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occupied Palestinian territory

humanitarian UPDATE

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BARRIER CONSTRUCTION AND LAND CONFISCATION

Construction of the Barrier continued on the Western side of the West Bank, and OCHA field staff also observed Barrier construction under way north east of Nablus. In this Update we focus on confiscations and Barrier construction in the Ramallah area.¹

Qatanna area

Military land confiscation orders for the construction of the Barrier between Beit Sira and Beit Ur al Fauqa were issued on 15 December and 6 January (see Map). According to the October 2003 projections, a barrier will also be constructed to the north of this area, creating an enclave of around 15,800 acres. Fourteen communities with a combined population of around 50,400 will be affected.² Even before the construction of the northern part of the barrier in this area, the Beit Sira-Beit Ur al Fauqa section of the barrier and an Israeli restricted road will effectively enclose the communities living south of the road. Construction of the barrier around this area will affect this population in the following ways:

- **Livelihoods:** A large proportion of the population in this area is dependent on income from agriculture – mainly through the cultivation of olives and wheat. According to the military orders, 787 acres of land will be confiscated for the Barrier, and access to land beyond the Barrier is likely to be lost. The construction of the barrier will make access to Ramallah far more difficult, and this will affect

¹ OCHA is drafting a report on the Jerusalem Barrier, which will be published shortly.

² PCBS, 2003 projection

trade. Livelihoods will also be affected because the barrier will prevent Palestinians from traveling to Israel.

- **Access to education:** Many of the affected villages have their own schools, but teachers working in schools at Beit Liqya and elsewhere are based in Ramallah. Construction of the barrier or depth barriers may prevent the teachers from traveling to work. Students wishing to attend university in Ramallah and elsewhere will also be affected.
- **Access to healthcare:** Although primary healthcare is available at clinics in Beit Liqya, Beit Ur al Fauqa, Saffa and Beit Sira, these clinics are open only for limited periods. Inhabitants of this area rely on health services in Ramallah for specialized medical treatment.

Qibya-Budrus Barrier construction

Barrier construction has also affected villages west of Ramallah.

Qibya

Qibya³ village council received military confiscation orders for construction of the Barrier on 12 November 2003. The following day, Israeli bulldozers were brought up to the village fields, and started to clear the land. Approximately 500 – 625 acres out of a total of 3750 acres of land was confiscated at Qibya, most of which was planted with olive trees or used for livestock. Some 130 mature olive trees have been uprooted, and 210 new olive trees were also removed. Qibya village council estimates that after the Barrier is finished, some 95 per cent of Qibya's inhabitants will be unemployed.

Budrus

At Budrus,⁴ construction of the Barrier started on 22 December. 50-60 olive trees were uprooted in the first day of land clearance. One third of these were replanted, but most subsequently died. On 29 December, local and international activists protested against the construction of the barrier, and specifically against its planned route: the Barrier will go straight through the village's only large olive grove, and according to the village council as many as 2,000 trees will be uprooted.

On 3 January, construction at Budrus ceased. During the construction period, the village was held under curfew for 3 days and held under closure for a further 3 days.

Beitunia

On January 6, 2003, the Municipality of Beitunia⁵ received military orders for land confiscation for the construction of the barrier. The municipal authorities estimate that 390 acres of land will be taken for the construction of the Barrier itself, and 5000 acres will be separated from the town by the Barrier. The Municipality was informed by Bet El that the owners would be given one week to object to the confiscation of their lands.

³ Population 4811 (PCBS 2004)

⁴ Population 1476 (PCBS 2004)

⁵ Population 12956 (PCBS 2004)

ANALYSIS OF EASING OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

On 18 December, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced at the Herzliya conference that Israel would lift restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinians.

“Concurrent with the demand from the Palestinians to eliminate the terror organizations, Israel is taking and will continue to take steps to significantly improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population: Israel will remove closures and curfews and reduce the number of roadblocks; we will improve freedom of movement for the Palestinian population, including the passage of people and goods; we will increase the hours of operation at international border crossings; we will enable a large number of Palestinian merchants to conduct regular and normal economic and trade relations with their Israeli counterparts, etc. All these measures are aimed at enabling better and freer movement for the Palestinian population not involved in terror.”

