed the Arab Studies Society and became a main center to service the residents of Jerusalem. In 1995, Faisal Hussein received the responsibility for the Jerusalem Portfolio from the PLO, and a year later he was elected by the Palestinian National Council as member of the PLO's Executive Committee.

Faisal regularly confronted Israeli police forces, led demonstrations to defend holy sites such as Al-Haram al-Sharif, and strongly opposed settlements, particularly in Abu-Ghneim (a.k.a. Har Homa). He continuously voiced objection to detrimental Israeli policies in East Jerusalem and defended its Palestinian character. Faisal's efforts effectively transformed Jerusalem into a functional capital for Palestinians and made Orient House the main location for official meetings of political figures. He tried to unite Arabs and direct their attention to Jerusalem; he undertook dozens of tours all over the world to defend the cause of East Jerusalem and Palestine.

Faisal Hussein passed away during a visit to Kuwait in 2001 and was buried in the courtyard of Al-Haram al-Sharif, next to his father and grandfather.

* Although this section usually focuses only on living persons, TWIP decided to make an exception in order to honor this man who so generously dedicated his life to working for the common good.