Source: Israeli MFA, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0o350>

Qalqiliya and Tulkarem

Both Qalqiliya and Tulkarem governorates⁶ have seen a relaxation in the movement restrictions at checkpoints and major road gates. This has been evident particularly with the opening of the checkpoint at the entrance to Qalqiliya and the gate into the village of A Azzun. The checkpoint at the gap in the barrier at Nazlat Isa has also been removed during this period. On 13 January, the IDF began construction of a tunnel between Habla and Qalqiliya to enable movement between the two towns, which are currently separated by the barrier.

Freedom of movement for populations living in Qalqiliya and Tulkarem varies according to the daily situation, however. On several occasions, Tulkarem and Qalqiliya have experienced closures following security incidents. Tulkarem was closed for a week, for example, after the suicide attack of 25 December.

Movement is persistently hampered by the limited and erratic opening hours of the barrier gates. People are not permitted to cross unless they possess various kinds of permits.

All work permits to Israel proper remain suspended following the suicide attack of 25 December. Palestinians have over the past month received trade permits into Israel. However, on 11 December the IDF issued new military orders proclaiming that Israeli citizens are no longer allowed to enter Tulkarem for security reasons. Consequently, the number of Arab-Israelis now traveling to Tulkarem to visit shops there has decreased significantly. Tulkarem relies heavily on commerce with Israel proper, so these new orders will damage commercial enterprises.

Ramallah

In Ramallah Governorate,⁷ a checkpoints – Atara Bridge – and An Nabi Saleh Gate have been replaced by manned military observation towers, from which soldiers frequently halt traffic to undertake checks. There are now six military observation towers around Ramallah, 13 roadblocks and 50 earth mounds. OCHA field staff have also observed

⁶ Populations of these governorates are 97,036 (Qalqiliya) and 170,482 (Tulkarem) (PCBS projections, 2004).

⁷ Population 283,414 (PCBS projection 2004).

more IDF flying checkpoints around Ramallah. These are less predictable than static checkpoints and further disrupt freedom of movement.

Hebron and Bethlehem

Between Hebron and Bethlehem,⁸ movement for Palestinian private vehicles has improved since late November with the opening of the Hallid-Wadi Sa'ir route. Public transport along route 60 has also improved, and buses can now travel directly from Hebron city centre to Al Khader, south-west of Bethlehem.

Within the Hebron governorate, however, the IDF has erected a number of obstacles to internal traffic: Palestinians are not permitted to travel along specific routes and off bypass roads used by settlers. Those living in the west of the governorate now face long detours, and are obliged to cross bypass roads if they wish to access urban areas.

In Bethlehem governorate, movement between the areas of Husan, Battir, Nahalin and Bethlehem remains problematic as Palestinians have to cross a major route on foot. Freedom of movement in these areas is likely to diminish further, as they are slated to become enclaves according to projections of the Barrier south of Jerusalem.

At An Nu'man, work continues on the Barrier and bypass road; once completed these will isolate the village from the West Bank. An Nu'man residents hold West Bank ID cards. Residents have been informed by the IDF of plans to build a new checkpoint and military base. Border Police have also severed the route to Bethlehem via Cremisan monastery, closing access to Walaja village.

Nablus

Eleven manned checkpoints remain in the Governorate of Nablus,⁹ and a further three unmanned checkpoints, 53 earth mounds, 19 trenches and 7 gates continue to restrict freedom of movement in the area. None of these has been removed since 18 December. Two communities – Beit Furik and Beit Dajjan¹⁰ – currently remain closed.¹¹

On 15 December, the IDF intensified incursions into the city of Nablus, and from 26 December it launched a military operation with a concentration on the Old City.¹² In December-January part or all of Nablus was held under curfew for 13 days; during this period nearly all movement was prohibited.

Further details on the situation in Nablus are provided below.

Assessment

In the southern part of the West Bank and around Tulkarem and Qalqiliya there has been some increase in freedom of movement for Palestinians. Elsewhere – notably around Nablus – restrictions were tightened and there were long curfews.

⁸ Population of Bethlehem 174,542; of Hebron 528,320 (PCBS projections 2004).

⁹ Population 329,986 (PCBS, 2004).

¹⁰ Populations are 3545 (Beit Dajjan) and 10276 (Beit Furik) (PCBS, 2004 projections).

¹¹ OCHA field staff were denied access to the villages on 14 January, and then visited the villages on 19 January.

¹² On 8 January, OCHA published an initial status report on the impact of the recent military operation in Nablus Old City. The report is available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/>.

Two factors illustrate how IDF restrictions continue severely to disrupt Palestinians' lives:

1. Very few of the physical barriers to mobility have been removed since 18 December, so restrictions can be – and frequently are – re-imposed at very short notice. Palestinians cannot therefore conduct normal, regular economic and trade relations, either inside the West Bank or with Israeli counterparts, nor can they reliably access basic services.
2. Israel continues to construct the Barrier, bypass roads and settlements in the West Bank. These physical barriers impose permanent restrictions on Palestinians' freedom to move around the territories, which override any benefits derived from the relaxation of more flexible restrictions such as checkpoints.

NABLUS: UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN THE CITY SINCE 6 JANUARY, AND CLOSURE OF BEIT FURIK AND BEIT DAJJAN

On 8 January, OCHA published an Initial Status Report on the military operation undertaken by the IDF in Nablus Old City between 26 December 2003 and 6 January 2004.¹³

Since 6 January, the IDF has continued military operations in the Nablus area. On 7 January the IDF entered the Ras al Ain governorate of Nablus with seven armoured vehicles, and arrested seven people. Two people were found dead after the IDF left the area; they had been fired on at close range. The IDF continued to conduct operations in and around Nablus throughout the first half of January. On 10 January four Palestinians were seriously injured. On 11 January a Palestinian student was killed after clashes with the IDF, and another Palestinian from Nablus blew himself up.

Commerce in Nablus has been severely affected by the complete closure of the city during military operations. During military operations, the Awarta check point, which is the only commercial link to the city, has been closed except for occasional opening for the supply of basic food stuffs. No trade in or out of Nablus takes place during such operations. Furthermore, access to the industrial zones, located next to the Balata camp and to the Beit Iba check point, is usually denied during periods of tension.

Two villages near to Nablus, Beit Furik and Beit Dajjan, were held under strict closure between 26 December and 14 January after a suicide bomber from this village blew himself up in the Tel Aviv suburb of Petah Tiqva on 25 December. Entrances to the villages, including dirt roads, were sealed off by earth mounds. Medical transportation was allowed into the villages, though only between the hours of 05:00 and 20:00; outside these hours patients were carried over the earth mounds.

On 14 January the IDF allowed people over the age of 35 to enter and leave the villages.

¹³ This Report is available at OCHA oPt homepage: <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/main.asp>.

Statistics Box:

The following box contains figures for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

16 December 2003 – 16 January 2004		
Number of Palestinian Deaths	46	
Number of Palestinian Injuries	356	
Number of Israeli Deaths	11	
Number of Israeli Injuries	33 (approximately)	
Ambulance incidents		
Delay (40 min-7 hrs)	31	In one incident the patient died
Denial of access	14	
Verbal/physical abuse on medical crew	6	
Verbal/physical abuse on patient	1	
Detention of medical crew	2	
Detention of patient	1	
Damage/Shooting at ambulance	2	

Medical delays

- **11 January:** On return to Qalqiliya from the hospital in Nablus, a PRCS ambulance was searched by a flying checkpoint near the village of Jit. After some 25 minutes, the ambulance was instructed to transport two detained persons under the escort of a military jeep to the Qadomin bus station. 10 minutes after the arrival to the bus station, the ambulance crew got their IDs back and was allowed to continue.
- **11 January:** One PRCS ambulance was stopped by a flying checkpoint at the Enav junction while transporting a diabetic patient to the hospital in Tulkarm. The ambulance was allowed to proceed after the companion of the patient was arrested.